XERO

XERO 4 april 1961

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XERO comes from Pat & Dick Lupoff, 215 E. 73 St, New York 21, NY, for contributions, letters of comment, and trades. Bhob Stewart is art editor.

FRONT-END EDITORIAL

No ponderous pronouncements just here and now, nor egigesises of Universal Deep Problems. Just a few paragraphs about XERO which, if I were H.L. Gold, I might have titled "Progress Report #1"...but which, since I'm Dick Lupoff, I'll just call some administrative announcements.

First of all, Pat and I are extremely pleased to announce an addition to the staff of XERO: Effective with this issue, Bhob Stewart is art editor around here. Those of you who have received all since XERO 1 will surely have noticed the change for the better as far as art is concerned. In XERO 2 this was due to the courtesy of two artists, Sylvia White and Dave English, who stencilled their own work. In XERO 3 there was some additional stencilling by Sylvia; all the rest was done by Bhob. In the present issue, Maggie Curtis, Andy Reiss, and Steve Stiles cut their own work; Bhob did the rest. Now that he has agreed to art-edit XERO, we will be able to accept art not-already-on-stencil. Also, you will be seeing a lot more Stewart art around here, all of which is very much to the good.

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Secondly, if you are reading this copy of XERO at a friend's house and wondering when, if ever, yours is going to plop in the mailbox, may I suggest that you reread the inconspicuous paragraph at the bottom of the contents page. There will be no elaborate accounting system around here, with check-boxes and scribbled notes in each copy of the zine warning you that you have only three...two...one...no more copies coming to you. The arrangement is simple enough, and if you haven't written a letter or contributed material since the last issue, or if you claim to trade but haven't published in yea long months, you just won't get the next issue of XERO. There may be a rare exception to this for one or two Ancient Fannish Friends, but don't count yourself in this category unless you were a subscriber to SF52 or the publisher of MOTE.

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Speaking of letters, incidentally, if you wrote a good one since the last issue and can't find it in the Epistolary Intercourse section, please don't stop writing. Every letter that comes in is carefully read and most of them are thought about and talked about in this house. I know this sounds hackneyed, but it is also the actual and literal truth. However, when it comes to publishing, Pat and I are faced with a choice among three courses, none of which we like too much:

(1) We could publish all the good letters we get, plus all the other material we now publish, in which case XERO would grow to HABAKKUKian proportions.

(2) We could publish a fat letter section and keep XERO at a reasonable size by cutting back on other material.

(3) We could publish all the other material we want to and hold down the overall size of XERO by limiting the length of the letter section.

Well, that first choice sounds attractive. The only trouble is that should XERO grow to HABAKKUKian size (a trend already underway, I fear) it would also shrink to HABAKKUKian frequency. And if you'll run it through your portable giant electronic brain, I think you'll agree with me that four-to-six times fifty pages makes more pages per year than one times one hundred sixteen, despite the fact that the latter makes a fatter package at one time than does a single fifty-page fanzine. So, choice number one is out.

As for the second choice, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a semi-letterzine. Hell, one won the Hugo last year. But it just happens not to be the kind of fanzine that Pat and I want to publish. So choice two is out.

That leaves number three: "limit the letters". And so we will try to publish about eight pages of letters in each issue, selecting the most interesting and representative from among the stack we receive. Fortunately for me, Pat has now taken over the letter column. At least one reviewer has already noted the improvement therein, and while this does not leave me 100% unchagrinned, it is still a pleasure to have her handle EI. I couldn't possibly hold it down to eight pages; I guess it takes that old feminine ruthlessness.

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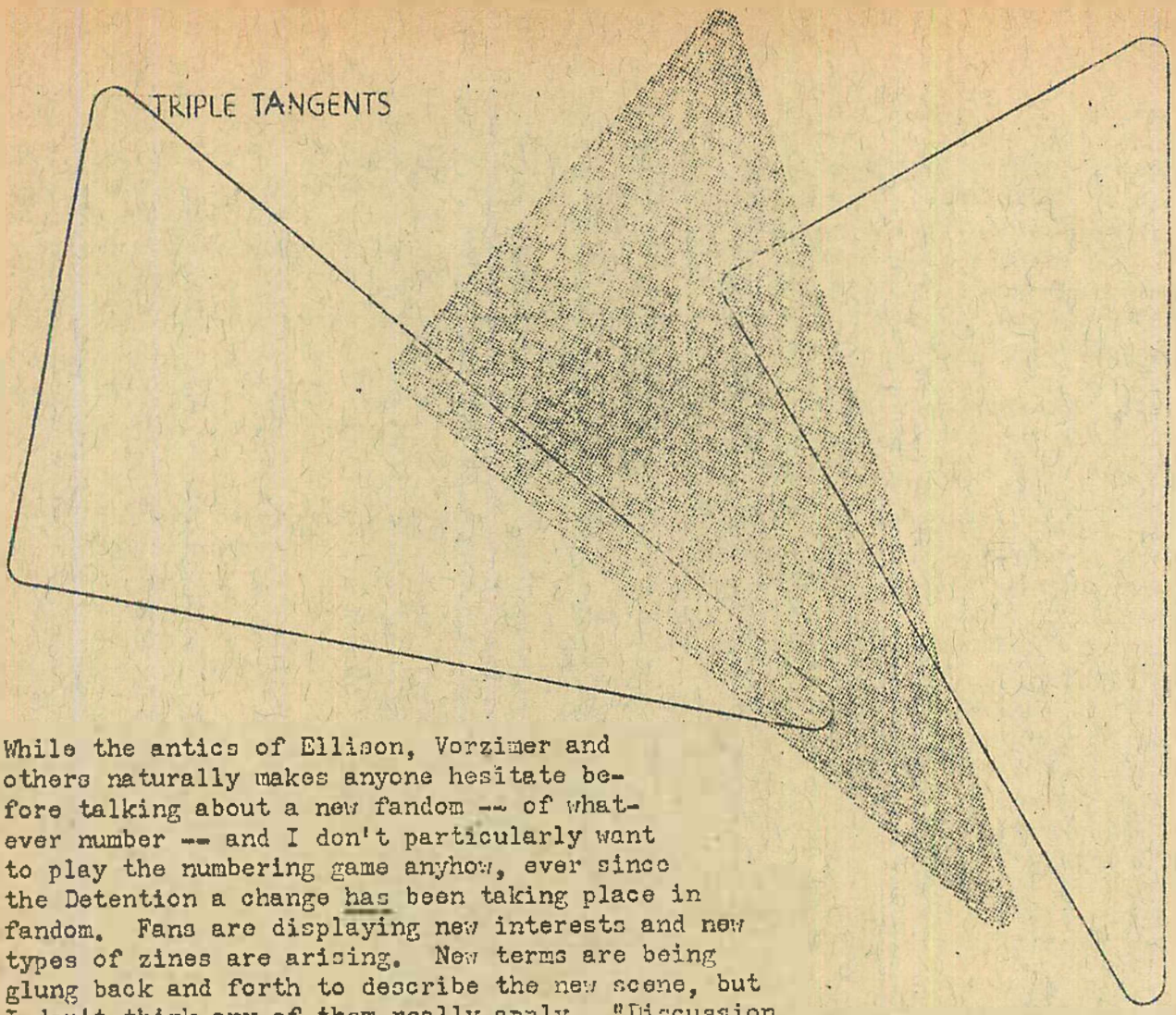
But this whole problem of allocating pages brings up the deeper problem of, ahem-ahem, editorial balance. Any number of people have written in asking to see less of this or more of that in the pages of XERO, and while either Pat or I have tried to answer each subh letter personally, let me put our standard reply on record, but first let me say that I am talking about subject matter, which is a subject open to controversy in these pages; not quality, which is a closed subject...closed because like every editor in history, we want the best material for XERO that we can get.

As for subject matter, then, if you're one of the "let's-have-less" group, you'll get little sympathy except for a single piece of advice: if you don't like the topic of an article, skip to the next one. If you don't like the whole fanzine, the same applies.

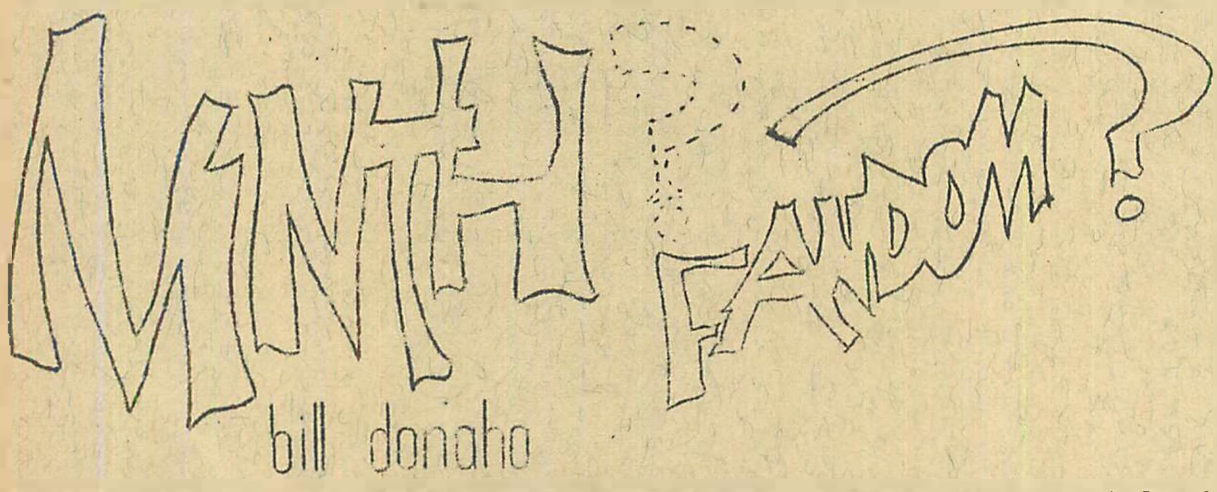
If, on the other hand, you're a "let's-have-more" type, the reply is: you want material on a given topic to appear in XERO, you write it. No submission to XERO has ever been turned away because of its subject...quality is another matter, of course. So if you're tired of a diet of book reviews, fandom symposiums, and nostalgia... and you would rather see material in XERO dealing with fractions, Freud, or freedom for colonial peoples...you write it. We don't promise to print it, because of the qualitative standards just mentioned. Namely, it must be interesting, it must be at least reasonably organized and stylistically bearable, and it must not open Pat and me to a libel suit.

But as for topic, no taboos.

—Dick Lupoff



While the antics of Ellison, Vorzimer and others naturally makes anyone hesitate before talking about a new fandom -- of whatever number -- and I don't particularly want to play the numbering game anyhow, ever since the Detention a change has been taking place in fandom. Fans are displaying new interests and new types of zines are arising. New terms are being glung back and forth to describe the new scene, but I don't think any of them really apply. "Discussion zine" is not too useful as many zines of the past were discussion zines and some of the new ones are not. "Pith" and "piffle" have unfortunate connotations and tend to confuse the issue as one man's pith can be another man's piffle. By whatever definition all of the new zines publish lots of piffle.



Perhaps the characteristic the new zines have in common is that they are non-fannish "Fannish" not an easy word to define -- the meaning keeps slipping away -- but fannish zines seem largely concerned with fans, their doings and their lighter activities, with "fabulous fannish characters". At least that's what they have been like during the past two or three years.

Fannishness has many merits and I enjoy it very much. Most of my own writing is fannish and I did not set out to publish a non-fannish zine. It just sort of

happened. Contributors and readers do a lot in shaping a zine and it's non-fannish time now.

Whatever the merits of fannishness, it is esoteric. Even when the reader does not need previous knowledge to beable to follow what is happening, he usually has to learn to appreciate the style and the method of approach. In 1958 at the IllWiscon in a conversation with Grennell, Hickman and others, someone (I believe Grennell) said, "I can't imagine a neofan enjoying the first issue of GRUE of HYPHEN that he picks up. You have to learn to appreciate the flavor." Fannishness is a fine flavor, but there has been too much of it. A natural reaction is setting in.

And the reaction seems to be entirely spontaneous. KIPPLE was influenced by RETROGRADE, but HABAKKUK, XERO, ESPRIT, WARHOON, TESSERACT et all seem to have all started on their similar paths without reference to eachother. At about the same time the WSFA started putting out SPECULATIVE REVIEW, Earl Kemp started his first project, and fans like Jack Chalker and Bob Jennings started zines seriously devoted to their own hobbies and interests. It's non-fannish time. Even old zines like YANDRO which had resisted the fannish current are now rising steadily in general estimation.

The apas have always been generally non-fannish and they are not changing too much now. I believe that it was Ted White who said that they belong in another current and do not reflect the state of general fandom. This seems to be true. In many ways too the new trend is just a transference to general fandom of trends that have been in the apas all the time. They have always had members seriously interested in their hobbies and read to discuss all sorts of general topics.

Everyone seems to have a tendency to lump all the new zines together, but they are diverse in that they all reflect the personalities and interests of their respective editors. Perhaps another thing besides non-fannishness that they have in common is that they take some effort to read. They contain entertainment and humor of various kinds, but they also have material which requires thinking. Unlike the fannish zines they do not slide effortlessly and painlessly into the mind. Nevertheless any intelligent person who is willing to take the trouble can read and enjoy them.

They do make demands upon the reader though. He has to think and digest what he is reading. Horror of horrors he quite probably cannot read the fanzine in a single sitting! Certainly anyone who tries to plow through one of the new zines without pausing to think, reflect and assimilate is going to be left with only a confused impression of a rather peculiar mishmash. This seems to have happened to quite a few faaans.

You are right about the genuine dialectical synthesis; in the new zines fandom is a serious hobby. It must be emphasized, however, that the new fanzines are serious and humorous; unlike the sercons of the past we do not confuse seriousness with lack of humor. It is also possible to treat your amusements quite seriously indeed and to still get a bang out of them.

It should also be emphasized that many of the new zines are just as escapist as the fannish ones. It is not necessary for escape to be light and frothy. But of course -- judging by the way they act rather than what they say -- most faaans take fannishness very seriously indeed. As Walter Breen says, "FIJAGH is a way of life." Certainly everyone I know who seems to have no other life but fanning, devoting every possible moment to it, always seems to do so while chorusing "Fijagh, fijagh, fijagh."

It's probably just as well that the swing to non-fannishness took place at this time. The present ill-health of magazine science fiction clearly shows us that from now on fandom is going to grow and expand or wither and die entirely inddpendently of the prozines. We can't count on them for recruits any more. Many of us will continue

to love the stuff, if only because of nostalgia for past glories, but in order to survive we are going to have to start recruiting fans from other sources.

Earl Kemp's survey may give us some statistical information on just what a fan is, but we already know that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between a science fiction enthusiast and a fan. The essential ingredient of being a fan seems to be a desire to communicate with others on paper. This leads slowly but gradually to amateur publishing, although some don't get beyond the letter-hack stage. (And a good thing, too; who would write for fanzines if everyone were publishing? Who would write letters of comment?) Of course, whatever a potential fan's interest in communication via the printed word, if he does not have common attitudes and interests with fans he will probably not be too interested in joining us. Fandom though contains such a wise range of tasts and such a wide variety of people that it can accomodate very diverse sorts. The problem is to reach them.

The non-fannish zines seem to be reaching many new people. I know that HABAKKUK is and I am sure that the others are or could. The word spreads to friends-of-friends-of-friends and the circulation goes up and up. Damn it. So non-fans are interested in the new zines, even excited by them, but will they make their interest a two-way reaction? Will they get into the act too? We'll just have to wait and see. I am beginning to get material from these non-fans; as yet it is a slow trickle, but it is very encouraging.

I disagree somewhat with your chart of differences between 8th and 9th fandoms. Berkeley was the center of fannish fandom, but it remains a center of the new fandom. Berkeley has even increased its activity and the new centers that are emerging have not yet begun to challenge it. Walter Breen is here now. Norman Metcalf will soon be back. Bob Lichtman and Andy Main will be here next year. No, Berkeley is not past its zenith. Look at the FANAC poll for the placing of Berkeley zines.

Maybe it's because I live in this citadel of fannishness, but I haven't heard anyone in Berkeley admit to preferring AMAZING to F&SF. I don't myself. I like the fact that AMAZING is experimenting -- but that also gave us The Last Vial, UGH -- and think that in a year or two it will probably be tops, but so far not that many of its experiments have been successful. It certainly deserves our support though.

Speaking of lousy science fiction, while I like both Larry Harris and Randy Garrett, the fact that ANALOG published such god-awful crud as "That Sweet Little Old Lady" and its even more unfortunate sequels is the best evidence I've yet seen for the theory of Campbell's senile decay.

I think that you are wrong about the interests of fannish fans. Outside of the apas such interests as you mention were mostly kept out of fanzines. Fannishness dominated the scene to the exclusion of almost everything else.

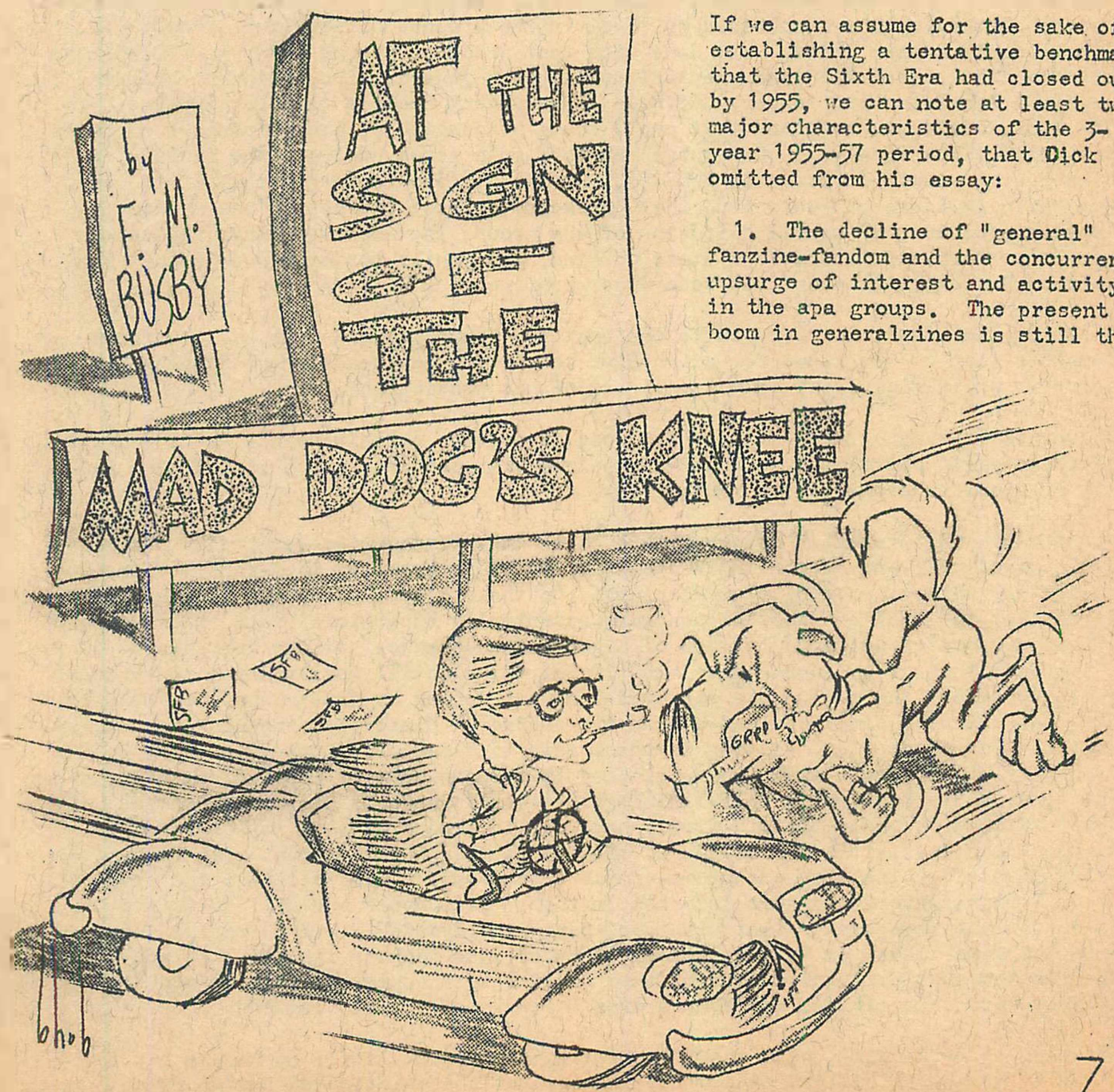
As as for an interest in comic books being a characteristic of the new fandom, you Sir, are W*R*O*N*G, Sir.

In "Absolute Xero", Dick Lupoff prepares to catapult us into Ninth Fandom, ready or no. It would be tempting to draw some obvious parallels, but I'm sure that Dick took these into account and bravely spoke his piece anyhow. Nevertheless I wish to reiterate the truism that fannish era and transitions only become apparent in retrospect, and that their designation is largely a matter of opinion in any event.

In Speculating on the condition of fandom and its trends, Dick's viewpoint is limit-

ed by the scope of his own experiences and activity. Counter-speculating, I am of course subject to similar limitations. Until a definitive history (Get Well, Harry Warner!) is written of the postwar developments in the microcosm, we can only pile up a sizable stack of individual opinions and see which way they topple.

First, I don't go along with the idea that because the Sixth fanmish era included a move to declare the coming of Seventh, arbitrarily, it therefore becomes mandatory to skip the number "7" in fannish history, like the 13th floors of buildings catering to the superstitious. Obviously, 7 comes between 6 and 8; I'll have no part of any hanky-panky to the contrary. "7th Fandom" was a phenomenon that occurred during the Sixth era; I'll leave it to the experts to state just when that one ended and the next began, but that next era (which we may or may not still be experiencing) is or was the Seventh, dammit, and the question has been kicked around so exhaustively elsewhere that I'm surprised and disappointed to see it popping up again at all.



If we can assume for the sake of establishing a tentative benchmark that the Sixth Era had closed out by 1955, we can note at least two major characteristics of the 3-year 1955-57 period, that Dick omitted from his essay:

1. The decline of "general" fanzine-fandom and the concurrent upsurge of interest and activity in the apa groups. The present boom in generalzines is still the

same resurgence that began -- oh, in 1958, perhaps. I'll beg the question of whether this apa-centered period was an era in itself or merely a protracted transition period between two era, but to my mind the phenomenon was considerably more definitive a change than some of the current developments that are drawing so much self-conscious interest today.

2. The great improvement in the overall quality of "repro" in fanzines. In just about three years, shoddy duplication changed from being the norm to being the exception. Once again, this could be considered either the characteristic of a transition - period or a development within an era, but in either case it deserves consideration.

Dick's six criteria or characteristics of "a fandom" deserve further study. "Geographical location", for instance: while Berkeley has without doubt been the most outstanding fan-center of 1958-60, a number of other localities figure strongly during that time and also for 1955-57 when Toronto and D.C. were among the more prominent spots. Naturally I'm nonplussed by "Just in the process of emerging...Seattle..."; I'd thought we were pretty well done with that process, around here, in 1957-58 when Seattle "took over" SAPS and when CRY developed a general circulation and refused to remain a localzine any longer. Offhand I'd say that Seattle (and Los Angeles; how in the world could you overlook that one?) could be considered among "centers of fannish activity" since mid-1958. Of course New York in a sense bestrode the fannish world like a microcosmic Colossus in 1957-58, but I'm willing to forget that if you are. And while it is regrettably true that "Berkeley is past its zenith" as a fannish locality, because of normal diffusion of the group, the Berkeley Bhoys themselves are not. Berkeley Fandom is a State of Mind, and you'll not convince me that the Justice Society will ever supersede Super-Squirrel.

"Leading Fanzines": I refer you to the past two Fannishes and Hugo ballots for a more complete list of the zines for which Dick is carving the headstones; Fannish III will serve as an initial check on the validity of his predictions.

"Favorite Prozine": always there is broad divergence on this point, but I doubt much that any valid correlation can be made between fannish eras and shifts in the popularity of specific prozines. A red herring, this.

"Attitudes and Interests" covers Dick's other three categories (attitude toward fandom, toward s-f, and common interests) fairly well; certainly they can't be considered separately without excessive overlapping. On these items, it appears to me that Dick is placing too much emphasis on what are essentially superficial fads, blown up out of all proportion by fandom's love of a good catch-phrase. At the very height of the "Who reads that crazy Buck Rogers stuff?" fad it was still mostly noise and little real substance; the saying was parroted tongue-in-cheek by many who obviously did read s-f but were simply talked-out on the subject. Similarly, the jazz-and-sports-cars bit was of deep and lasting interest only to a few, but many enjoyed it as a temporary kick. And I think you will find this to be true of the current old-comics pitch, which is inherently self-limiting in several respects and which strikes me as symptomatic of a group that is pretty hard put to find a subject for conversation. As Bob Leman says, it's a question of vintage: I'm in the same boat with Bob and with Harry Warner; by the time adventure-comics came along, I was well past the stage at which I might have found some interest in them. Jack Speer and Bill Evans are two others in the same age-bracket with Bob, Harry and myself -- and I imagine they'd vote the same ticket on this question. Further, the younger fans will be out of this one for the most part, since few of them could obtain copies of the old comics even if they were se inclined, and comics aren't reprinted or anthologized.

Dick has to be kidding, with that "sophisticated sercon" label; he simply has to be. I won't let myself believe otherwise; the idea of a sophisticated sercon fandom

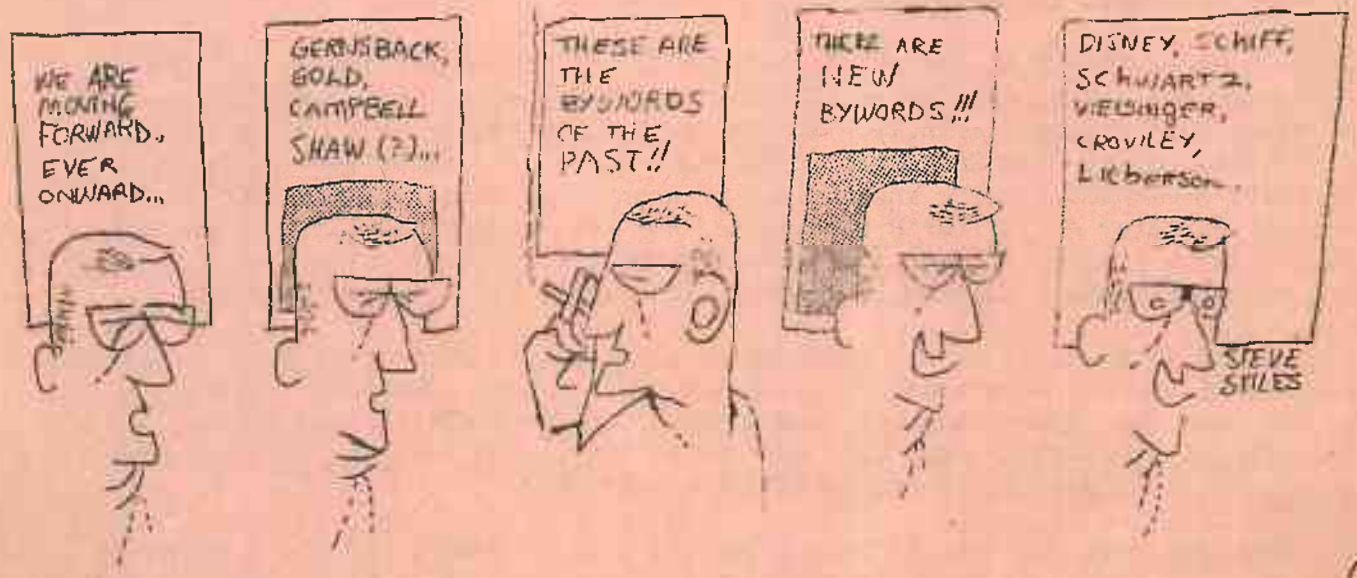
centered around comic books just naturally breaks me up. And since the term "sercon" was doined to describe naive eager-beaverish crusading, while "fannish" took the opposite meaning (a more knowledgeable attitude of not taking oneself or one's hobby too seriously), "sophisticated sercon" is an utter contradiction in terms. If it's sophisticated, it's not sercon; sorry and all that, but the test of serconism is not seriousness; it's undue or inappropriate seriousness. Such as in this paragraph, possibly.

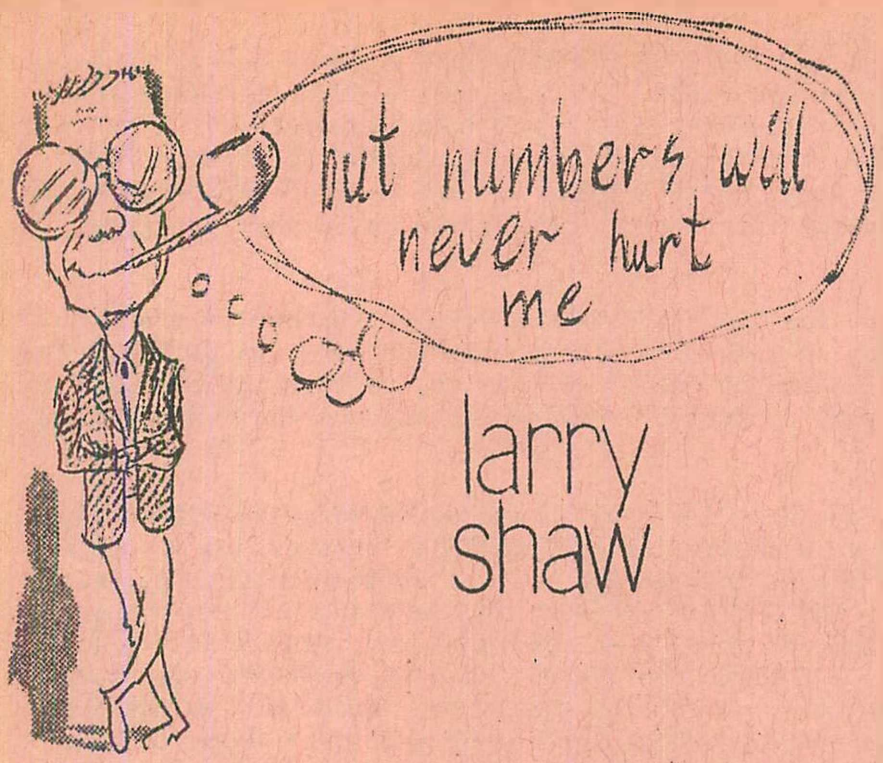
No one seems to have a kind word for "fannish" fandom lately. Either we are suppposed to concentrate solely on s-f for interest, or alternately fandom is to become a place for "serious discussions of all sorts of ideas" -- that is, to turn the communications media of fandom over to the normal content of mundane. I suppose the next step will be a bowling league.

"Fannish" fandom is condemned for being in-groupish and concerned with private jokes. Since the ingroupism is not of an exclusive nature, and the jokes are no secret to anyone who is willing to stick around long enough to pick up the continuity, (as witness the affinity of neofen for the ONY lettercol, which develops its own running - gags at the slightest provocation, or none) -- since, as I say, fandom is the most hospitable in-group imaginable, I fail to see the validity of the beef. Of course, some folks just don't care for humor, period; by-and-large, fandom has in the past few years held little attraction for any who do not enjoy the light touch to some extent. But the "private joke" bit I don't get; the gist seems to be roughly the same idea that has watered mass-media entertainment down to the soggy lower levels of the mass mind, that <u>everything</u> must be understandable to <u>everyone</u>, and about all I have to say to <u>that</u> is "Not in <u>my</u> fanzine, bwah!"

Since I suspect that once the warmth wears off the nostalgia, even the current hard core of comics-fandom will be getting pretty bored with the whole thing, it might be just as well to hold off having a great batch of "Ninth Fandom" buttons made up just yet.

Oh, you'll <u>thank</u> me for this, one fine day!





larry shaw

Recently, a storm of controversy arose because John Campbell dared to change the name of his magazine. Now a storm of controversy has arisen because Dick Lupoff published some evidence that fandom may be due for a new number.

Does nobody bedides me see a similarity between these two events?

There's more to it than the amount of heat and noise generated in each case. Both explosions occurred because an individual who was aware of the onward flow of history attempted to comment on it and/or ride with it.

Well, gloryosky, fellows! I screamed as loudly as anyone at first, and I still grieve for ASTOUNDING. But it's Campbell's magazine, after all, and considering what he's doing to it, I'm forced to admit that ANALOG is more appropriate, even if it doesn't appeal to me. And while I'm not at all sure that the system of numbered fandoms can be useful any longer (if it ever was), and while Dick may have been in error on some matters of detail, it seems undeniable to me that he is the only one involved who is attempting to see the history of fandom with any perspective.

In both cases, a large proportion of the audience has reacted emotionally and violantly rather than thoughtfully. I feel sure that if Campbell (to get a little more mileage out of him before I scrap him) knew about this ninth fandom donnybrook, he would find more ammunition in it for his charge that fans are opposed to and strenuously resist change of any sort. And I'm not at all sure that fandom as a whole has any good arguments to prove him wrong.

As an example, take F.M. Busby's objections to the "sophisticated sercon" label. Buz knows what sercon meant when it first came into being, and obviously is goig to defend the original definition to the death. Meanwhile, as long ago as 1954 Walt Willis called "The Enchanted Duplicator" a Serious Constructive Insurgent Publication without evoking any shrieks of agony, and more recently self-styled fabulous Berkeley fan Walter Breen pointed out that fandom is a serious ghoddam hobby with no apparent damage to anyone's groin. It's practically a cliche by now that usage determines meaning, isn't it? Or doesn't New York usage count?

As a matter of fact, if anyone asked me to point out an example of a sophisticated sercon fan, I would choose Buz Busby as the perfect one. There are lots of others. I'd say that the general tone of fandom these days is sophisticated sercon, and sszine might be a better name than discussion zine. And lest you have any doubts, Buz, when I call you that I consider it a compliment.

Yes, Dick may have had some of his historical details wrong, and it is proper to point out his errors to keep the record straight -- but it is also proper, and sane, to cast a wary eye at those who treat such errors as mortal insults. It is decidedly improper to lump errors of fact together with differences of opinion. Whether or not

Berkeley is past its zenith is a matter of opinion. I happen to agree with Dick that it is, and I think another year will prove him right. After all, it isn't how many fans live in an area, or even how active they are, that's important; it's how much influence they have on the rest of fandom. In this sense, I think Berkeley is definitely on the wane and Seattle on the way up. (New York is warming up in the bull pen, but I wouldn't care to make any bets on its future performance on the mount.)

But I don't want to argue about any of these individual points. Adding to the howls of rage and wails of injured dignity isn't going to clear the air any. If we could leave our personal feelings out of it and all of us try objectively to list the characteristics of fandom-as-a-territory we might eventually produce a worthwhile map. (As things are going, we'll get hoarse before cartography.)

Meanwhile, I don't think that anyone will seriously deny that fandom has changed and is changing. But I would like to point out one reason this is so. Fandom, although we sometimes forget it and sometimes actively deny it, exists in the real world. Fandom can never be entirely separated from the real world. As individual fans are subject to mundane influences, so will these influences have their effect upon fandom. And there are some pretty powerful and ubiquitous mundane influences floating around these days. The fallout's falling all around; it falls on you and me; it falls on our conventions here, and on Huntington Hartford also.

Fandom is a microcosm, true. But it is not and cannot be totally insulated from the macrocosm. We can't keep the macrocosmic forces out completely; some of them are too strong, some are too subtle, and some are even desirable. We don't check out genes or our educations at the gate when we enter fandom, even if we sometimes check our manners. And if the real world changes in important ways, fandom changes too, no matter how hard some fans try to run from reality.

I happen to think that the real world, by which I mean the United States in this case, is emerging from a period of apathy, lethargy and resignation. A determination to get to work and improve conditions seems to be prevalent -- and I mean on the part of Goldwater Republicans as well as Kennedy Democrats. At the same time, there are sweeping waves of nostalgia everywhere. They've been around for some time -- Ray Bradbury, Jack Finney and PLAYBOY, prominently among many examples, have cashed in on them -- but they seem to be growing stronger and deeper rather than otherwise.

Thus, for one thing, interest in comic books. Nostalgia per se, of course, but also perhaps a return to the belief that men can be heroes instead of only victims. I think this makes sense as an explanation of the return of the super-hero comic books themselves. Dick may have erred in singling comic books out as the sole common interest of ninth fandom -- though to me his editorial implied others even if it didn't list them -- but he certainly was not wrong in stressing their importance.

If we don't know what fandom we're in now, and can't discuss the subject without throwing temper tantrums, we'll accomplish more and make life pleasanter by confining the discussion to comic books exclusively. Perhaps, too Harry Warner had better shelve his projected history, for fear of stepping on somebody's corns. Meanwhile, fandom is changing. If you can't join it in changing, you don't even have to bother to leave -- you'll get left.

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SOME COMMENTS

NEW MAPS OF HELL, by Kingsley Amis. Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1960. 161 pp.; $3.95

This volume is now very well known, as it deserves to be, since it is the only existing serious study of science fiction of any weight to be undertaken by an outsider. The books by de Camp and Knight, and Advent's "The Science Fiction Novel," are all three of great value, but they are each the kind of book that can be read with greatest profit by a practitioner, that is, another science fiction writer. Amis is rewarding in this respect as well, but he addresses himself primarily to the reader -- particularly the prospective reader.

Amis is not, of course, the complete outsider that some of his reviewers have implied. He has been reading s-f since about 1934, and his text refers to magazine stories which appeardd well before that year (plus, of course, works of Wells and others which appeared before he was born). He is a member of the three-man board of selection of the British Science Fiction Book Club, an organization with a considerably better record than its American counterpart: and it is perhaps indicative that NEW MAPS OF HELL is dedicated to Bruce Montgomery, widely unrecognized in the U.S. under this, his real name, as Britain's leading s-f anthologist.

BY JAMES BLISH

Many of the comments I have seen on the book, however, praise or damn it for quite irrelevant reasons, as well as some that are simply untrue. There has, for instance, been a tendency to laud the book for having wrung from Time Magazine the first faintly friendly notice ever accorded s-f by that ill-written and dishonest journal. Why the friendship of Time should be considered valuable is beyond me, but in any case it has nothing to do with the merits of Amis' book. Writers who are praised by Amis praise him back, in one instance to the point of endorsing a guess of his which is patently untrue; those he damns (or worse, simply ignores) respond with steam-whistle screams. (Hell hath no fury like a woman who can't even find her name in the index.) This is understandable, but again, irrelevant.

The book has many strengths, not the least of which is its wit -- as was to have been expected from the author of "Lucky Jim." It is anything but "considerably" arrogant, as its most arrogant critic unluckily alleges; indeed, Amis has no use either for intellectual slummers or for people who see s-f as the greatest of art-forms, and is at pains to dissociate himself from both types. Furthermore, he is aware of the existence of gaps in his knowledge, if not always of their extent, and admits them readily. No more can I see why opinions which have been in formation over a period of 26 years should be labelled "ill-considered;" the book is in fact extremely reflective in cast, no matter how many of its conclusions one may disagree with.

WITH REGARD TO

The same critic alleges " unconsidering slovenliness of research", which is nonsense (and leads me to the suspicion that the three accusations involved are not so much the product of critical judgement as of the game being played with the verb "to consider"). There are, to be sure, some errors, and some omissions, but they are quite minor. On page 46, for instance, Amis is unable to remember the title or author of Hal K. Wells' "The Cavern of the Shining Ones", hardly a crucial lapse; and he spoils the anecdote at the top of page 60 by making its protagonist a s-f writer instead of a Weird Tales writer, thereby missing an interesting but altogether minor psychiatric point. In general, it is quite plain that Amis has read far more s-f than most of his critics. He is also immensely better read in the mainstream, which gives him a great advantage over people with only one string to their bows, but not, it must be added, an unfair one. For documentation see

NEW MAPS OF HELL

the index, which by the way is excellent.

The book has also been criticised -- for once, relevantly -- for its marked bias toward the Galaxy type of story. This is in part a product of the author's personal taste, about which nothing can be done; but in part, too, many of those doing the complaining have only themselves to blaim. In the course of preparing the lectures at Princeton which resulted in the book, Amis sent extended questionnaires to many writers and editors in the field; and report has it that the returns came largely from the Pohl-Ballantine-Gold Axis, thereby heavily skewing the data Amis had to work with.

This is nevertheless a real weakness. What seems to appeal most to Amis in s-f is social satire, so much so that he readily swallows a great deal of work ranging from the pathetically inept to the downright awful. It is this bias that leads him to his now notorious deification of Frederik Pohl, which I suspect is already an embarassment to both men and is likely to become moreso as time goes on. Of greater consequence than overestimating an individual writer, however -- for on

BY KINGSLEY AMIS

such a matter there is often no possibility of honest agreement between one critic and another -- is the encouragement this bias lends to further proliferation of the social satire in s-f, a sub-class which had reduced itself to a cliche and a bore some time before Amis came on the scene to lend it his endorsement. I at least would maintain that rather than calling for better examples of the type, as Amis does, what is needed is a moratorium on the damn thing; it has already been done very well, middling well, not well at all, and absolutely miserably, ad nauseum.

Personal taste, skewed data or both also mias the book toward the one-punch type of story, of which the work of Robert Sheckley is properly singled out as the best example. This bias, unlike the previous one, is surprising in a sophisticated s-f reader, simply because such a reader is usually almost impossible to surprise. It is characteristic of a Sheckley story, as it is of the work of less polished writers of the same kind, that the punch can be seen coming some pages ahead of the moment when the author delivers it (the reader knows, for instance, that when a character mutters, "There's something wrong here, but I can't quite put my finger on it," there is a large hole in the story's logic immediately adjacent to the

[illegible], each of which hole the author will pull his surprise at the end); and if the punch is all the story has -- as is almost invariably the case -- nothing remains but Sheckley's incidental wit (or in the lesser writers of the same kind, nothing at all).

I would further disagree with Amis' contention, on page 101, that satire on individual persons and corporations is universally absent in s-f. I'll not resist the temptation to point out that my own "They Shall Have Stars" -- which furthermore was first published in England -- devotes about a third of its wordage to a personal attack on McCarthy, a point U.S. McCarthyites were quick to recognize. Corporations? Well, the higher echelons of General Electric were in no doubt whose ox was being gored in Kurt Vonnegut's "Player Piano", as I know from having worked for one of their public relations agencies that year, and this book we can be sure Amis has read (see page 149).* These examples could be multiplies; McCarthy indeed was quite a favorite target of American s-f, as was only to have been expected; for instance see Kornbluth's "Takeoff", or the more recent "The Manchurian Candidate". I would not go so far as to maintain that it is a common feature in s-f, but it's there. Whether or not we need more of it is another Question.

One of the problems in this kind of thing is inbreeding, or to put it more bluntly, incest, a conspicuous failing of quite a sizable body of s-f. Writers in this field quite frequently put eachother in their stories, sometimes to express friendship, but more often to criticize or even to pay off old scores. Thus -- to cite on example of each -- we find Anthony Boucher making Judith Merril the heroine of a story, Fritz Leiber satirizing both L. Ron Hubbard and A.E. van Vogt as a peculiarly revolting villain (in, luckily, and utterly revolting story). These examples, too, could be multiplied. The outcome may be interesting to those in the know, but for most readers it is more likely to be simple bafflement. This type of roman a clef, in which the necessary key is virtually inaccessible, is far more common than it ought to be in s-f, and any general move toward personal satire is likely to multiply it.

Despite these dissents, however, NEW MAPS OF HELL strikes me as a job that badly needed to be done, and for the most part has been done wondrous well.

-- JAMES BLISH

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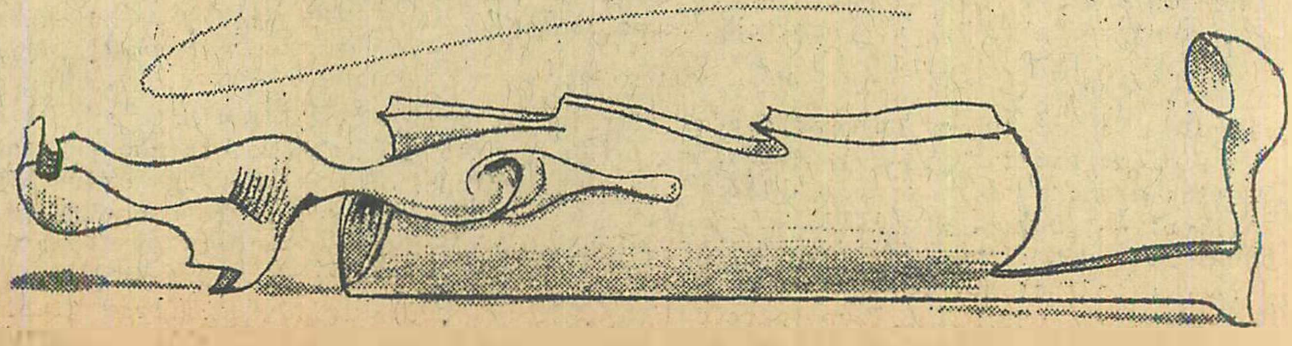
* Nor was Chas. Pfizer & Co., Inc., in any doubt about who was being satirized in my own "The Frozen Year", which appeared in England as "Fallen Star" with an Amis jacket endorsement. In fact, they damn near fired me.



This parting shot concerning "What to" is:

AN OPEN LETTER

FROM HAL LYNCH

TO RAY BEAM

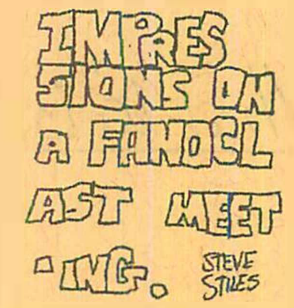
Xero 3 has just arrived, and the coming of that publication has prodded my lagging conscience to write to you about your article in Xero 2. "What to do about it" was exceedingly well written, and expressed thoughts I'd had on my mind a long time. The goals you mention are worthwhile. The problems and proposals you describe, developed from your experiences with the ISFA, are common to other local SF clubs. I know my own experiences as a member of the Philadelphia club have led to similar conclusions that some improvements are necessary, desirable, and possible.

You want to build up your local fan club, and you also want to build a really strong national, or world, fandom. Ray, I'm with you all the way. I agree, too, that SF fandom is "not a youngster any more" and ought to show more maturity than it often does.

But some things ought to be said to put the whole problem, and goal, in a larger perspective. All over America today, in all kinds of "leisure-time" organizations, there are problems of recruiting and holding members, of finding new prospects, of dealing with oddballs and pests, of building up treasureies, etc. I've been a member of several different types of clubs, and I know that SF clubs are by no means unique in having difficulties of this kind. Alumni groups, church fellowships, veterans' organizations, sports clubs and little theatres are constantly out beating the bushes for good new prospective members (while wondering how to rid themselves of the deadwood they're stuck with), trying to keep the treasury from evaporating, inviting distinguished guests and then having no audience show up, having parties in which the regulars are outnumbered by strangers, having feuds....

In some ways we're like all other clubs. Perhaps, though, there are extra problems because SF fan clubs are clubs for readers. Lots of people read newspapers, a number read national magazines, a few read fiction, fewer still read anything off the beaten path. Most of those fewer-than-few are determined introverts who don't want to join anything. What's left we get. And don't always keep.

Clubs for readers, aside from types like Book-of-the-month, are anamolies that may seem impossible by definition. It is little wonder that such clubs even puzzle their prospects -- unenlisted members of the reading public. After all, people who like



clubs go out and join clubs. Other people stay home and read. So how can there be a club for readers? If there were (there may be) a Southern Novel Admirers' Circle, you might very well ask, if invited to join, whatever do they do at meetings? Do they try to write Southern novels, do they read novels to each other, do they talk about their favorite characters, do they exchange books? Why don't they all just stay home and read?

So much for the problem. We who try to set up SF clubs are doing not the difficult to be done immediately but the impossinle which takes a little longer.

We are trying to get readers to drop their books and mags long enough to join us for a little social fun. Most of them are interesting people we'd like to meet. Therefore we need to get 'em out.

No, we're not subscribing to the American myth that everything just has to get bigger and bigger all the time, that more and more people have to get on the bandwagon to make this a success. We just feel we can have more fun, get some more constructive ideas, do ourselves and SF some good, if we can get some more people infected with our disease.

Generally speaking, most SF clubs would be better clubs if they were double or triple their present size. Better programs can be arranged if clubs know they'll have sizable audiences for them, better parties can be thrown in more desirable locations, and (at least theoretically) there'll be more fannish workers to be put to work on pet projects like the club fanzine. (Sure, only a few wind up doing the work -- but if you have a large club to start with, you have more people to tap, to get those happy few.)

I realize that some fan clubs (mighty good groups, too) under certain special circumstances, have to limit their membership, their contacts with the mundane public, etc. They must stay small for good reasons. (The most common example is when the club meets in the private home of someone who can only accomodate so many anyway, and does <u>not</u> care to make their address known to certain persistent SF pests.) Such clubs are like handicapped people. It's not their fault, but they can't be taken as the norm.

Most clubs should be looking for new members, and trying to grow. Let's publicize our clubs, as ISFA and LASFS did by participating in community hobby shows, as other clubs have done by newspaper stories, contacts with libraries, etc. Any club that can invite the public to come wee what's going on, should certainly do so. If pests show up, spray 'em with DDT.

Our fan clubs should publicize, but then comes the second, the really hard job. Not only do we have to get members, we have to have programs interesting enough to get and <u>hold</u> new members.

This is not easy. And, in spite of all the talk, it is not really because nobody but new members wants to discuss SF. The difficulty is in discussing SF from contantly new and fresh points of view. I heard a panel ten years ago kicking around "What's wrong with today's science fiction". Recently I've heard and read a lot on the same subject. Unfortunately the arguments are still the same,

on both sides. A talk about science fiction can be fascinating -- but it can be obscure, and it can be dull.

The trick is to find new things to say about SF. And new people to say them.

Another myth about programs is that you can give members what they want by asking them what they want. It's worth a try, but don't be too disappointed if it doesn't work. Members mostly don't know what they like. They only know what they don't like. They'll tell you that -- if you're lucky. If you aren't, they'll just quietly vanish.

There are volumes to be written on the subject of club programs, but this is about all I can contribute at the moment, and it's pretty dismal. Let me turn to at least one more thing.

It seems to me that all clubs (SF and other clubs) tend to be made up of both "active" and "passive" members. "Passive" members, the agood ones, anyway, attend faithfully, pay their dues, and enjoy the programs, or anyway most of them. Sometimes they will not, sometimes they cannot, participate any more than this.

"Active" members do all the above, and volunteer for committees, work on publications, arrange parties, and serve as officers. It is not really that they are two different kinds of people. (I have, at the same time, been an "active" members in some clubs and a "passive" member of others. It's just that in some clubs I get my kicks out of just being there and in others I get involved.)

But since this is the case, I believe that clubs (SF clubs -- not all SF clubs but some SF clubs) can be most effectively run by formalizing this classification of membership. Many clubs are run this way. The larger circle, the "members", pay dues or meeting attendance fees, and in return get notices, and often refreshments, and voting privileges. The inner circle, the "executive members", run the club, head the committees, arrange for programs, serve as officers. The members of this inner circle are sometimes called Board Members, Directors, or Special Members.

I believe this is a natural, efficient, and practical arrangement -- if it contains safeguards. Something has to be written into the constitution to prevent the "inner circle" from becoming a closed clique. Not only that, it must never look like a closed clique to new members.

A club with this kind of arrangement but without safeguards can go alogg for years with a very stable, strong organization. But it rarely grows and often breaks up into feuding factions.

The "active" members of the inner circle must do the work, set up the programs, and arrange the meetings for the benefit of the large "passive" membership, but as soon as a newcomer joins the group, they must be sure to give him every opportunity to be "active" before abandoning him to the "passive" ranks. And from time to time the "actives should ask the "passives" to become more active just in case their personal circumstances, or inhibitions, or lethargies, have changed.

A "model" SF club, in some city or other, might be most successful with the following pattern: four or five outstanding programs each year, attended by most of the fifty or so members, together with numerous visitors attracted by good publicity. A couple of big parties, attended by the same large group. Out of the visitors, a dozen or so good, prospective members, who are given respohsibilities as soon as they join the club, and are invited to get together with the "directors", who meet very informally,

once a month. If the newcomers show, by their discharge of these first responsibilities (for arranging programs, arranging publicity, assisting in publishing club fanzines, etc.) they very soon become directors; if they cannot take such an active part, or show no real interest, they continue to be considered members in good standing until they drop out completely.

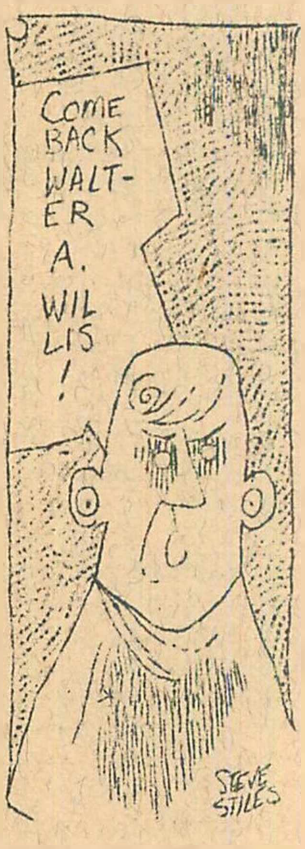
I doubt that such a club would have to be divided by age. Some clubs seem to have problems of yout versus age. Many do not. If there are jobs for everybody, the problem won't become acute.

It is quite possible that more exchange of club information, particularly program ideas, between clubs in various cities would result in better programs everywhere. Anybody who tried something a little unusual in the way of a club activity or program could let other clubs, in other cities, know about it. If it worked, it might work elsewhere. If it didn't work, somebody in some other club might see the flaw and how it might be fixed and it could be made to work. What are we doing in these crazy futuristic social kaffee-klatches, anyway??

If the various more-or-less successful local fanclubs across the country developed real ties, a "grass-roots" national organization might evolve that would be a real organization of fans, that would not be subject to the woes of the unlamented NSFS, Inc., and would embody some of the hopes many of us had for that late creature. (It gripes me to hear -- in our so-called progressive-minded, open-minded SF fandom, that our sad experience with NSFS "prove" for all time, that we can't have a national organization. Since when did one case make that big a generalization??)

If a group of fan clubs, with some common understanding of what could be done by a national body to help local fans, formed a truly representative "world" SF group, then we might be in a position to consider $5.00 membership fees and other innovations.

In the meantime, let's do everything we can to build up local clubs and their programs.



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Carter glibbered a rapid explanation.

--HPL

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FROM THE SF SHELF | The Finish Line

by Larry M. Harris

In a little while (as I write this) a new Sturgeon novel will be on the stands. Published by Ballantine, it is called SOME OF YOUR BLOOD, and I know very little more about it. Inveterate Sturgeon readers (a tribe as difficult of cure as peanut eaters and furniture arrangers) will snatch this one up as soon as it appears. Inveterate Sturgeon haters (a breed which does actually exist, and for which I have very little sympathy indeed) will pass it by. Most of us will pick up the volume, say: "Hmm." flip through a few pages, and try vainly to decide whether SOME OF YOUR BLOOD is going to be worth the price of a pack-and-a-sixth of cigarettes, half a movie admission, or a reasonably good can of chili con carne. In the hope of providing some aid and comfort for this large, motley and confused group of readers, I have taken down from my shelves the collected works of T. Sturgeon, and will examine them forthwith. Let us see what we can see.

The Works, which hold an honorable position on my shelves between Stapledon and Tenn, run to eleven volumes, complete. There are a few Sturgeon stories never anthologized (WHAT DEAD MEN TELL comes to mind) and a few probably untraceable under a stray pseudonym or two -- the only one thoroughly identified with Sturgeon is E. Hunter Waldo, or E. Waldo Hunter, who did work for ASF and UNKNOWN in the old days. But eleven volumes is a lot of bulk; we ought to be able either to reach some conclusions, or to have some fun along the way, anyhow.

There are four novels in the collection, and let's take them first. In order of publication, they are THE DREAMING JEWELS, MORE THAN HUMAN, THE COSMIC RAPE (which, according to usually reliable sources, was not the publisher's title, but Sturgeon's) and VENUS PLUS X.

The first, with its classic opening paragraph: "They caught the kid doing something disgusting out under the bleachers at the high-school stadium, and he was sent home from the grammar school across the street. He was eight years old then. He'd been doing it for years." -- this novel really can't be summarized. Not so much because it would spoil the surprises for those who haven't read it, but because it appears to defy summary. The plot is not really so confused -- THE COSMIC RAPE is much more complicated, for instance -- but we're never given a chance to adjust to its shifts and turns. Monetre, the villain, is sadistic and powerful -- we accept this -- then we learn that he is telepathic, too -- then we learn that his telepathy depends on his ownership of some odd crystals ... and so on and so on, world without end. The hero, Horty, develops at an alarming rate, too -- he and his girl find brand new powers around the turn of every page, seems as if.

The problem here is twofold, and yet it can be expressed in one word: money. Sturgeon appears to write the way a lot of guys in the field write (me, for instance, though I'm trying to break the habit): first draft, keep it up as long as it excites you, write it out of the gut, and finish it up for submission fast, damn fast.

faster than that, because by God you need the dough and anyhow you're through; it doesn't excite any more. Sturgeon's half-humorous introduction to SHOTTLY BOP, in WITHOUT SORCERY, is a fair description:

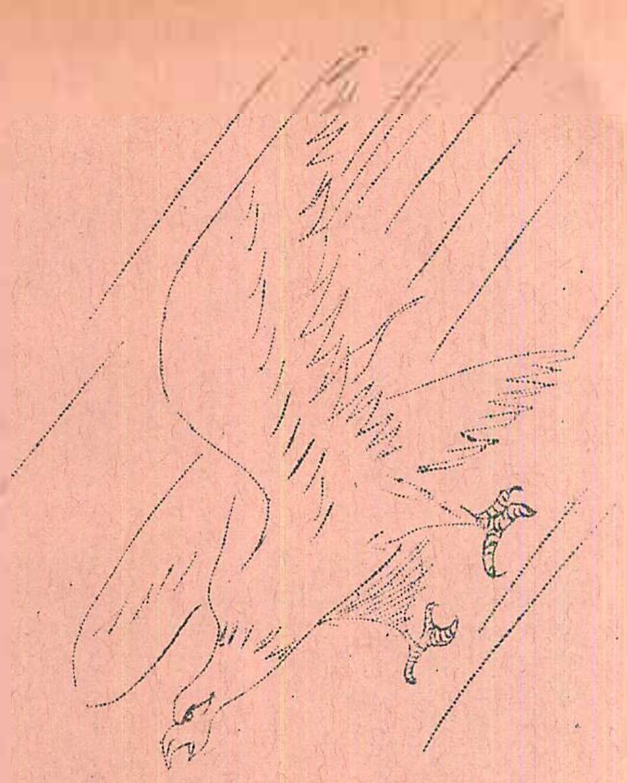
> "I think it pertinent to cite this story as an example of the 'blind grope' technique of story telling. Start with a situation, give it a vague directional push, and let happen what may. If the author does not know what is to happen next, the reader cannot possibly know."

There are two holes in that, which we'll get to later. But, again, Sturgeon on Sturgeon (about THE ULTIMATE EGOIST, same volume):

> "This yarn sprang fully-armed from the rather low brow of a story by a per se non-extant writer named Rene Lafayette. I hurled his story away from me and leapt to the typewriter, finishing the opus in one sitting and seven cups of coffee ... "

And again, same volume, regarding IT:

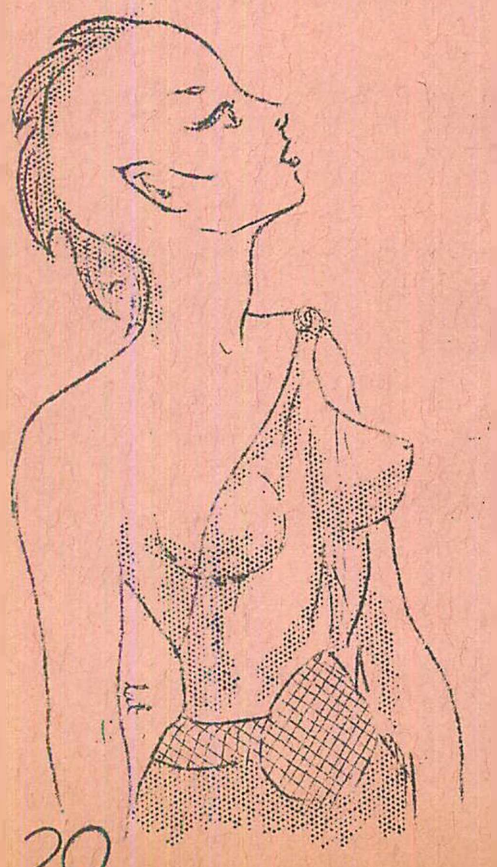
> " ... it wrote itself. It unfolded without any signal effort on my part from the first sentence. The names of the characters were taken off my ubiquitous coffee-maker. I was supremely happy as I wrote it ..."



The technique has certain advantages. Chief among these is that it keeps the writer interested. This is not so silly as it sounds; I've been held up on stories for months, stories without difficult technical problems, stories I knew I could sell, because I didn't give a damn about them any more; the people were dead, the setting was boring, and I no longer cared that much about what happened to anybody. Also, in the hands of a writer whose gift or gifts (for story-line, for action, or for sheer prose) are extremely strong, the result can be something like Campbell's famous 550-volt DC line. Compelling, in a word.

But there are disadvantages. First, the writer may find himself under the necessity of constant invention just to keep the excitement going -- and lose character and the smooth flow of development thereby. Second, he will probably be tempted to chop off the finish much too quickly.

Both these tendencies are evident in THE DREAMING JEWELS. The wrap-up of the novel -- in which a character dies, comes back



to life again, provides an epiloge, and so forth -- happens so fast that it takes at least two readings to remember. And the constant invention does tend to destroy any solid, long-line virtues of character or development.

Nevertheless, it's not a bad book. Luckily, it's written in Basic Sturgeon.

There are, by my count, three Sturgeons. Number one (Basic Sturgeon) is a free-wheeling, hell-for-leather word-user who can get more fun out of a string of phrases than most of us get out of a bottle of Scotch and four blondes. It may be hard to believe that the corruscating, punning, writes-like-an-angel side of Sturgeon's personality is a first-draft thing, sometimes he does without much effort or rewriting; but it is true of him, and of other writers as well. Sturgeon's damnably infrequent letters -- like the letters of Walter M. Miller, Jr. and Ted Cogswell, among others -- have the same style, effortlessly. Some cats swing like that.

Number Two -- Sturgeon in Excelsis -- is still poetry, but of a different, more thoroughly worked-out kind. Some of his short-stories (which I will get to later) show this tendency toward the painful and brooding creation of detailed, symbolic poetic images; almost as if Sturgeon were trying, years before the fact, to be Bradbury (though the result sounds more like an even more earnest James Stephens, CROCK OF GOLD phase). This hasn't shown up in a novel yet; it would appear to be too demanding, and even too powerful a style, for any work of length.

Number Three is Sturgeon in Earnest. Here the poetry, the ribaldry and the puns almost disappear, and we are left with a bare-bones writing style that says what it means, forcefully and with economy. VENUS PLUS X, which I hople all of you have read by now, has strong elements in it of Sturgeon #3.

Basic Sturgeon exists in THE DREAMING JEWELS, and makes the book worth reading for style along. It also exists in his next novel, MORE THEN HUMAN. But here we've got more than a style to deal with.

Maybe the answer is that MORE THAN HUMAN was, originally, three novelettes.

But before we get to the answer, let's find the question.

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MORE THEN HUMAN is built around that rarity, a really new science-fiction idea: the <u>gestalt</u> man. A total of seven people with various "wild talents" -- a computer, some telekineticists, a telepath, and so on -- become one new human being. This notion alone is so strong that, I dare say, the combined efforts of Silverberg, Jerry Sohl and Robert F. Young couldn't entirely have killed the book. But there's more.

Part I, THE FABULOUS IDIOT, is the story of the contruction of this new human being, out of its "components." Part II, BABY IS THREE, deals with its growth and its gropings toward self-knowledge. And PART III, MORALITY, deals with its acquisition of a brand-new component, and a brand-new person -- the conscience of this magnified human being.

Only Part II was published separately, though Parts I and III were submitted, and rejected by various editors.

Here, in part because the plotting is on a very simple level of action (and isn't that a complicated, scholarly way of saying not much happens?), Sturgeon's been forced to hold himself back to some extent. Besides, the idea itself, which informs

the whole book, has so many new facets that excitement and change can come from that, rather than from the constant flow of new notions, new situations, new characters and talents that confuses THE DREAMING JEWELS. MORE THAN HUMAN does have believable characters and evelopment which, if it doesn't have the primary virtue of felt inevitability (and that must be the scholarly way to say something: but what?), does at least seem reasonable after the fact, and proceeds slowly enough, and with enough interior cohesion, to keep the reader from becoming confused.

And yet...

Well, there's that finish. Sturgeon had a message, and an important one. But when it came to delivery time, there was that old wolf at the door, there was that old editor waiting for a script -- and the message is simply thrown at our heads in better than a solid page of straight preachment (226-7-8, Ballantine edition). And once the message has been delivered, why, the book's over, and there's nothing more to do. The book ends within six pages, falsifying characters, simplifying changes, wrapping things up in a hell of a hurry.

Admittedly, as another writer once told me: "MORE THAN HUMAN can stand that finish." It can; the rest of the book is about as good Sturgenn as there is, and in spite of the vaguely disappointing ending it deserves the awards it received. But the ending is a shame, still; given a decent finish, what a book this <u>could</u> have been.

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THE COSMIC RAPE is another story. Here the <u>gestalt</u> man is used both as a plot-point and as a snapper (and if that sounds confusing, try the book itself).

Here we have Earth's civilization, and humanity's very existence (at least its existence as a set of discrete individuals, which is all most of us care about), threatened by a Thing from the stars. This Thing conquers races by getting them to ingest some sort of little structure; that is (pardon me if this begins to snarl up around here), it gets <u>one representative</u> of the race to ingest this structure. It seems the Thing has never run into a race of discrete individuals before; they've all been mass-minds. When one is taken over, the rest are: simple as that.

The individual picked for the process is a man named Gurlick, the epitome of bumhood.

We follow Gurlick for a while; but we also meet other people. There is a woman who is being faithful to her absent husband, and an extremely unprincipled wolf who is trying to change this situation (with the use of a drug of some sort). There is a little boy named Henry, whose parents neither understand him nor treat him rationally. There is another woman who Hates Sex, and who is trying to reform her female friend, who rather likes it. There is a young Italian juvenile delinquent who is in reality a great violinist. There is an African tribesman named Mbala. There are others.

The book is not a long one. The Dell edition runs 160 pages. But this plethora of leads needs much more room than that to allow the reader full identification or understanding. I count eight leads in the paragraph above (which is not exhaustive). Each of them is given at least one section of his own; we return to some more often than others -- to Gurlick, to Henry and to the Italian violinist-criminal perhaps most of all. The major line of plot (the Thing's effort to figure out what kind of species this it, its try at conquering the world, and humanity's brief, final fight against it) requires only Gurlick as lead. The book's told in a third-person very close to the major character in each sequence; it can almost be described as first-person with auctorial comments, one of Sturgeon's favorite techniques. Gurlick would have done the job. Why all these others?

Well, first of all, they make the story book-length. And they do add background and help flesh out the bones of the plot. But neither of these is, in the strict sense, a necessary function; there are other, and simpler means of doing both.

But they keep the author interested.

When he gets tired of Gurlick's travail, there's little Henry waiting for a chance. When he gets tired of Henry, Mbala is sitting around. Or the wolf and his drug-seduction. Or any of the others.

It's not that the reader tires. I've read lots of books with only one viewpoint character, even very long books. So long as the technique is, however vaguely, a third-person technique, even the limitations of Gurlick's mind aren't severe enough to cause boredom to set in.

But Sturgeon, writing full-speed, letting the thing flow -- Sturgeon gets tired. And Sturgeon needs new characters, new scenes to keep him going.

The ending isn't very rushed, though it shows haste (particularly in one almightily strange tie-up between Gurlick and the woman who Hates Sex -- thrown in apparently because <u>something</u> had to happen, and why not this?). But the book itself is chopped into so many iterrupted pieces that it's reasonably hard going. The story's very simple, and the book is written in Basic Sturgeon again.

Buy it for style, I guess.

And then we come to VENUS PLUS X. No, I haven't changed my opinions. But I have heard a lot of comment about that finish. People tell me they feel it's too rushed, too mechanical.

Maybe it is. You see, that's the flaw in Sturgeon's "blind grope" technique. "If the author does no know what is to happen next, the reader cannot possibly know." Ain't true. If the author does no know what is to happen next -- he runs a terrible risk of grabbing at the nearest next step, just because he's going so fast. And the nearest step is likely to be a very familiar one. It takes effort and thinking to find something new.

The familiar plot steps are easy, they're available -- and they get used. The author does no know what is to happen next. But the reader knows the familiar answers -- and, with the use of this technique, he very often gets them.

I've heard comments that VENUS PLUS X is such a case. I don't think so. But those who do feel that here, again, Sturgeon's let us down, let us down when his great talent, his fine and original mind, his beautiful command of English style, could have lifted us to the top of the mountain.

Maybe so. It's happened before. The best time in any writer's life is just before he starts a book. The worst is that period, a long time later, when he's facing the last thirty pages. They generally take as long as the precedent book -- and there is a temptation, to which Sturgeon's work-habits make him particularly prone -- to make those last thirty pages something more like three pages, and get the agony over with.

+ +

This piece is running longer than I like, and I have no wish to abuse the patience of the three people who, I am sure, read this book. There are seven volumes of Sturgeon shorts. God knows I have [illegible] more to say; it may be a disease for which there is no [illegible], but does anybody want to hear it?

I'm not craven, however. I won't quit now. Unless we get a lot of letters saying For God's Sake, Stop, or Write about something else, or simply Go Away, THE FINISH LINE continues next issue. If those letters do come in, I'll figure out something else to do, and sulk in silence. I'm not proud either. Not exactly.

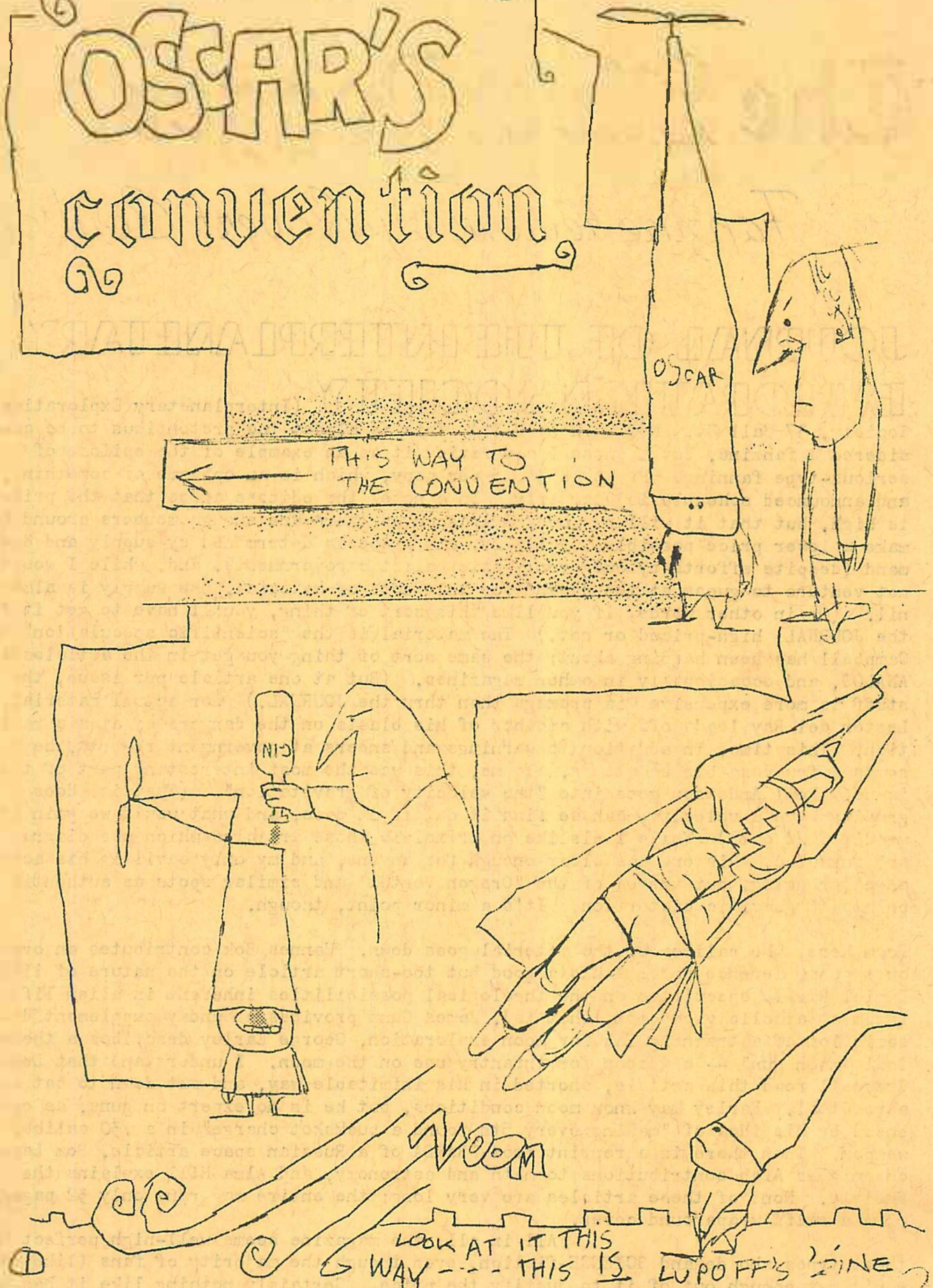
So let me know. I'll report on SOME OF YOUR BLOOD, anyhow, if I can get it before next deadline.

I'll be back.

Will you?

— Larry M. Harris

OSCAR'S convention



The Silver Dagger

Fanzine reviews by Robert Coulson

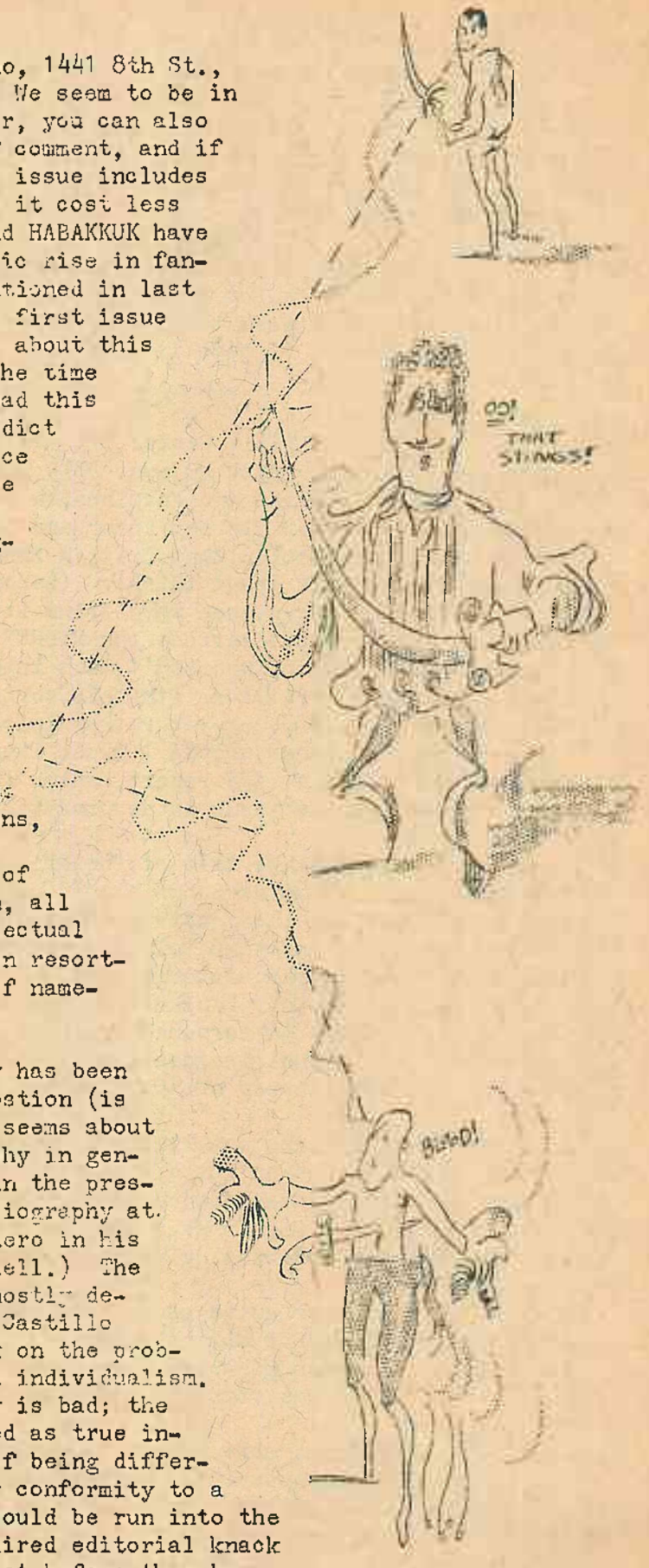
JOURNAL OF THE INTERPLANETARY EXPLORATION SOCIETY

(Interplanetary Exploration Society, 37 Wall St., New York 5, N.Y.) This is almost too pretentious to be considered a fanzine, but I guess I can review it as an example of the epitome of serious-type fanning. Price is $1.25 per copy, which is an epitome of something, and announced schedule is quarterly. In a note, the editors agree that the price is high, but that it will be lowered as soon as there are enough members around to make a lower price possible. Actually, any price is determined by supply and demand (despite efforts by our overly paternalistic government), and, while I would not venture to guess at the demand for this sort of material, the supply is almost nil. (Or in other words, if you like this sort of thing, you'll have to get it from the JOURNAL, high-priced or not.) The material is the "scientific speculation" that Campbell has been harping about; the same sort of thing you get in the articles in ANALOG, and occasionally in other magazines. (But at one article per issue, the stuff is more expensive via promags than thru the JOURNAL.) For actual material, Lester del Ray leads off with another of his blasts on the dangers of atomic radiation. This time, in addition to warnings and sneers at government reports, he presents a few possible solutions. To me, this was the most interesting part of the issue. Poul Anderson goes into "the velocity of gravitation". (That is, does gravity have a velocity, can we find it out if it does, and what would we gain if we did find out.) While I dislike on principle those articles which use diagrams and formulae, this one was clear enough for anyone, and my only cavil is his acceptance (grudging, but there) of the "Oregon Vortex" and similar spots as authentic points of gravitic distortion. It's a minor point, though.

From here, the caliber of the material goes down. Hannes Bok contributes an overly cute poem, Terence Roberts has a good but too-short article on the nature of life, Daniel Raible speculates on the theological possibilities inherent in alien life (from a Catholic viewpoint, that is), James Gunn provides a Sunday-supplement description of a training lab for moon exploration, George Earley describes a theoretical "moon gun" -- a weapon for infantry use on the moon. I understand that Dean Grennell read this article, snorted in his inimitable way, and sat down to bat out a rebuttal. Earley may know moon conditions, but he is no expert on guns, as evidenced by his idea of "making every 5th round a buckshot charge" in a .30 caliber weapon. Then there is a reprint from PRAVDA of a Russian space article, Rom Landau chronicles Arab contributions to math and astronomy, and Alma Hill explains the Society. None of these articles are very long; the entire mag runs only 52 pages, plus a stiff wraparound cover.

All in all, the magazine seems well-nigh perfect for those types who demand SCIENCE-fiction, even though the majority of fans (like me) won't get enough out of it to justify the price. Certainly nothing like it has been seen in fandom for years. Oh yes, Hans Santesson is the editor, and the magazine is printed (which explains, but doesn't really justify, the price).

HABAKKUK #5 (Bill Donaho, 1441 8th St., Berkeley 10, Calif. - 50¢ - irregular) We seem to be in an era of high-priced fanzines. However, you can also get HABAKKUK for a trade or a letter of comment, and if you don't already, why don't you? This issue includes 116 pages plus front cover, which makes it cost less per page than most fanzines. Donaho and HABAKKUK have performed what might be termed a meteoric rise in fandom this past year. The mag wasn't mentioned in last year's FANAC poll (possibly because the first issue hadn't been published yet; I'm not sure about this and I'm not going to look it up.) By the time you read this you will probably have read this year's FANAC poll and I confidently predict that HABAKKUK will wind up in first place (or, if the FANAC and CRY supporters are too numerous, the very lowest it should get is third). Mostly, I think the magazine's excellence is due to the fact that Donaho is interested in people -- all sorts of people. Consequently he knows all sorts of people, and, after persuading a few of the more flamboyant personalities (and better writers) among his acquainences to give him articles on various controversial subjects, all he needed to do was sit back and watch the accusations, recriminations, and counter-aacusations pout in. HABAKKUK is the home of some of the most spirited discussions in fandom, all conducted on a surprisingly high intellectual plane. (Even when name-calling has been resorted to, it's been an intellectual sort of name-calling.)



At present the Great Peyote Controversy has been pretty well replaced by the Beatnik Question (is or is not a Beat a human being?) This seems about to branch into a discussion of philosophy in general, aided by Art Castillo's article in the present issue, which boasts a 140-book bibliography at its end. (Art doesn't really get anywhere in his article, but he's intellectual as all hell.) The letter column (all 37 pages of it) is mostly devoted to items brought out in previous Castillo articles, with a sort of overall attack on the problems of conformity, non-conformity, and individualism. Everyone seems to agree that conformity is bad; the arguments start over what can be classed as true individualism and what is simply a case of being different for the sake of being different, or conformity to a minority code. It's a question which could be run into the ground, but Bill seems to have the required editorial knack of shutting of prolonged discussions just before they become boring.

Aside from the major controversy of the moment, material in HABAKKUK is apt to be almost anything. Ray Nelson writes nostalgic reccollections of war propaganda and comic books, Dick Ellington discourses on the juvenile code, Jerry DeMuth tries out as a poor man's Mort Sahl and fails, William Rotsler presents a selection of cartoons, and Eunice Reardon writes small-talk on cats, apartments, and people, and sneers at "small minds" -- apparently under the delusion that she has a large one.

I wouldn't say that HABAKKUK presents "something for everybody", but it provides a variety of subjects for those who are interested in the sort of general discussions that most fans seem to be interested in. It deserves the #1 spot on the FANAC poll, whether it gets it or not.

ORION #26 (Ella Parker, 151 Canterbury Rd., West Kilburn, London NW 6, England - US Agent, Betty Kujawa, 2819 Caroline, So. Bend 14, Ind. - irregular - 15¢) This one comes in two sections, a 52-page magazine and a 26-page letter-column which is given its own cover and staples. Someone (Redd Boggs, I think) has made the observation that British fans talk about people, while American fans are more apt to talk about things. (Large exceptions to both categories, of course.) This is probably one reason why I find it hard to get interested in most British fanzines. Few writers outside the HYPHEN crew can make long articles about people interesting to someone who isn't much interested in people in the first place. ORION seems less afflicted with this sort of fannishness than most British zines. The editor and Andy Young yak rather interminably about visits of various people I barely know to other people I'm not interested in, and there is a short installment of Ken Bulmer's TAFF report, which is a sort of a fannish visit squared, but the remainder of the issue is devoted to items which interest me more.

John Berry pens another tale of the Irish Constabulary; not one of his best efforts, but still funny. Some day John should put all these manuscripts together and peddle them to Ballantine; they just might go over big. Arthur Thomson's "Guide to Curly Monster Drawing", unfortunately, is not particularly funny; I've seen fans of far less stature write far better pieces. Sid Birchby comes off much better with his "Three Grues", but Rory Faulkner would have been better served by having the last half of her article (a personal incident) published in the letter column and the first half (a personal incident) published in the letter column and the first half (the now-outdated theory of "permissive" child-rearing) thrown away.

Reprints from fanzines not likely to have been received by most fans give us Jim Groves' speculations on ant civilizations, Harry Warner's discourse on the creative process and Fred Hunter's account of a Russian political exile. All good, with Warner probably having an edge because of greater writing ability, and Groves coming up with the most interesting approach to his subject.

The letter column is quite good, as most British letter columns seem to be. Slight confusion is caused by Ella's using // to indicate a new paragraph; while this is correct, it has been mis-used by so many fan-editors to indicate an editorial insertion that it seems standard, and the correct usage looks awkward.

Overall, ORION seems more uneven in quality than most British fanzines, but I think this is more apparent than real, and due to the fact that it provides more variety than most British fanzines. The more variety, the less likelihood of having every piece appeal to any one reader (and the more likelihood of having some pieces appeal to every reader.)

CRY #145, 146 (Cry, 920 Third Ave., Box 92, Seattle 4, Washington - monthly - 25¢) Most fanzines go all out on Annishes; extra pages, better material, etc. It's worth noting that CRY #145 has 60 pages, and CRY #146, which is the 11th Annish, has 44 pages. Material is about the same, except that #145 has several pages of con report, which is nice for people who like that sort of thing, and a photo-cover. Funny thing; when I first began getting CRY, the one item I always liked best about it was Wally Weber's "Minutes" of Nameless Meetings. Weber's humor stood well out in front of the other contributors. Now, some 50 issues later, Weber is still writing the same stuff, and sometimes I don't even read it. Either the caliber of the other contributions has increased enormously in the interval, or Weber's humor is the type that palls on me after a while. (God; have I lost my Sense of Wonder?) Anyway, Wally's column should still be a gas for people who haven't been reading his stuff for 4 years. Other regular contributors include F.M. and Elinor Busby, Terry Carr, John Berry and Les Nirenberg, with occasional contributions from other well-known fans. Contents are mostly "fannish" rather than serious or science-fictional, and they're usually pretty good.

The heart of the magazine, however, is the letter column (although I know one highly respected fan who said he didn't get the mag any more because there was too much space devoted to "those idiotic letters".) At present, for example, the readers are worked up over supplying Mike Deckinger's starving family with bread; sooner or later some other equally zany discussion will take over.

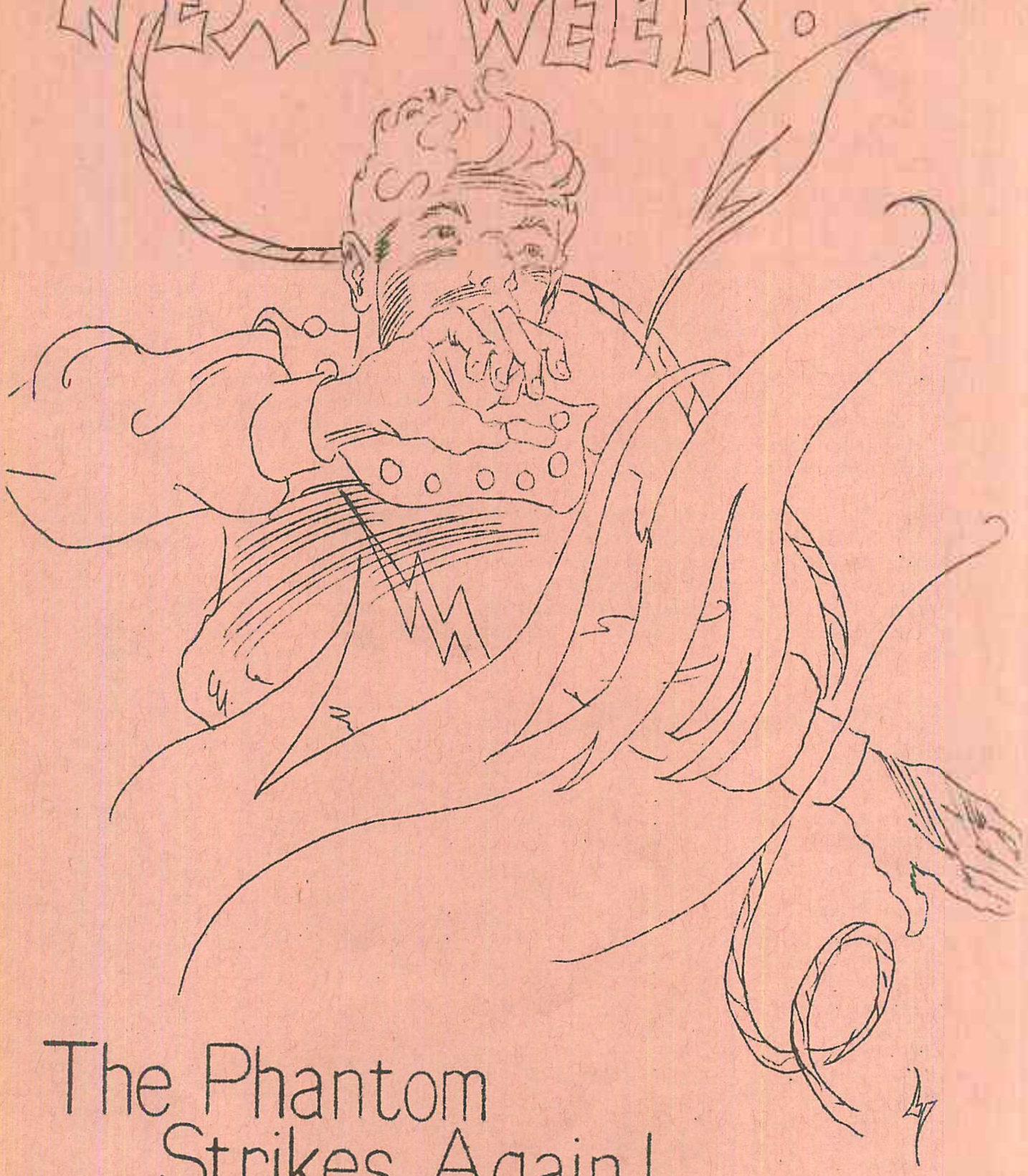
In general, I'd guess that a few fans will like everything in the mag, while the vast majority will like about half the items (which half, of course, depending on whether the fan in question is sercon or fannish.) A good many readers seem to feel that it's today's leading fanzine; I wouldn't go that far myself, because there is too much chaff in with the wheat to suit me. Certainly it's one of today's leaders.

SHANGRI-L'AFFAIRES #53 (Bjohn Trimble, 2790 West 8th St., Los Angeles 5, Calif. - bi-monthly - 25¢ except this issue, which is 75¢) Mostly because this issue includes a 57-page supplement of Christmas greetings by various fan writers and artists, and a calendar by George Barr. (Interesting to speculate on whether or not any other fan artist could have presented the variety of illustrations and styles that Barr did. Personally I doubt it, though Robert E. Gilbert might come close if he worked at it.) At any rate, the artwork in the supplement and the calendar is fabulous, and easily worth the added tariff if you go for artwork. (That is, of course, if they have any issues left by now; it's worth asking, if you don't have a copy.)

In general, SHAGGY has always struck me as a slightly more serious and less sloppy version of CRY. You have the same Club Minutes, written by various people (Jack Harness this time). And you have the same fannish columns, by Pon Ellik, Bjo and others, and the same reviews of science fiction (which you aren't getting much in CRY anymore since Busby decided his column was more work than it was worth). Well, not the same columns, but similar ones. You know what I mean; quit nit-picking. With Bjo around, SHAGGY has much better artwork than CRY, and usually better layouts, though SHAGGY does tend to get too fancy on their layouts on occasion. And CRY has a longer and wackier lettercolumn. But I still think the mags are remarkably similar. Of the two, I like SHAGGY the best, but I seem to be in the minority on this. Anyway, I recommend it, too.

Maybe next time I'll devote some space to fanzines that I don't like.

NEXT WEEK:



The Phantom Strikes Again!

BY CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

It was like saying "open sesame" to a world of a thousand thrills...a world where brave men -- and women too -- risked life itself in service of a gallant cause. Today they are forgotten people. A whole generation is growing up unaware of either them or their greatest contribution: a contribution to the Progress of Melodrama. They gave it their own special brand of fast-moving enchantment, and they gave of it unstintingly...until, sadly, it was no longer wanted. They gave us the serial.

The movie serials -- Saturday afternnon epics spaced out by colorful cliffhangers -- belong to the past. They belong to a world where a personal, muscular attack upon evil was still possible. No doubt it's precisely because evil could be met on such personal terms -- because the serials happened in a sort of twentieth-century elfland where strapping, square-jawed heroes pitted themselves against horrific villains -- that they still exert for some of us a haunting fascination. Serials had their faults no one is blind to them. But they had greatness, too; and they gave us a full half-century of thrills. Here are some memories of them.

The history of serials might also serve as the history of motion pictures: the chapter-plays developed soon after the movies began and achieved great popularity during the days of the silent screen. And the idea of serials -- adventure stories broken up into fast-moving chapters -- goes back to the nineteenth century, when penny magazines called "story-papers" presented running weekly installments of no fewer than three thrillers at once. Although this was basically the ancestor of the serial, the movies were at first slow to learn. In the beginning they experimented with what might more properly be called the "series" film. An exciting story was strung out in episodes complete in themselves. The danger was met, and dealt with, before each chapter closed, leaving the villain to dream up some new peril for the following chapter. The first of these not-quite-serials, made in 1912 by the Edison Company here in New York and on the cliffs of New Jersey, was graced by the simplest and yet one of the most intriguing titles ever given a film. It was called What Happened to Mary? Not only did this multi-chaptered bit of blood-and-thunder pave the way for the serial proper, it also established a tradition once enormously popular: the serial heroine. Enter Pearl White.

It's hard to understand, when watching it today, why so crude and uninspired a film series as The Perils of Pauline should be so enthusiastically remembered -- hard to understand, that is, until one spots Pearl White. She was one of the movies' first great stars, and unquestionably the goddess of all chapterplays. This girl from a small Missouri town had a special kind of magic. In a day when the movie dream-girl was either vampish or wistful, Pearl displayed merely her healthy good looks -- a kind of apple-pie-and-fresh-cream vigor that was the match of any villain. Or even hapless her! As flamboyant as any of her plots, Pearl insisted that she did all her stunt work herself...and this was very nearly true. Whether outdistancing a rolling boulder down a mountainside, swimming from a sinking ship to a desert island, escaping the clutches of a wicked uncle after her inheritance, burning up the distances in an international motorcar race, braving pirates, gypsies, Indians and what-have-you, all in Pauline, Pearl's zest for adventure got the serials off to a rousing start.

And Pearl did it without much help from the plot. The Perils (it's strange that it has such a nostalgic reputation) was both incoherent and inept, almost beyond belief. The various adventures were strung together without rhyme or reason, generally initiated by Pearl's evil uncle (Paul Panzer), of whose villainy Pearl was blissfully unaware until the final chapter. Pearl's gentleman friend -- it would be difficult to call him the hero, for he was completely ineffectual, and existed merely to be rescued by plucky Pauline -- was played by Crane Wilbur, who later wrote a multitude of "B" horror melodramas. He had bad example from the Perils, the writing of which was almost illiterate.

Take this example: Pauline is lost in the Rockies, and captured by a fierce Indian tribe. Her amazing resemblance to the local tribal deity causes the old chieftan to declare her the living personification of their immortal goddess. Only in the titles it was misspelled "immoral."

But no mere bloopers could impede the success of The Perils of Pauline: it was snowballing into fantastic popularity. The audiences of the day were eating it up -- and demanding more. And they got more. The following year -- 1914 -- Pearl White was swinging through The Exploits of Elaine. Compared to Pauline, Elaine's story was a model of sophistication. For one thing, her hero was slightly more worthy of his laurels, and her villain was a humdinger. Here's a sample of the plot. Elaine's boy-friend is Craig Kennedy, whom students of the turn-of-the-century mystery story will recognize as one of the first scientific detectives. The intense, no-nonsense Craig is determined to end the career of a master fiend known only as The Clutching Hand. (And here we come to a serial standby and indeed a standby of the whole of yesterday's popular melodrama; we will deal with the master fiend in detail later.) By chapter nine Craig (who is balding, by the way) has caused Clutch and his underworld gang a considerable amount of trouble. So a message cut out of newspapeer capitals is delivered, announcing that The Clutching Hand has developed a death ray. If Craig doesn't get out of the country absolutely at once, people will be felled by the death ray every hour on the hour. Clutching Hand is as good as his word. Instanter, a hapless passerby in the street outside Craig's laboratory clasps his chest and keels over. A small, shocked crowd gathers. Seconds later the whole thing happens again. Heroically, Craig decides to submit to CH's demands. So, instead of figuring out the angle of the death ray to its source (a gimmicked-up klieg light in an office across the street), Craig boards the afternoon boat to South America. Or so The Clutching Hand thinks. It seems our villain conceived this elaborate scheme merely to kidnap Elaine. Which his gang proceeds to do. They toss her down a cellar pit -- inside a lovely vine-covered bungalow in a peaceful Los Angeles suburb. However Craig and the cops -- despite the death ray -- manage to rescue her and to save the day.

Mind you, this is but a single chapter -- entitled "The Death Ray." (Another, called "The Life Current," introduces an apparatus to revive the dead.) And this was but a single serial. Pearl White was to swing by her thumbs over swamps, skyscrapers and sizzling forest fires across ten more full years of thrills. And about the time of her exploits as "Elaine," serials began making a point of ending their chapters before the climax...closing with those fabulously frustrating tags, "To Be Continued Next Week." Not only were those five words used on the screen, however. These were the days of the great press wars, and newspaper syndicates regularly ran serial stories (all "to be continued next week") simultaneously with their theatrical release. One Chicago daily, by spotlighting the chapters, increased its circulation by a whopping ten percent. The serials had truly arrived.

Perhaps the grandest name in the history of those silent cliff-hangers was Pearl White, but others deserve mention. Helen Holmes, in particular. She was the switchman's daughter in a spectacular railroad adventure called The Hazards of Helen. Ruth Roland, "The Girld Detective," was another of the early serial queens. (And before she became the girl detective, in her first cliffhanger -- The Red Circle -- Miss Roland played a wealthy girl reformer tainted by a family curse...a taint straight out of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde.) Walter Miller alternately wooed and rescued Allene Ray through ten of the serials of the twenties, and the two became known as "the serial lovers." Warner Oland, later to become famous for his portrayals of Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan, set a pattern for villainy as the menace of the Pearl White stories And while many of the early serials had as their chief character the I-can-take-care-of-myself heroine, with plots revolving around wicked guardians and lost heirs (plus

the inevitable fate-worse-than-death), such masculine idols as Gene Tunney and The New York Giants starred in their own cliff-hangers, and the chapter-endings became more frenzied than ever. So did the serials' popularity. By the nineteen-twenties they hit a high stride...with blood-and-thunder masterpieces like The Phantom Foe, The Screaming Shadow, Son of Tarzan, Bride 13, The Dragon's Net, The Yellow Arm, The Million Dollar Mystery, The TWENTY Million Dollar Mystery -- dozens of serials with occasionally as many as thirty chapters each being released yearly. And these were no mere Saturday afternoon fillers for the juvenile trade. In the twenties serials were as respected as any star-studded feature; they were the surest way to fill a theater, and they knew it.

(When Harry Houdini decided to invest his own capital in motion pictures starring himself, the format he chose was -- of course -- the serial. And he made motion picture history by battling, through many an episode, the first robot ever seen on the screen.)

Forty serials were made in 1919 alone, and the cliffhangers continued unabted through the twenties. Very few of them survived the passage of time and the crumbling of old film stock, and that's a genuine pity. Because we are missing out on a ring-a-ding world of melodrama the remaining serials from the period can only hint at. And the few glimpses we have are terribly tantalizing. One such glimpse is over the shoulder of Officer 444 (a "Goodwill Picture" of 1926, starring Ben Wilson and Neva Gerber). The Officer was not a secret agent nor ranking army careerist, he was a fireman. (Fire-fighting thrillers were the rage in the twenties.) Not a very promising basis for an exciting cliffhanger, you say? Just wait. Officer 444 -- big, hearty, Irish to the core -- was a star member of the fire brigade known as the Flying Squadron; a hero amongst heroes. Now it seems that most of the fires erupting throughout the Los Angeles of the 1920's were being started by The Frog, the shadowy, hunchbacked leader of a vast criminal organization, and undoubtedly the Clutching Hand's identical twin. The Frog's constant companion -- through the twisted streets and sewers of his waterfront empire -- is a modish but mannish femme fatale known as The Vulture. Constantly sending reports to the Frog is the enigmatic Professor Kalium -- looking somewhat like a Satanic Ernie Kovacs -- head of an apparently functionless group calling itself the International Society of Scientists. The Society is convening constantly, but all its bewhiskered members do is furrow their brows while Kalium sneaks away with another missive for the arch fiend. By the end of chapter three it was apparent to all astute serial fans that the tall Professor Kalium and the stooped-over Frog are one and the same person; the really complex question was what third identity was he also??

By the third episode too, all semblance of plot had been tossed aside in favor of catastrophe and confusion. The Flying Squadron was forever rushing to fires here, fires there; all Los Angeles seemed in flames. The Frog was taking audiences on a crook's tour of Chinatown and waterfront dens (in one dim cellar, girls dressed in men's clothing danced with one another, while seedy hoods unconcernedly plotted jobs and puffed on opium). The pert heroine spent the best part of nearly every episode resisting kidnap attempts (now carried off by the Frog; now socking the Vulture in the jaw). Then there was the Haverlyite. Haverlyite was one of those great scien-

tific achievements, a machine that could by, and we quote, "a boon to mankind in the right hands," but with one disastrous side-effect: it could crumble the mind -- and change men into monsters. Naturally Kalium lost no time in experimenting with it on our heroine. Happily, there existed an antidote: the Radio Ray, which counteracted Haverlyite, but which in itself had some dangerous properties. (Whenever either ray was in use, theater projectionists slipped a red filter over their lens -- and of course all the fires were tinted red too!) Through scientific laboratory, underground cell, secret passageway and burning warehouse, amiable, two-fisted Officer 444 pushed his way, not the cleverest of serial heroes, but certainly the most singed. He was a nice guy, a sweet guy, and he got his girl at the end: in some ways he personified a good deal more of the twenties than just its serials.

The coming of sound at the turn of the thirties gave the cliff-hanger an important new attribute: the heroine's scream. It was the beginning of what was for a time an almost inviolate law -- her shriek should be heard at the close of each chapter, as the avalanche descended, the buzz-saw came closer, or the locomotive rushed into the screen. It released the pent-up, heart-stopping emotions of the audience, and became as tradition-bound a serial device as the giant, looming question mark that finished out each chapter. Sound helped in other ways as well, letting cliffhanger audiences hear the crack! of assassins' bullets, the thunder of stampeding herds, the barrooomm of exploding buildings with the hero trapped inside. More exotically, it awed us with the chilling hum and crackle of innumerable death-ray machines. Then too, one could now hear the hissing, sinister tones of the master criminal as he instructed his band of cronies from behind a curtain or mask, or over intricate communications systems that rivalled RCA. And who could forgot those secret temples high in the Himalayas where, over the whirr of ancient prayer-wheels that were somehow also radios, hooded dacoits listened to those ominous words: "Ace Drummond must die! The Dragon commands!"

The Dragon is, of course, our old friend the master fiend in not very new a guise. How persistent -- and indeed how delightful -- a theme he was, continuing without a slack through the entire history of the serial (and by that token, nearly all of popular melodrama). One of the first talking chapterplays was The Clutching Hand! He had even taken to the air...as the flying menace in one of John Wayne's serials in the early sound period. (The setting was a circus, and in it Wayne duplicates almost exactly -- more than a quarter of a century earlier -- the famous flying sequence in Hitchcock's North by Northwest.) To get back to The Dragon, it should be explained that he was actually a prosaic businessman determined, for financial reasons, to prevent the building of a string of airports across Tibet. (His schemes are naturally foiled by daredevil ace pilot Ace Drummond.) So were all the great villains unmasked. Innumerable masterminds of the underworld -- weird and grotesque figures, dark disfigured shapes never clearly seen, and sporting names like The Phantom or The Spider -- were ar the close revealed to be (remember the gasps? "Good Lord, not him!") the kindly old inventor, the chairman of the board, or even, in an admittedly extreme case, the heroine's father. (Because the blood-lines of the serials were forever pure, it was made clear immediately that the girl was not his natural daughter, but "adopted.") Bent over in hunchback fashion and wearing a long black cape, a huge shapeless hat pulled low by a taloned hand, these villains-in-disguise lurked -- as did the Scorpion in Blake of Scotland Yard -- in such diverse places as secret passageways under ancestral English mansion and an apache cafe in Paris' Left Bank. The master fiend was everywhere: as tangible yet as shuddery as nightfall. Clearly he was a stand-in for the fears of a simpler and yet still very complex, changing society. Just as clearly he has retired today. It would be easy to explain his absence by saying he's no match for a cobalt bomb, or that world destruction -- in those days symbolic of quite other fears -- now is a possibility. But that isn't the whole answer, nor is it really the right one. Popular art changes, literature becomes more sophisticated, some things must be left behind. We parted company with the master fiend as we turned into the forties, give or take a plot. He accepted his fate like a man -- unflinchingly, bravely evil right up to the end.

The aformementioned Blake of Scotland Yard, by the way, was typical of the serials of the thirties -- which is to say, it moved along like the Super Chief and had a wallop like a karate death-blow. Which is to say, it operated on so many plot levels at once it needed program notes by Salvador Dali. Which is to say: a sheer and utter joy. Likeable young inventor Jerry Sheehan has perfected a death ray that can destroy over immense distances. The distinguished Inspector Blake of the Yard, Jerry's pal, observes it will make armies obsolete; "munitions stocks will be worthless." But the Scorpion -- "the most dangerous menace for peace in Europe" -- plans to steal the ray for "such a war as will make the last one seem a game for children." (The year is 1936.) Jerry is going to turn his invention over to the League of Nations at the forthcoming Geneva Peace Conventions, but he underestimates the Scorpion and his gang. And what a gang! Our hunchbacked mastermind has agents everywhere...even at the Convention itself, in the person of Count Basil Segaloff, a trusted delegate of the League actually in the pay of a munitions king. But Segaloff is only one member of a far-flung ring of agents, unknown to one another and identifiable only by a number. The Scorpion controls huge gangs both in the Limehouse and the Left Bank: such diverse types as a sinewy, sullen Apache dancer who is also a damned fine knife-thrower, a wonderfully mad old beggar-woman hobbling down London streets with messages from the Scorpion, the mindless, brutish son of the crippled owner of a waterfront boarding-house (the lad is so strong he is kept locked in a cell), and many other delightful characters from barons to butlers. After twelve chapters of incredible adventures, Blake, Jerry, Jerry's girl friend and nauseating young Dickie Jones finally unmask the Scorpion, who turns out to be another delegate to the Geneva conference. Our hero then gives over his machine to the League of Nations -- the climax of the serial. The President of the League tells him: "You have made a long stride in the preservation of the peace of the world."

Death-rays and destruction rays were a serial commonplace. If the serials had been our scientific inspiration, hydrogen bombs just wouldn't have had a chance: civilization would have been zapped to death long ago. And, in the thirties particularly, serials plotted the end of civilization with relish. "We are facing the destruction of the world," moan the scientists at the start of The Lost City -- just one of dozens of cliffhangers that utilized world's-end as a sort of standard opener. Menace was everywhere: from evil geniuses causing titanic electrical stroms from a "lost city" inside a "magnetic mountain" in Africa; from advanced civilizations in the futuristic world of Murania 25,000 feet under the surface of the earth (Gene Autrey, of all people, rides down to Murania in The Phantom Empire); from outer space menacing earth with fantastic rays at the start of all three Flash Gordon serials. The sentence "I want enough power to destroy the world if necessary!" literally became the villain's stock phrase during that catastrophic decade. Villains were not long in getting that power either. The maddest of mad scientists were found in the serials -- and, of course, the most inventive. Doctor Alex Zorka in The Phantom Creeps -- played with majesty by Bela Lugosi -- came up with these mechanical aids during his 12-chapter career: a Devisualizer, worn as a belt, which turns both the wearer and his clothing invisible; a terrifying, grotesque robot over eight feet tall; a meteorite fragment he uncovered in deepest Africa which has all sorts of fantastic properties and is the source "of all my power"; an explosive more devastating than anything the world has yet known; a way of inducing suspended animation to entire armies; and a metal spider that crawls to its victims, explodes, puts them in a trance. As another character says of him, he is "working contrary to the good of mankind." Be that as it may, Zorka is very sever with his critics: "You are attempting to destroy the greatest genius the world has ever known! Now let the world beware my vengeance!"

But even Zorka couldn't top the enterprizes of Doctor Zolok, master of The Lost City mentioned above. While not sending out world-wide electrical storms from his gleaming tower under a magnetic mountain, he busies himself with a Brain Destroyer.

Indeed, his favorite line through every chapter is: "Put him in the Brain Destroyer!" This marvelous machine not only erases the mind -- its rays can also stretch the body to giant, superhuman proportions. For what appears to be the sheer sport of it, Zolok permits himself the opportunity of putting whole tribes of screaming, terrified natives through the Brain Destroyer, gleefully expanding them into giants or reducing them to dwarfs.

+ +

I am carrying on the electromagnetic traditions of my people.

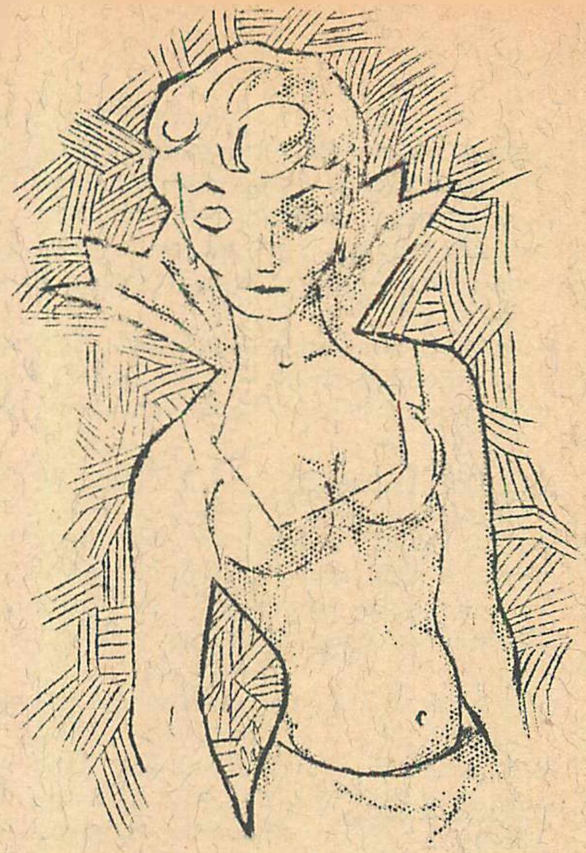
-- Zolok

+ +

And the heroes were as incredible as the villains. When serials were at their best, gallant adventurers like Buster Crabbe, Kane Richmond, Tom Tyler and Billy Halop gave us muscular portraits of raw courage, of rugged nobility. And certainly among the virtues of this legion of heroes was the ability to face the near-impossible without batting an eye. Take, for instance, football's famed Red Grange. He was recruited for one of the first talking serials ever made: The Galloping Ghost, complete with hunchbacked mystery-villain. In the close of chapter one Red and his girl must bail out of a burning plane -- but there's only one parachute. So Red lets the girl -- Dorothy Gulliver -- wear the chute, and they share it: Red clinging to Dorothy as they jump. Dig? Only their combined weight is too much for the silk, and one by one the strands begin to break. So Red does the only thing a hero can do, he says goodbye. As Dorothy screams he just lets go and we see him last hurtling thousands of feet through space. (Is he a goner? Not on your life; he's still got a big game to win! At the opening of chapter two he lands on the back of a second plane that has just come up underneath.) A few years later Dick Tracy (also in a plane) watches New York City being swept away by a gigantic man-made tidal wave -- surely among the most devastating chapter-one climaxes ever devised! And, lest we forget, college athlete "Flash" Gordon first meets airplane-passenger Dale Arden on a share-the-parachute gambit. Their airship has been crippled in a tremendous, cataclysmic storm, caused by the wandering planet Mongo in an effort to destroy Earth, so Flash and Dale bail out...and land near the secret laboratory of the eccentric scientist Dr. Zarkov. Zarkov has been building a rocket ship to take him to Mongo, for he is convinced that on Mongo is an evil intelligence deliberately plotting to wipe out civilization on our planet. Flash convinces the scientist that he and Dale must come along too -- and the three of them take off in a sputtering, smoke-belching rocket ship for a serial adventure to end all serial adventures: far and away the best serial ever made.

One could write a book on Flash Gordon alone -- the finest glory of the serial era. No one paragraph -- or even paper -- could do it justice. Handsome Buster Crabbe and delightful, exciting Jean Rogers were a perfect Flash and Dale, and the superbly insane villainy of Charles Middleton made Emperor Ming of Mongo a memorable addition to the screen's gallery of fiends. The serial's production values, its sets and its concepts, staggered the imagination. Fantastic futuristic cities, great fleets of rocket ships, barren monster-infected wastelands, palaces suspended in the sky on vast anti-gravity beams, lion men, clay people, rock people, winged warriors, great apes, bridges of light-beams, vast atomic furnaces, lands under the sea, wonders piled on wonders. Flash Gordon saved Earth from Ming in three separate serials. At the climax of the first (1936), the strangely Oriental-looking Emperor has walked into a flaming crematorium, conceding victory to our hero. A short two years later, however, in Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars, Ming is back; he has changed his base of operations and is happily bombarding Earth with a deadly Nitron Lamp that causes earthquakes and cyclones. It takes a fast fifteen chapters on Mars for Flash to put the Lamp out. Ming isn't switched off that easily, though. One more year and we find him back in charge of Mongo, sending a spacefleet of plague-rockets to spread

the Purple Death on [illegible]. His aim: "to kill every living thing -- to depopulate the universe!" Flash blasts off for Mongo again, and -- despite attacks from the Annihilatons, an army of mechanical men who are walking bombs -- he manages to destroy the merciless emperor. Says Zarkov: "Ming conquered the universe, and you have just conquered Ming. Therefore, Flash Gordon, you have conquered the universe!" This bit of grandstand logic, curious as it may seem, supplied the title of the third and final serial of the series: Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe.



Farfetched and juvenile as they sounded -- and as they undoubtedly were -- there was poetry to those space operas. Flash brought the serials as close to true art as they were likely to come -- and, because of him, they came pretty damn close. Those three golden nuggets had grace and zest; they sounded a high, pure, full-throated call to epic adventure. And bow your heads, kids, for we won't hear that call ever again.

Small wonder the Flash Gordon series is still hailed by such European critics as John Peter Dyer as among the most significant and distinguished of American contributions to the surrealist cinema!

Not every serial in the sound heyday was a never-to-be forgotten masterpiece, but quite a few of them provided warm, glowing memories. Remember Billy Batson poking his way through an ancient and crumbling Siamese tomb, meeting the dying wizard, and learning the magic word? Shazam! (Comic book fans will notice Genesis was somewhat changed here.)* And how in the name of Solomon, Hercules, Atlas, Zeus, Achilles and Mercury could Captain Marvel -- without any camera trickery or lab mattings -- fly that way from mountain-top to mountain-top and up the sheer side of buildings? (Republic Pictures kept that secret well, and used it again in such later serials as King of the Rocket Men and Zombies of the Stratosphere.) Remember The Return of Chandu -- a white yogi, magician and hypnotist who, if anything, out-gestured Mandrake (and who was played with vigor by Bela Lugosi, the villain of the first Chandu serial four short years before!). Our hero, who is known as Frank Chandler in the Occident, is about to be married to Nadji, Princess of Egypt...only her highness is being sought by the sinister priests of the lost island of Lemuria, "birthplace of black magic," in whose temples black-robed figures worship Ubasti the Cat. The cult wants Nadji because only the soul of an Egyptian Princess can bring back to life their Goddess, dead three thousand years -- and restore Lemuria to its glory.

*Comic books and comic strips sent many of their heroes over to the serials. In addition to the ones mentioned in this article (Captain Marvel, Dick Tracy, Flash Gordon, Ace Drummond, Tim Tyler's Luck, Don Winslow) there were also Tailspin Tommy, The Vigilante, Blackhawk, Radio Patrol, Buck Rogers, Secret Agent X-9, Red Barry, Green Hornet, the Phantom, Congo Bill, Batman, Superman, Mandrake the Magician, Brick Bradford, Spy Smasher, Captain America, Brenda Starr, Smilin' Jack, and possibly more; some, like Superman, Dick Tracy, and the Lone Ranger, were done more than once.

(It is a testimony to that stout adventuress, Madame Blavatsky, founder of the still-popular Theosophy movement, that many of her weird and cerebral theories found their way untampered into the mouth of serial-hero Chandu.) Of course our white yogi rescues his princess -- "calling upon the wisdom of the East," which evidently included hypnosis, second sight, thought transferrance, invisibility, telekinesis, mediumship, and psychic dynamite!

Remember the serial Tarzan? Not grunting Johnny Weismuller, but articulate, literate Herman Brix -- and so well-spoken was this Olympic shot-put champion that he dedicated himself to acting completely, changing his name to Bruce Bennett.

The New Adventures of Tarzan was "actually filmed on location in the jungles of Guatemala," but a good portion of the action also took place at Greystoke Manor in England. Therefore, one saw this Tarzan as conversant with the aristocracy as with the apes, as comfortable in formal dress as in a loincloth, and as much at ease at a lawn party as astride an elephant. Lord Greystoke was never again allowed to come that far out of the jungle.

The memories are crowding on one another now...

Billy Halop of the Dead End Kids searching for his kidnapped scientist father in Junior G-Men and for his kidnapped scientist brother in Junior G-Men of the Air -- lucky Tim Tyler crossing Africa in the craziest armored tank ever to rumble off a Hollywood drawing board -- the deceased Chinese father of deadly Sombra (The Black Widow!) materializing every once in a while out of a hi-fi set that evidently pulled in the next world -- Don Winslow of the Coast Guard battling June Duprez in fog-shrouded Seattle -- Fu Manchu's minions scurrying from dark missions on invisible wires high above the streets -- Crime Busters trying to bust up the League of Murdered Men -- Nyoka the Jungle Girl fetchingly menaced by an incredible gorilla - or caught in a cell over a lion pit with the floor slowly pulling away - or suspended over an erupting volcano with a magnifying glass burning through the rope!

The forties gave the serials World War II to play with, which the serials did with characteristic gusto. But, alas, it was the sunset of a glorious epoch...it was the beginning of the end. Slowly cliffhangers were losing their Saturday punch.

What caused it? Why should this roaring torrent of adventure ever end? Some argue that the serials were growing tame and obvious: the same almost ritualized conflicts (such as the board of scientists, the divided maps, et cetera), the same tired cliffhangers (with some "stock" chapter-ending footage used time and time again), the cheating, the slack, the carelessness, the all too apparent disinterest. This was all very true. But was it cause or was it result? Was the world moving on to a new secularism -- a new climate of sober realism in which the serial, just like its master fiends, could no longer exist? The answer lies somewhere there. The serials were dying because people no longer believed in them.

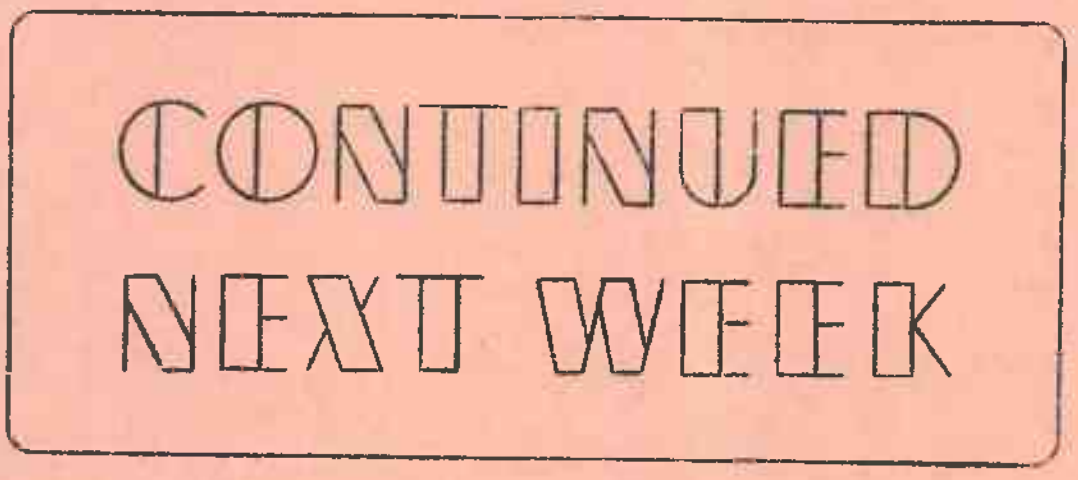
And of course there was the problem of economy. Rising motion picture costs began to make the cliffhangers with their twelve and fifteen chapters -- equivalent to about four feature films -- a financial impossibility. Television was forcing most motion picture houses into booking only star-studded, wide-screen, technicolored spectaculars -- far out of the serials' class. And, too, television was siphoning off serial talent -- and money -- into the quick half-hour videofilm. Those directors still around, those players still making a living from the cliffhangers, reluctantly made the change.... There were a few more spurts, a few attempts.

Captain Video, Captain Africa. But that was it. The last chapter had ended.

Yet the ghost of them still can be seen on TV -- the merest wisp, of course, but there. One can feel their presence in such shows as Superman (with one hundred and four episodes; no wonder George Reeves couldn't escape it), Captain Midnight (called Jet Jackson in areas where Ovaltine refuses to sponsor) Fu Manchu and others.

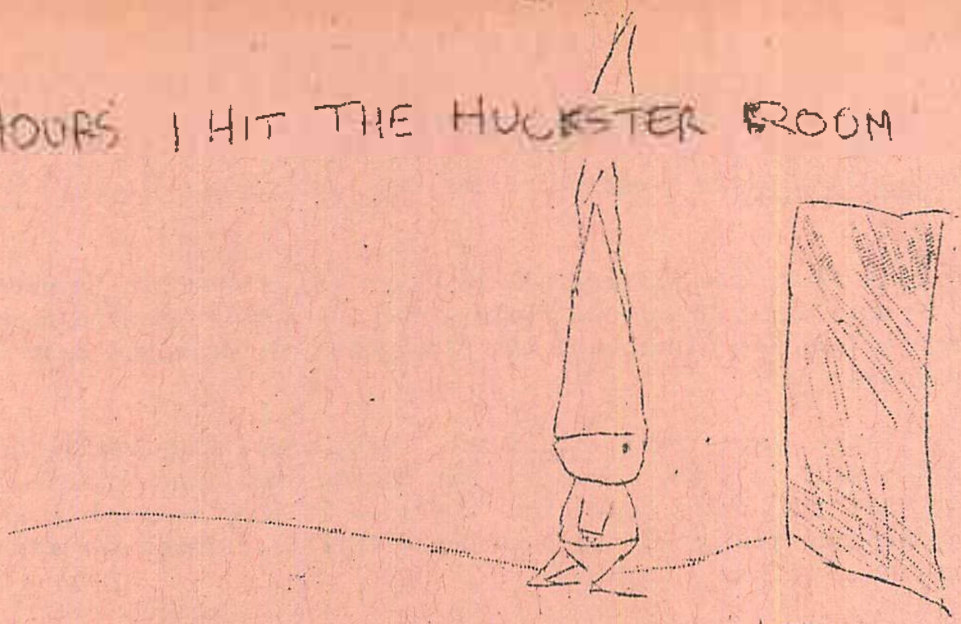
Not to imply these are all serials in disguise, or serials transformed; they're not. But every once in a while, one spots a prop -- some fantastic machine or ray-gun -- one hears a familiar line...and the floodgates of nostalgia open up. But sadly, as at a graveside.

And even if the chapterplays could come back, would they really be the same? The door in the wall is gone. Horizons are shorter now, and Chinatown is a housing project. Let those that come after mourn -- if they remember. And if they can, let them replace that world of a thousand thrills...where the eternal battle of Good against Evil was always

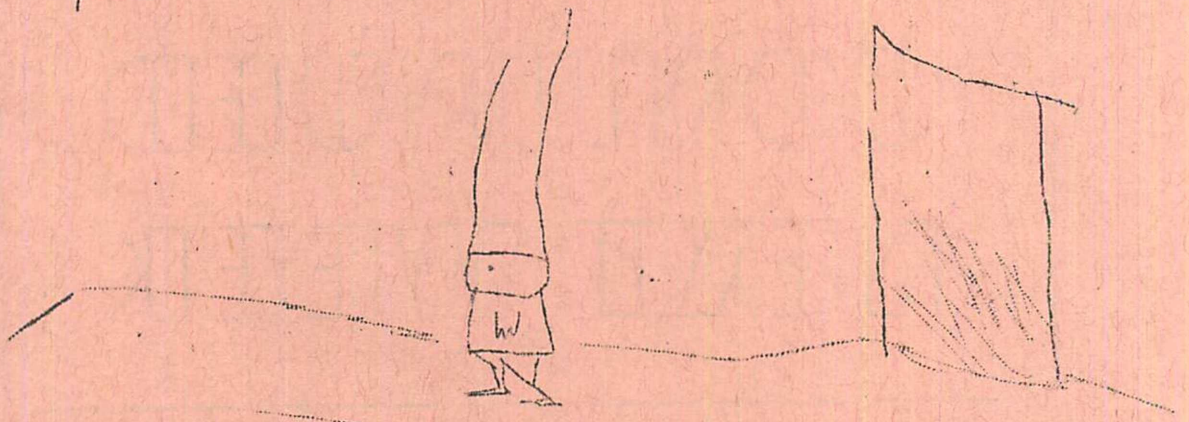


— Chris Steinbrunner

AT 0 HOURS I HIT THE HUCKSTER ROOM



I STAYED FOR A WHILE - - - THEN LEFT . . .



I HAD, OF COURSE, NO INTENTION OF RETURNING - - -

F.I. conducted by Pat

BOB MARGOLIN
(510 W.113 Street, New York, N.Y.)
I have a few comments to make on Mike Deckinger's article, "Madness and Horror," in XERO 3. First of all, in PSYCHO, Janet Leigh did not parade around fetchingly in her undies. She wore a slip. Let's be accurate. Second of all, by 1919 motion picture was not "nothing more than an experimental infant field." Cameras and projectors had been introduced into the United States as early as 1895 and by 1919 the cinema was well on its way to glory. D.W. Griffith had filmed THE BIRTH OF A NATION and INTOLERANCE; both known for their startling cinema overtones. Granted that the cinema fully blossomed forth during the 20's but there were still good films before that.

Mr. Deckinger regards PSYCHO as a giant step forward in the art of motion pictures, stating that insanity has never been exploited to such a length. Perhaps he never heard of a British film called DEAD OF NIGHT made in 1945. The story is about a man who is invited to the country to visit a friend. Upon arrival he finds there four or five guests (I don't remember exactly) each of whom has a personal experience with the supernatural to tell about. One woman tells the story of an old mirror her fiance bought in which he could see reflected a non-existent room. This mirror vision drives him mad and he tries to take his wife's life (they married) before she smashes the mirror and restores him to sanity. Another incident is about a children's party where one of the hide-and-go-seekers discovers a room in which she finds a live little boy who is supposed to have died many years before. Someone else tells of a gold incident which I don't remember very well.

But I have saved for last the ventriloquist incident, told by a psychiatrist, which is a direct parallel of Norman Bates' sickness in PSYCHO; probably an extreme case of schizophrenia. The psychiatrist tells of his experience with a ventriloquist who had a dummy named Hugo. This fellow is doing a nightclub act when he is visited by a ventriloquist associate. Hugo, the dummy, makes a few remarks to the associate such as "Take me with you," while Hugo's owner keeps telling him to shut up. The two, Hugo and owner, battle verbally back and forth until Hugo makes a remark which necessitates their leaving the stage. Backstage, the ventriloquist's associate has come to visit, only to hear Hugo say onece again, "Take me with you. Nobody owns me." The ventriloquist is frightened and leaves. Later in the hotel bar Hugo, held by his owner, makes a wise remark to a passing girl which results in his owner's getting his face punched.

Hugo's owner, expecting a possible attempt by his associate to steal the dummy, steals to the other man's room in the middle of the night and finds the dummy there. He is so enraged he kills the associate! Discovered, he is put in a jail cell with Hugo. While in the cell, Hugo, the dummy, continues to make snide remarks and finally the ventriloquist flings the dummy on the floor and the plaster (or wooden) head cracks open. There is a striking shot of Hugo lying there on the

floor with his head broken into various pieces. It turns out that unbeknownst to his other personality, the ventriloquist had stolen up to his associate's room and put Hugo there so that when he returns to the room later, he attributes the dummy's presence to his rival's having stolen him. The sequence ends like PSYCHO with Norman Bates sitting in the chair talking to himself except that the ventriloquist is in a hospital bed. One difference is that the other ventriloquist has come to visit, in the voice and with the facial expressions of Hugo, the dummy.

Perhaps the comparison is even more valid than THE CABINET OF DOCTOR CALIGARI. The cases in PSYCHO and DEAD OF NIGHT, aside from a few details, are almost exactly the same. I haven't seen CALIGARI, but from what I have read, it was highly stylized to convey a sense of unreality which neither PSYCHO nor DEAD OF NIGHT does.

/A number of others commented on Deckinger's article, including Ajay Budrys and Noreen Shaw who both pointed out an important fact not mentioned in the article: The "it-was-all-a-mad-dream" sequence of CABINET was not part of the picture as originally planned, but was tacked on at the very last minute for reasons which offer much interesting speculation. Reconsidering the film in light of this fact also offers interesting areas to think about. PL/

DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

(66-17 Clyde Street, Forest Hills 74, N.Y.)
Thanks for XERO 3 which I really enjoyed. It's got a nice easy but clear style about the whole thing that slides down a lot easier than some fanzines otherwise highly rated.

The three comments on Beam were interesting though a little academic. Not having seen the original article, nor ever having even heard of Ray Beam, it's like coming in on the end of a heated argument in a foreign language, but the arguments are familiar. It's always the same -- one guy does all the work and the rest of the bums are just freeloading. Has there ever a club anywhere run differently -- in any field? Besides, take the story of the Penn State SF Society. Why should it continue? What could it do? The day of crusading for stf is long over. Argue maybe in favor of space flight? Ha! Experiment in amateur science? Double ha! It never had a point, hence couldn't have any reality.

I think fandom is a way of life (yeah, I know the remark's not original and current fandom seems to disapprove of it, but I don't care, it's true regardless,) and fans must meet and simply glow in each other's presence. That's all. What makes a fan? That's a different debate and not for tonight.

Your rundown on N-Ninth Fandom seems a logical presentation. A bit premature -- from what I can see, Eighth Fandom is still pretty damn strong and a couple years more could bring new shifts in the fan current to alter your projection. But -- it could be.

Comic books... After my time. But the discussion is fascinating. I knew and know men who work on them -- Binder to the contrary I know another fellow who claims he writes Superman today. I also happen to remember the day when I bought the first issue of the first comic magazine ever produced on the first day it hit the NYC stands. Not many can make that claim, by Ghod. MORE FUN, and it was oversized.

/My comic-reading husband tells me that Superman stories currently appear in nine different periodicals, ranging from monthlies to an "annual" which appears about every five months. Binder, he says, is a writer, not the writer, of Superman. Me, I'm a Mary Poppins fan. PL/

GENE DEWEESE

(3407 N. 22nd, Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

The mailman seems to have swapped me today -- my letter on the 2nd XERO for the 3rd XERO. Couldn't ask for much quicker service. #3 was the best issue so far in all ways. The "All in Color" articles were the best, especially the Harmon expose' of the JSA. Exactly the sort I'd love to see done about all the other characters.

However: Your style sheet for the series fair gives me the coldrobbies, to swipe a phrase from another comic. Dick, are you sure you haven't been doing too much technical writing? The thing bears a horrifying resemblance to some government specifications I've seen -- "The description of the component shall contain the following information: etc." If you start including parentheticals like "(See figure 4-1)" and calling the illos by figure or table numbers..... At one time I considered doing a YANDRO-type movie review in the format of a government T.O. but the whole thot was just a bit too frightening.

I don't want to sound unappreciative, but I didn't realize you were trying to "do something worthwhile" with your comics series. (I skipped a few pages here and there in the first two issues; the only things I invariably read from cover to cover are YANDROs, Little Lulu comic books, and Arthur C. Clarke books -- not that I mean to imply an similarities within that group -- !) I guess that explains White's article and one/tenth. Anyway, not to sound stupid or anything, just what worthwhile goal do you have in mind? Nostalgia with laughs -- such as Harmon's article -- is great with me. (Just thot: It was funny-----wasn't it?) /I hope so/

I'm afraid I just cannot take fandom seriously. Any more than I can Hugo Gernsback. It's fun, and that's about it. If it weren't, I'd be getting either money or credits for it. /I'm with you./

On the same subject of seriousness: In your editorial, you mention "sophisticated sercon". Yes? For instance you mean....? /Help -- Oh, Dick/ Oh well, serious or not, XERO is highly enjoyable and I hope you keep sending it.

JAMES BLISH

(P.O. Box 278, Milford, Pike County, Pennsylvania)

My Video piece administered a few unintentional slights (and a few intentional, I freely admit). I had meant to give as complete a list as I could of the people who wrote the show that year or so, but I must have been typing too fast. I don't think I can reconstruct a complete list after this many years, but I do recall that among the people who did sequences -- in addition to Richardson, Walton, Miller, Knight and myself -- were Jack Vance, Bob Sheckley, and Arthur C. Clarke. Several of these did two sequences before the debacle, -- Walton of course did a whole string of them -- and there was one instance of one of the boys rewriting another, at Olga's request. (Not me, Doc, not me!)

One last note: one of the glories of the show for the writer was the model shop. Hollywood models are usually very elaborate -- a spaceship model, for example, may run six feet long, just in case somebody may want to count the rivets -- but on TV that's not necessary because of the degradation of the image. Capt. Video spaceships rarely ran longer than a foot and cost very little; and the man who made them also did the shooting, and was good at it. This meant that the writer could call for all kinds of tabletop and other process film without so much as a blench from the producer it was regarded as part of the normal cost of the show. My script called for a planet-wide earthquake, and the model shop turned out quite a terrifying one. /Yes, James Blish=Arthur Merlyn. Ubiquitous Mike Deckinger won the prize this time./

EARL KEMP:
(2019 North Whipple Street, Chicago 47, Illinois)
Dear Pat,

Since you're a hell of a lot better looking than Dick, I'm going to write this one to you. The occasion is the receipt of XERO 3 (pronounced zero here, how's by you?) /Same way/

The reproduction, artwork and stencilling are beyond reproach. The contents fabulous. "What to do about what to do about what to do about it." I'll have to side with Don Thompson here because we're in very much a similar situation here. The 'big' local club is under the auspices of the University of Chicago, and delighted to remain there for all sorts of favors granted, like free meeting rooms, free kitchen facilities, projectors, screens, all the goodies of life. The ingroup (because the name of the University cannot be used in any public way without permission) leads a double life as the CHI SF League, a name we can bandy about as publicly and disrespectfully as we please. We have the same described situation, wherein we just meet enough new student members each semester to retain our University charter; from then on it dwindles....

Mike Deckinger did an excellent job contrasting PSYCHO with DR CALIGARI. I have seen DR C several times now, but alas, PSYCHO only once. And while I never personally made the same connections until I read the article, he is right. I would not go to the extreme of advocating many more on the same theme, but both were great in their own right.

I would like to think that Arthur Merlyn was damon knight, but knowing how difficult it is to get material out of him I'll pinpoint him as being one of the Red Bank boys, del Rey, Blish possible.../Right! ...on the third try. Do you win 1/3 of a copy of FLYING SAUCERS?/ I'm going to skip commenting on the comics bit. Not that I don't dig it, because I do, but because something Dick brought up is far more pressing.

Ninth Fandom: Dick, I think you hit it exactly right here. But wouldn't you be more inclined to think of it as some sort of renaissance? To me the single most significant word emerging from the current biggies (or at least those I consider big and important) is "think". The zines are all think zines: XERO, HABAKKUK, DISCORD (and KIPPLE that you mentioned, but has escaped me so far), and to this I'll add Ajay Budrys infrequent DUBIOUS. To me they are all calculated to make you think. Personally, I read an article in any of them, close the issue and just let my small and overtaxed brain run madly through whatever comes, stopping only to sip a little more beer or light another cigaretter.

I think of it as a renaissance because I think something big and lasting is going to come from all this. /Yes, a great big screaming reaction/ At the risk of "spreading it around" I'll bring up WHO KILLED SF and the in-progress WHY IS A FAN. I look on these as certainly something of value, but more than that, a concentrated effort towards magnifying, and if possible solving one small problem. (And at the same time, Dick, take the opportunity of thanking you, Noreen, and all the others who did my ego so much good with your kind words along this line.) I think HABAKKUK does the same in some of its highly opinionated article, and certainly Dick, in your own material in XERO you do the same. I'm only sorry you don't do much more of this "soul searching" for want of a better word...

(I dig this Marvel bit so much I even bought a copy of your picture from Buck, how about that?) Now I'll quit, I'm pooped...

BOB LICHTMAN:

(6137 Croft Avenue, LosAngeles 56, California)
I received XERO 3 the other day, but I've been putting off writing because I'm unable, even yet, to make up my mind as to whether or not you're just kidding in your editorial. Really, you're in a rather poor position to judge whether or not a new fandom is coming into the foreground, especially one whose main interest is, of all things, comic books. You happen to be publishing a fanzine whose main center of interest -- indeed its entire reason for existing -- is the discussion of comic books. /Now this is just plain untrue. The present issue would be a good argument against your claim, but it is ex post facto evidence. So let's look back at the contents pages of XEROs 1, 2, and 3. Among the authors who appear, none dealing with comic books, are: Harlan Ellison (on PSYCHO), myself (on Mervyn Peake), Ray Beam, Les Sample, Don Thompson, Buck Coulson, and Russ Wolff (on purely fannish matters), Mike Deckinger (on television and then on movies), "Arthur Merlyn" (on television), and Larry Harris (on books and writing). Certainly comic books have received much attention in XERO, but this does not make XERO a comic-book fanzine./

XERO is the only fanzine which has dealt with comic books at any great length to date. KIPPLE had had occasional features on the subject, and admittedly these features have increased in the amount of space they take up in any given issue, but it hasn't been an overwhelming interest there. HABAKKUK has had one article, the article entitled "War Baby" by Ray Nelson. Outside of these magazines, nothing of significance has appeared concerning comic books. As for the projected magazines you mention, COMIC ART and FORGOTTEN WORLDS, these are not really Significant, to my way of thinking. Remember EC fandom? For that matter, there are a number of fanzines out that might herald a monster-movie fandom, if you want to be that way about it.

But comic books....really! Besides, I tend to look upon the whole discussion-zine topic with somewhat of a grain of salt and my tongue firmly inserted in my cheek. Fandom isn't going over 102% to these discussionzines either; it just seems that way because the producers of such magazines are currently a bit more active and vociferous than other fans. There are still far more "fannish" (if you insist on differing fanzines between "fannish" and "discussion", a distinction too clear-cut for me to stomach) fanzines than "discussion" fanzines, and such will always be the case, I believe. (Leaving apazines out of it, please!) Fandom just seems to have to have something to quibble about, and now discussion vs. fannishness is the subject, just numerical fandoms, fanzine vs. convention fans, and who-killed-ol'-stf? have been topics for quibbling in the recent past.

Fannish centers... I would agree that New York has become more of a center of fanzine fandom than it has been in the past -- it has always been a center of convention and club activity -- but I am inclined to question the prominence of Chicago. After all, who lives there other'n Earl Kemp, and if Chi is just a center for Kemp's presence, what has Earl done to further comic books and discussionzines? Seattle is a left-over center from Eighth Fandom, is it not? And as for your statement that Berkeley is past its zenith, need I only point out that one of the top discussionzines, HABAKKUK, emanates from that location? Also, you seem to have totally overlooked Los Angeles in your survey. What with people like Bruce Pelz, Ted Johnstone, and even myself active here, Los Angeles deserves consideration as a leading fan center. (However, the thought occurs to me that much of our activity this past year or so has been in apas -- Bruce and I are in five apas apiece, for instance -- and not so much in general fandom.

Ray Beam's article on science fiction clubs and like that seems to have gotten some interesting replies, so let me stick in my two cents worth. I am perhaps unusual here in Los Angeles in that I'm about the only leading actifan (a statement which

I don't think is too farfetched, do you? I didn't and don't claim BNFship.) who isn't a regular attendee at the weekly meetings of the LASFS. During 1959 I went to about ten meetings, but from September 1959 until October 1960 I didn't attend at all, and since October 1960, I've only attended two meetings, the one in October that broke my 13-month non-attendance string and the Christmas meeting. (I am planning to attend a meeting tomorrow or the week after, I might note.) However, during the same period of time, I attended quite a number of Fan Hill parties, went places with fans (notably to Calico to help with "The Musquite Kid Rides Again"), and visited Fan Hill during non-LASFS attendance. The trouble with the LASFS, from my point of view, is that it's still too much a science-fiction club. There is one member in particular who bores many of us stiff by spending endless minutes making "announcements" about this and this bit of inconsequentalia. There is the fannish element in attendance, and the usual plonker fights (which I consider childish from grown fans like Bruce Pelz, and wouldn't do myself), but mostly the overbearing atmosphere is a mixture between science-fiction club and N3F-ish organizational chatter (what with various club committees). The only reason I go to those meetings as seldom as I do is to talk to the fanzine fans afterwards or out of the meeting room during the meeting. I find the meetings themselves rather uninteresting for me.

This is why I wouldn't particularly care to be part of a science-fiction club with a lot of science-fiction, per se, fans in it. Out at UCLA a fellow LASFS member has been kicking around the idea of starting up a stf club on campus (he's a stf fan more 'n a fanzine fan himself) and perhaps even calling it (on my suggestion) the Westwood Science Fiction Society (and maybe even taking out incorporation papers??). But the way I see it, I wouldn't mind helping to organize the club, but I would object heatedly to being expected to attend meetings. They would, for me, be as dull as dust. Dry as a popcorn belch. Flat as ginger ale or root beer after it's been sitting around in a glass for several hours. Like that.

Probably much of this attitude can be traced to my stfnal background. I started reading the stf stuff back when I was just a wee tad, ten years or so old, but I didn't begin reading it in earnest until I was 14½. From the time I started it in earnest until the time I got into fandom, a period of a year and some months as I remember, I read it to the exclusion of everything else. I must have read over 150 stf novels (or their equivalent) that year. I know I read GALAXY from its beginnings up until sometime in 1953 before I got tired of the whole goddamned stf mess and stopped reading stf almost entirely for a year or so. I do read some science-fiction now -- I have a sub to F&SF and keep up with some of my favorite authors -- but it isn't the same anymore.

So there you are. What of it? (Pardon me, but I feel cranky this afternoon.) /Go to bed. Go directly to bed./

Hell, I guess that's really about it. I don't know, haven't decided that is, if I want to lend my active support to you comic book fans. I enjoyed all that comic book stuff, but don't feel moved to comment. Tell Larry Harris that I thought Pauline Ashwell's "Unwilling to School" was a first-rate stinker. Tell Maggie Curtis not to tell her friend anything about fandom because if she is a potential hyperactive she will mess up things good being hyperactive the first year of college. Tell me there really isn't a letter by Henry Ackerman in this issue; I thought I'd seen the last of him when I stopped reading old-time fanzines.

Till XERO 4 then....

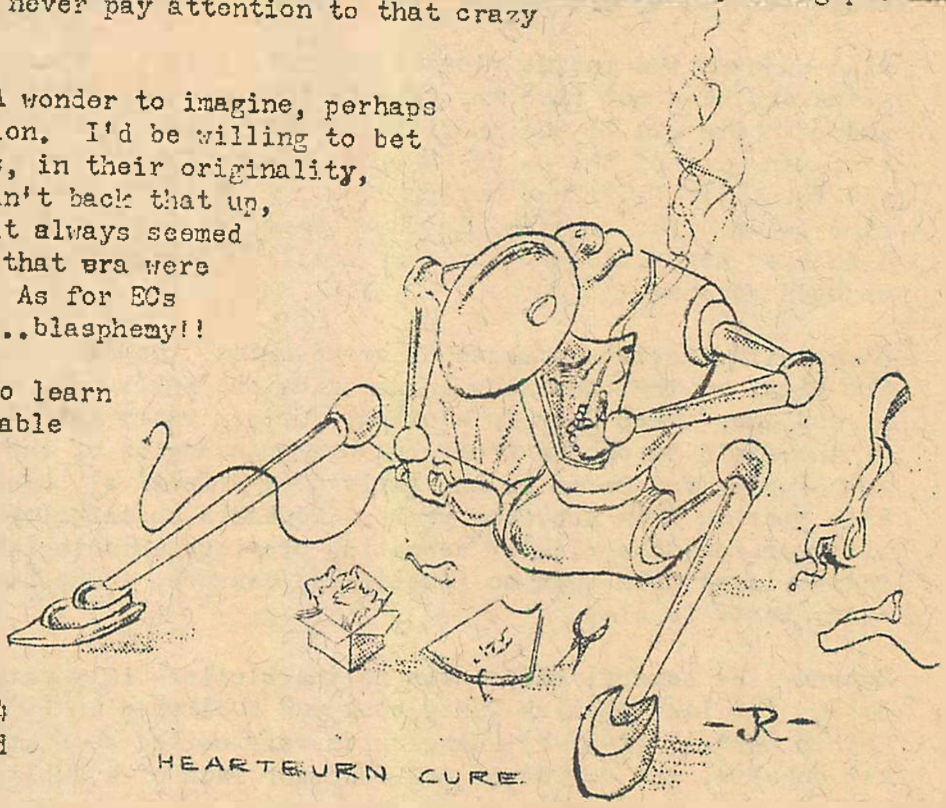
Nostalgia screws up a lot of people.

--W. R. Pedway

STEVE STILES:
(1809 Second Avenue, New York 28, N.Y.)
Glad to hear more about the good Captain Video. The sheer beauty of the series came to me yesterday when I was contemplating Flash Gordon in my quiet intellectual way. It was the continuity, the cliffhanging element which held my interest; like eating peanuts, bigosh, how could you stand missing a show, when in the last adventure the Ranger was being assimilated alive? It was interesting to read through an inside viewpoint, but as for guessing who the author is, I absolutely refuse; who wants to win FLYING SAUCERS? Once some fellow told me that Video was written by a big pro and goshwowboyoboyoboy, but I never pay attention to that crazy Buck Rogers stuff.

Harmon's piece was....? A wonder to imagine, perhaps might be the best description. I'd be willing to bet that the comics themselves, in their originality, were swinging bores. I can't back that up, being limited to EC, but it always seemed to me that the artists of that era were particularly uninspiring. As for ECs not being great literature...blasphemy!!

It was rather surprising to learn that Binder, so vastly capable of rendering imaginative comic strip plots, is turning out some of the papier-mache writings that seem to be the norm nowadys. Sort of like Feldstein writing the tripe he does now after after the '53-'54 period of WEIRD SCIENCE and WEIRD FANTASY. Sad.



Your description of the probable new period in fandom is...uh, perhaps they had better be taken one at a time. (1) Why is it certain that Berkeley is past its zenith? Are you trying to break the cherished dreams of a youngfan, or sumpin? (2) While I think that CRY is past its peak, I'm not altogether sure that SHAGGY is. There are also indications that CRY will shift with the change. I'm not sure that I'm not afraid of fandom shifting towards discussion zine orientation. TESSERACT and HABAKKUK were like rays of sunshine through a smogbank. I enjoy variety in reading, and after so much faaan prattle they were refreshing, but I wouldn't like it to become another kind of prattle. Besides which, strangely enough, it was the old in-group jokes which brought me to fandom. (I could even understand most of the fanspeak in my first CRY, and enjoyed immensely the in-group arguments.) (3) I still feel faanish, snif. (5) AMAZING STORIES --- ulk, gak, choke!

Don't be a tree on me!

-- Will J. Jenkins

BOB BRINEY
(10 Fairfield St., #8, Boston 16, Massachusetts)
XERO 3 was in no way inferior to the first two numbers, and that is saying a lot. I found Mike Deckinger's discussion of the parallels between PSYCHO and DR. CALIGARI especially interesting. I recently had the opportunity of seeing the two films on succeeding nights (there is a print of CALIGARI floating around the Boston film societies, and it manages to get shown about twice a year), and with both of them fresh in my memory the parallels are quite noticeable.

Also enjoyed the inside view of "Captain Video." Since I never saw any of the programs and have not read any of the books or comics, there are no personal memories and no nostalgia to tie in with the discussion, but I found it very interesting anyway. In view of the -- er -- prize offered, I'll refrain from attempting to guess the identity of "Arthur Merlyn" -- but if it is the same author who has used this name before (for example, in Super Science in the early 40's), then it is no wonder I enjoyed his article. I can't recall anything by Bl--, er, Merlyn that I haven't enjoyed reading.

Agree with Harris' comments on anthologies, though I would add a couple of remarks. The first is that the more anthologies are published, the harder it is to compile a good one. When Conklin started, fifteen years ago, he had the whole past files of the field to choose from; but his anthologies of the late 40's and Pohl's pb anthologies for Perma in the early 50's effectively used up the majority of readable stories from previous years. Nowadays an anthologist either picks from recent times or runs the risk of repeating previous anthologists' choices. Either alternative leaves him open to (justified) censure, so he has lost the game before he even starts to play.

Second, the several references to the Bleiler-Dikty anthologies are a mite out of date. The last Bleiler-Dikty book was published in 1954; the 1955, 1956, and "Ninth Series" (1957-8) anthologies were edited by Dikty alone. And according to all reports, the series is now dead for lack of a publisher.

One other remark: there are two reasonable markets for anthologies -- libraries (which do not, in general, keep files of sf magazines), and people who like reading sf but never buy sf magazines. I know several of the latter variety myself; they would rather read an anthology of stories drawn from the magazines than read the individual magazines -- and the hard-cover anthologies look nicer on their shelves than would the files of the magazines themselves. They do not read sf often or intensively enough to follow magazines month-by-month, but content themselves with a couple of hard-cover books a year.

/Regarding the choice of latter-day anthologists (re-reprint already anthologized material or use very recent stories) there is a third course open, albeit a difficult and risky one: seek out obscure sources in hopes of finding good stories no other collector has seen before./

On the What-to-do-about-it thing: the University of Chicago SF club might be a good case-history to examine. Since I haven't lived in Chicago since mid-1955, my direct experience ends then; but according to friends in the Chicago area, the club is still going along much as it did when I was a member. Which means that the club has held regularly scheduled bi-weekly meetings for something upwards of twelve years, during which time the bulk of the membership has undergone several complete changes; there is a core of "old stand-bys", but the transient membership of the club has always been fairly large also. These new members just seem to appear when it is time for them... The programs of the UofC club meetings were always based

directly on science-fictional material: panel discussions, movies, slides, dramatizations of sf stories (I remember the dramatizations of some Gavagan's Bar stories, and of Chad Oliver's "The Boy Next Door" --- we had a hell of a lot of fun with those), talks by visiting celebrities, etc. I can remember very few example of new people showing up for only one meeting and never coming back...most of the ones who came once, returned for the next meeting, and the next...and a few months later were probably officers of the club, and were taking just as active a part in the goings-on as any of the older members. And the club has, as far as I know, never put on an active membership drive. New members either hear about the club by word-of mouth, or see the club's ads in convention program booklets. But the important thing is, they do hear about the club, somehow or other; the membership has held fairly constant for quite a number of years, in spite of somewhat rapid turnover.

DON THOMPSON

(Room 36, 3518 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland 15, Ohio)
The lead article-symposium is interesting and I am especially surprised with my segment -- it seems much better organized than I thought, though it could stand improving. Buck's attitude is the type I meant to decry: the fan who doesn't care to attend organized meetings for the sake of recruiting new fen. Hell, I prefer disorganized gabfests myself, but pretty soon I'm not going to have anyone to talk to (not strictly ture, I'm marrying a fan). I'm in it for fun, too, but I like to give a thought to the future now and then. Wolff's idea is a little idealistic, it seems to me -- just how does one collect a bunch of readers and form them into a club, then leave them on their own? I seriously doubt its feasibility.

Deckinger's article could have been more tightly organized, but the idea of comparing PSYCHO with CABINET OF DR CALIGARI is a good one. I do wish, though, that you had prefaced this with a warning not to read it if you haven't seen the picture. I hate to think of somebody reading the article who hasn't yet seen the movie; it does give the thing away.

Larry Harris is a far better fan and reviewer than he is an sf writer. Possibly it's merely his collaborating with Garrett that gives me this feeling; Garrett is just playing around, prostituting his talent and infecting science fiction with social diseases in the process. Harris, in this article, shows evidence that he cares about science fiction and I think he ought to let Mark Phillips and Kenneth Malone die natural deaths and strike out on his own. This is a very well-thought-out article, and I really should restrict myself to it, but I like to complain whenever I get the chance about the lousy ending of the second Phillips novel, whatever it was called. Apparently "Phillips" wrote themselves into a hole and had to make Malone a super-superman to overcome the JD supermen. Hell. I was hoping for him to find a way that an ordinary type mortal could do it. Eric Frank Russell, who writes far too little, would have managed a way to do it. See his "Legwprk."

Blish's article (and don't you dast send me a copy of FLYING SAUCERS, bway) /aw, please/ is quite interesting, though I doubt that "Captain Video" was as good as he makes it out to be. I saw only a few installments, since my family succumbed to TV only recently, and I thought it stunk. Personally, I think westerns are the best-done things on TV (with rare exceptions such as "Twilight Zone" and news-features by Huntley Brinkley or Murrow-Friendly), probably because producers, writers and cameramen have more experience with horseshit-and-gunsmoke epics than any others. People are used to westerns, so you can start making them adult. People are not used to sf, so it's for kids. Serling is trying to start feeding the TViewers a dose of adult sf, even though they've had none (again with rare exceptions such as "Visit to a Small Planet") to eat in years, since they were on

the CVIDEO pablum. His show is popular, placing with the five finalists in the TV Guide poll for best continuing series (Other finalists in this b-r-o-a-d category were: "Father Knows Best" ((which won)). "Cumarioke," "The Real McCoys".) but he's been having sponsor trouble ever since he started. I don't think TViewers are ready for sf, except for occasional appearances. They'd rather watch hoods mowing down cops and other hoods for 55 minutes before Eliot Ness devotes the last five minutes to mowing them down.

On to another topic: Magazine sf is not quite all dead, but it's dying. I will not be content with books alone because I like short stories and I won't get short stories without magazines. Regret, not remores, more nearly describes my feelings here.

My favorite prozine is F&SF. AMAZING is better than it used to be, but every sf magazine is better than AMAZING used to be. The magazine looks great compared to the Fairman, Browne and Palmer versions, but it still prints a great quantity of crap. The recent novel by Dr. Sam McClatchie (I'm still not sure that's not a pseudonym of Moskowitz') is an archaic, clumsy, stiff and self-consciously "cute" hunk of crud. Maybe it had a good middle and end, I don't know. I started feeling queasy in my stomach halfway thcough the first installment. How many great stories has AMAZING published lately? How many have they published that are unreadable or barely readable? I read every word in every issue of F&SF and even GALAXY and IF, but I skip over at least one story in every issue of AMAZING and FANTASTIC because I find it dull, stupid or corny -- or not even remotely science fiction. And the covers, for Christ's sake -- and the way Lobsenz snickers about the mundane reaction to his cruddy covers -- are a disgrace. If you didn't already read sf, would you, as an intelligent, mature person, pick up a copy of a magazine with that stupid cover of a planet-head swallowing a spaceship?

And those "arty" little monstrosities by Bunch...Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Yet they look arty, so everybody praises them, despite the fact that they are all alike.

AMAZING STORIES a good magazine? Come on now. You've got to convince me of that. I think it's in about fourth place, below F&SF, IF and GALAXY and it's superior to ANALOG only because Campbell is determined to make ASFF a vehicle for his own crackbrained beliefs.

PAT AND DICK ELLINGTON

(2162 Hillside Avenue, Walnut Creek, California)
Well, I seem to have recovered from incipient gafia and am again able to draf myself toward a typer and start commenting on fanzines again. Actually I think that you're --chronologically speaking--quite a way down in the list but I've completely given up trying to figure out which came first.

I really wish I had read Beam's article, which frankly sounda a bit silly but then I'm judging only from the comments on it. Actually Russ Wolff's idea is the only one that makes sense to me, but even that would require some established fan's time and energy, willingly given. Me? I don't think we owe professional science fiction a damned thing and wouldn't walk two steps out of my way to rearrange a magazine stand or rant at a newsdealer unless I personally wasn't getting a specific magazine I wanted. Sure I read science fiction and I like it too but if all the maga in the field folded tomorrow I wouldn't sob a lonely tear at all. I'd just shrug and say so what and go back to reading something else.

I further don't give a damn if there are two pro mags or twenty -- I wouldn't buy them all if there were twenty, that's for sure, and most them would be filled with pure trash. Science fiction is nice, some of it and sometimes, but who wants acres

of the stuff being published? Not me. As to fandom, it's nice too but I don't feel any obligation at all to extend fantastic helping hands to neos or to organize fan clubs all over the place. This doesn't mean that I don't or won't do so. I do so when I find it enjoyable, and have many times in the past. I don't think either science fiction or fandom (the latter more particularly) is likely to die on the vine at any time in the forseeable future. I don't think fandom needs "recruiters" either, or special organizations to aid new fen or organize fan clubs. Is this be heresy, so be it, but them's muh feelings. All this jazz about crises in the making and we Must Act Now rings like so much warm boloney to me and always have.

Mike Deckinger's comparison of CALIGARI with PSYCHO is quite interesting. The real shockers in films, though, are not always by any means limited to just blood and gore. I wonder if either of you ever saw ISLE OF THE DEAD -- Marc Stevens and, I think, Karloff, from sometime back in the forties? /Dick did, I didn't/ It had real seat whoppers -- spots where a number of people in the audience would literally jump and gasp with shock. They achieved their effect by simple mood setting and atmosphere, a gradual diminishing of all sound and then a sudden -- expected -- shock of sound or action...and man, they were but gassers.

Yeah, sure, Harlan Ellison ran ROGUE? Hoho.

Harmon continues the interest generated in me by the first AICFAD. His remarks on Wonder Woman are quite apt, perhaps even the same artists -- the style is similar. For really blatant use of this sort of thing though, another pubber (name escapes me now) really took the cake. The one that had JUMBO, JUNGLE, et al. They really got carried away with the fetisher drawings. I forget now but it seems to me they had half a dozen zines around, though JUMBO and JUNGLE are the only two that stick in my mind. /A big birdie who needs a shave today tells me that outfit was Fiction House -- Malcolm Reiss and T.T. Scott. They published JUNGLE, JUMBO, RANGERS, FIGHT, WINGS, and -- forget it not! -- PLANET COMICS, plus a couple of minor ones (FIREHAIR, MOVIE COMICS, WAMBI) in addition to their pulps. And we have a stack of PLANET COMICS and will you do the AICFAD article on them?/

As to your last page, which seems to have set old Tee Carr off at such length, I kind of incline to the opinion that you're sort of joking. I mean some of the things have pertinence but a lot of it is sheer balderdash. I don't think your geographic center bit will hold water or that this thesis holds water at all regarding time spans in fandom in general.

As to comic books, like I say, I think it's interesting nostalgia but I'd hate to see fandom taking up such a thing as a main interest, or even as a main side interest. Dinna misunderstand me, I'd like no end to see the series in X run on forever, but I'd also rather see it stay localized right there. Anyway, I hope you're kidding, though even if you're not I doubt I'd carry on like Terry did about it.

Umm, nothing more to say, I find XERO thoroughly interesting and even more thoroughly enjoyable and hope you'll keep sending it my way, even if you don't become a focal point.

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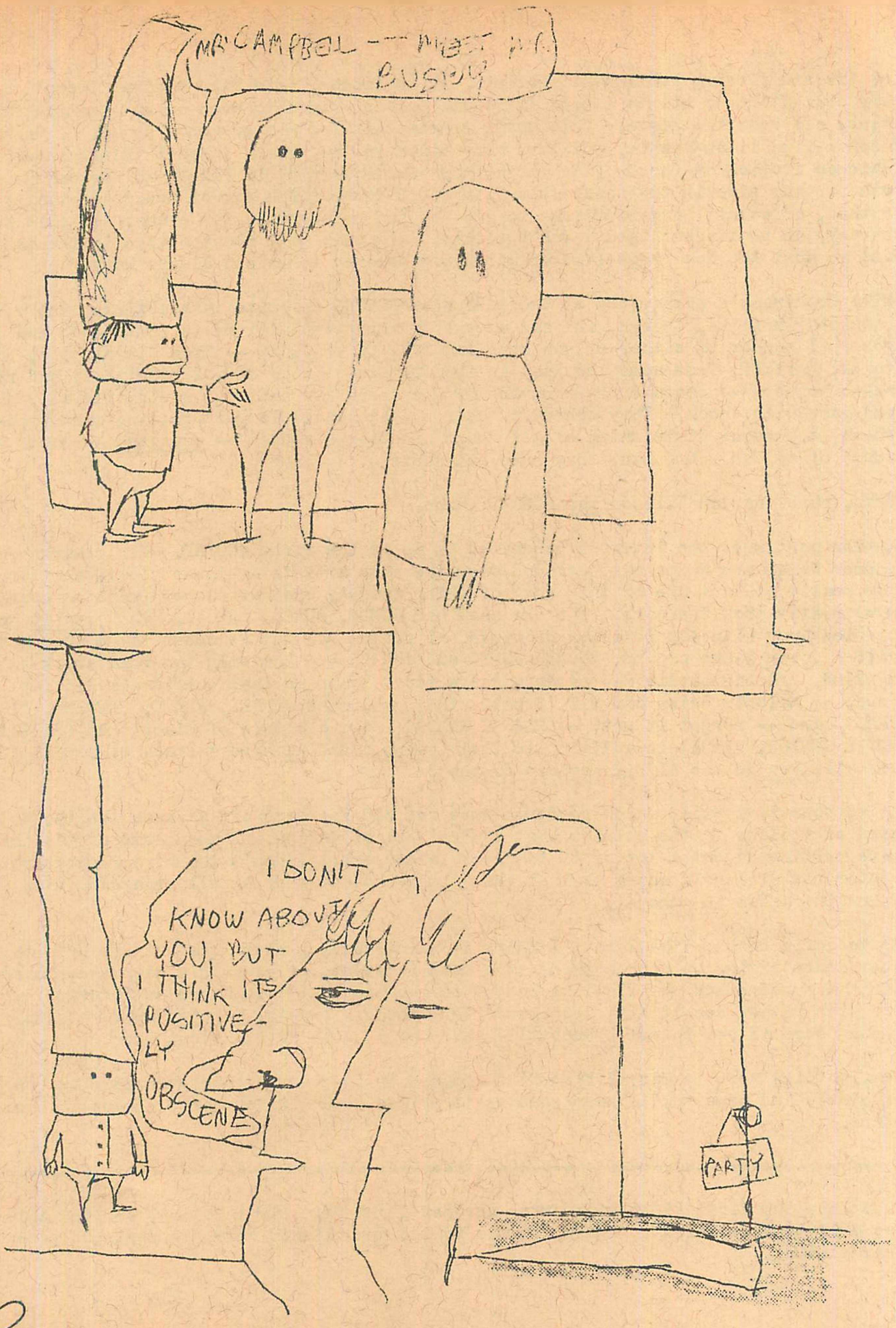
Thus ends the first EI session under our new Eight Page Limit Policy, and the column was only ten pages long. Again, thanks to the unpublished correspondents; please keep writing.

— Pat


MR CAMPBEL -- MEET MR BUSBY
I DONIT KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I THINK ITS POSITIVE-LY OBSCENE
PARTY

ABSOLUTE XERO

IN PLACE OF XERO'S CUSTOMARY SERIOUS EDITORIAL,

READ THIS *VITAL MESSAGE:*

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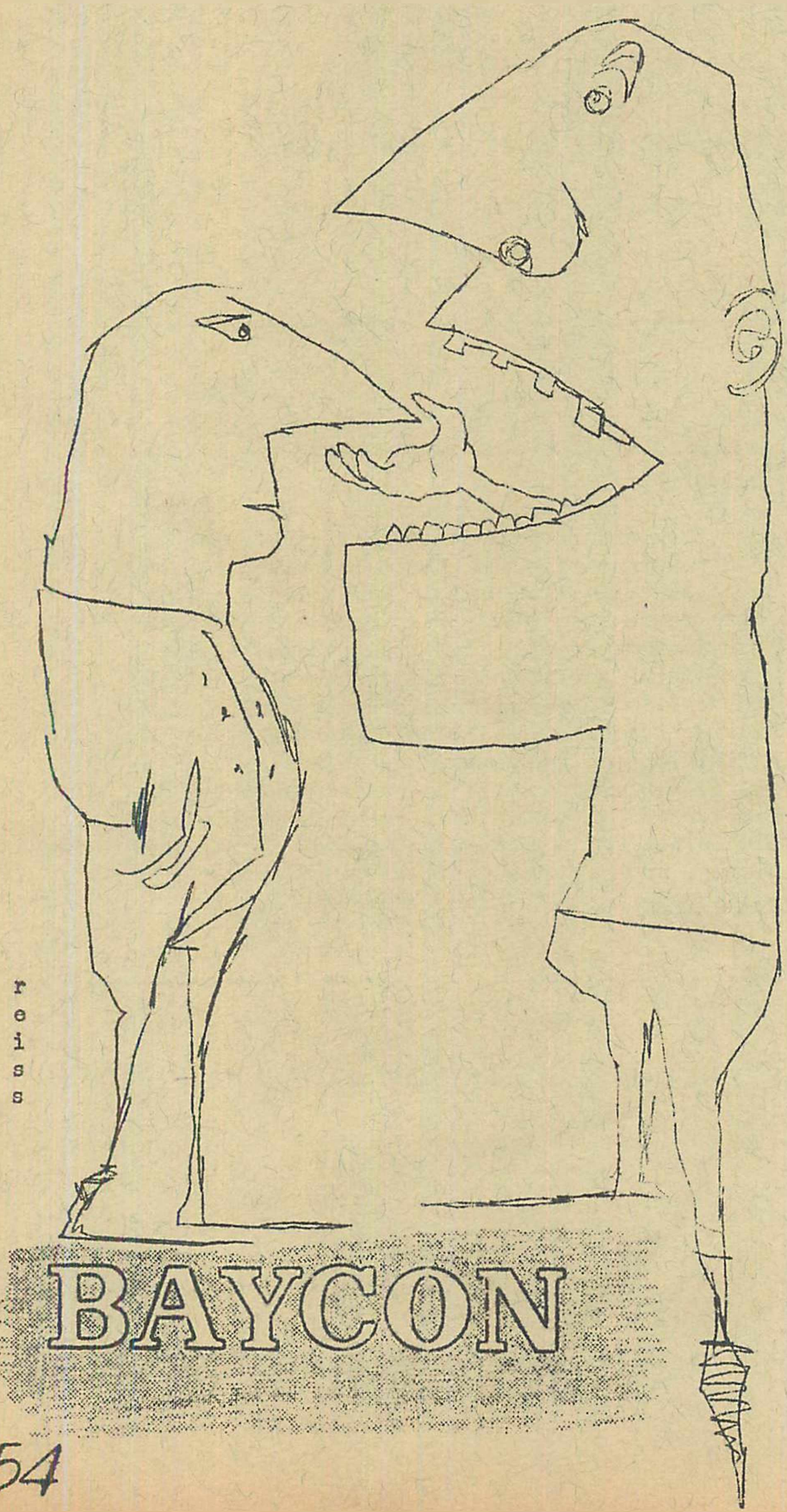
BRAY

Dear schizophrenics:

An excerpt from a card sent to Donsho: "There seems to be a mass-surge among the cattle recently to bandy about comic-book statistics like baseball averages. I hope this regressive idiocy dies out with the conditions that prompted it. I'm afraid these people confuse regaining childhood spontaniety with the morbid imbecility foisted on children by adults. So far (aside from Nelson) the only one who's had anything intelligent to say on the subject is Boggs (XERO #5)"...All around you is a society seething, begging not only for a critical evaluation of its fundamentals but for a re-construction of those very fundamentals, and you people sit on your ass and discuss comic-books. What's wrong with you, anyway?

A SIMPLE "PLEASE CANCEL MY SUBSCRIPTION" WOULD HAVE DONE.



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