

LET THERE BE...

WHOS

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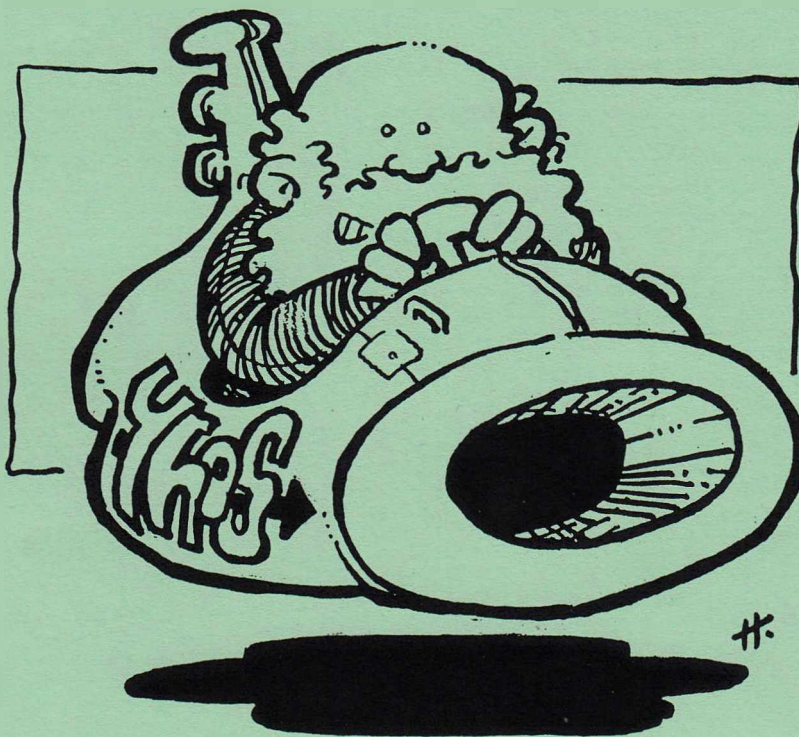
MICHAEL AGUS BONAROVIS & WARRIS

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Pastor Randy Smith
Fr. John Blaker
Yhos



O, I TRAILED

After typing up the mss of our two guest writers for this, I took the trouble to reread the 7th & final book of the Pelbar Cycle, *The Sword of Forbearance*, & parts of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, especially those where the secular characters debate "religious" values.

While I basically agree with what Blaker & Smith have to say, I was hoping for something a little heavier from a couple of experts. For one thing, the observation that sf fans & writers lean toward the agnostic & atheistic is scarcely earth-shaking. What interests me is that possibly this attitude may be mistaken, & that it may be instructive to look at some of the sf that *does* deal, in a positive or at least neutral way, with religion or religio-spiritual-nonrational attitudes. I wd also like to eliminate what Randy calls "the fundamentalist control freaks" from the discussion. See my footnote 3 in his article.

Canticle & *Pelbar* are alike in that they both look at humanity and the values that will lead us to an endless cycle of overdevelopment & destruction or a plateau where we will have a chance at the stars. Both are centered on North American culture, as if the rest of the world is irrelevant. Both think "religion" is important to our destiny, & both make "religion" nearly synonymous with Judaeo-Christian views or variations of same. Both have strong reservations about where scientific values will take us.

They differ in that C is pessimistic, where P is optimistic (given that heartland "Christian" values & a matriarchy with much the same faults as a patriarchy will dominate the new culture). Altho C sees Earth itself as finished, there is the forlorn hope of the abbey-starship, which gets away in the nick of time at the end. Much more interesting, however, is the second "inoperative" head of the mutant woman, which comes alive as the abbot (& the world) is dying, and forgives both abbot (representing The Church) & God Himself for their sins.¹

Which brings up the ultimately more relevant question (that seems to be more implicit than explicit in sf) of whether homo sap *can* make it in his present form or is entirely hopeless. Arthur C. Clarke, who is generally regarded as the dean of Hard SF, has, imho, a strong mystical, if not religious streak. In *Childhood's End* & most of his work (with the notable exception of *Rendezvous with Rama*) it seems that God (or Vanamonde or some vague super power) must interfere to save us from the consequences of our inadequacies. Even Octavia Butler, a strong realist, sees the friendly aliens of *Xenogenesis* giving up on us as fatally flawed.

¹ I wonder if Frost influenced Miller with his little two-liner or vv: "Forgive, O Lord, my little jokes on thee/ And I'll forgive thy great big one on me"

—A related theme in sf with strong implications for a religious approach (which the good pastors didn't deal with) is AI. I was hoping that the churchmen might tell us what our responsibility is, not only toward mutants (who may be superior &or inferior to us in various ways) but toward our creations, robots, androids etc. In *The Science in Science Fiction* (1983), Brian Stableford,² points out:

"What most sf stories about androids tend to show is that there is really no point in creating them. They are notionally useful because they allow their users to dodge the moral strictures against slavery: the basic premise is that we could cheerfully use artificial men in ways in which we could not decently use real ones."

Frankenstein was a piker. Like Jehovah, he created, then set the poor critter up for a fall, but at least he didn't enslave him.

But that isn't the worst of the moral abysses faced by homo sap, or for that matter, *procyon* ³*sap*, *ursus sap*, or whatever may succeed us. Whether it is our particular weakness or inherent in any hilfs⁴, I can't say. But it's the worst problem that science, religion, or that supposed

² I don't know of anybody else who has made this important point, in fiction or nonfiction—do you?

³ The raccoon genus.

⁴ I find LeGuin's little acronym "Highly Intelligent Life Forms" very convenient in discussions of this sort.

gap bridger, science fiction should be dealing with. Ray Bradbury⁵ & Dalton Trumbo⁶ have brot it up, but offer no solutions. I can't imagine a greater horror than (consciously or subconsciously) co-opting your god, or whatever you choose to worship or set up as an ideal. Bradbury rings a brilliant change on "The Monkey's Paw" by taking the point of view of the thing wished for. He presumes a lone Martian polymorph (perhaps the last of his kind) who encounters some pretty avg (I won't argue if u say below avg) humans in a colonial mining town. He assumes one form after another in trying to meet the emotional needs of various people. The big payoff comes when he wanders into the church⁷ where a despairing young pastor prays for the cross for guidance on how to reach his grungy flock that won't listen to his earnest messages of goodness.

The Martian becomes Jesus & steps down from the cross to comfort the pastor, who flips out & sends the Martian screaming in agony thru the streets of the town, where the people project all their needs onto him.

Before their eyes he changed. He was Tom and James and a man named Switchman, another named Butterfield; he was the town Mayor and the young girl Judith and the husband William and the wife Clarisse.He lay on the stoneshis face all faces, one eye

⁵ *Martian Chronicles*, "2005: The Martian"

⁶ Screen writer of *Johnny Got His Gun*, greatest of all anti-war movies.

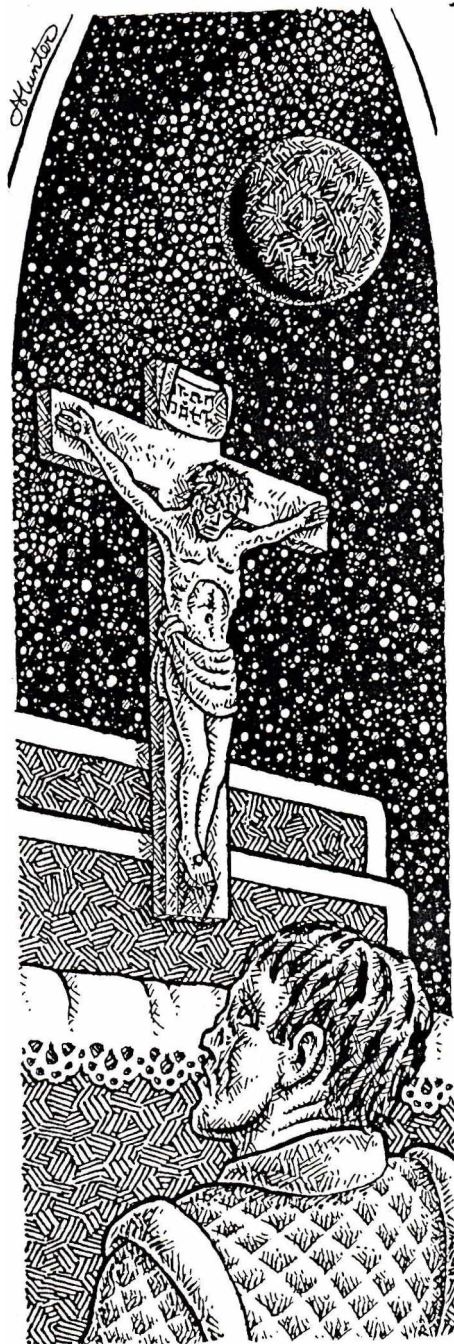
⁷ This part must've been added in a TV version. It isn't in my 1950 Bantam pb copy.

blue, the other golden, hair that was brown, red, yellow, black, one eyebrow thick, one thin, one hand large, one small.

"He's dead," someone said at last.

In *Johnny Got His Gun*, an idealistic boy enlists for World War I, & is blown away, but somehow survives as a real basket case—quadraplegic, blind, deaf, no face. In the hospital, the docs all go *hmm hmm*, & debate euthanasia, since he *must* be brain dead as well, but Johnny is still in there, as we see in flashback of his memories & dreams. His typical midwest boyhood, fishing, baseball, first love, & all that is poignant, but then it gets heavy. He meets Jesus, but not the wimpy, ethereal Jesus that the modern church has made Him into. This is a strong, practical, everyday Jesus in his carpenter shop, lifting heavy planks & wielding a big hammer. There is no sentimental hogwash, but righteous anger at what weak people do to them, & to Jesus over and over.

Later, Johnny meets Jesus again at the railroad station where the troops are about embark for the front. Jesus tries to stop it, but only Johnny can see or hear him. The chaplain gets them all together for a prayer, & the most God-awful thing happens. They get on board, the train starts move, & the camera pans up to the locomotive cab, where the prayers have forced a most unwilling Jesus to drive the train to their doom. I'll never forget that image, of the flames from the boiler playing on His face, howling in



torment as the engine races on thru the night, his moans gradually merging with the blasts from the whistle & fade to black.

Back at the hospital, only a nurse believes that somebody is still in there, & writes "Merry Christmas" on his chest with her finger. He bangs whats left of his head up & down on the pillow to show that he understands. Later he tries to communicate with head-banging Morse code so the doctors will understand, but they don't. Naah, just a coincidence. One young doctor thinks "well-maybe" but is overruled by the others. The nurse goes ballistic, but is hustled away. (Female hysterics, you know). Johnny is stashed away in a dusty ward for "hopeless cases."

It seems to me that science & religion are manifestations of a basic biological duality that is linked to the two modes of thinking: digital & analog, & brain function itself: the hypothesized left brain & right brain, altho that is probly an oversimplification. Our problem is not to choose, but how to use both, & when. We need to get beyond GIGO. There is also SIGO, SISO & GISO. S=Sense. GISO is what enables organic forms to survive, including ourselves—but at the expense of SIGO, making mistakes. When AI arrives, it will have to have all four combinations, just as we do, & therefore will have to be treated as we treat each other in our best moments.

Ω



ON BEING CLERGY IN FANDOM

BY RANDY SMITH

After half an hour of conversation, the fan begins to study my nametag. "So, what do you do in Overton, Neb-raska," he asks.

"I'm a United Methodist pastor."

He furrows his eyebrows, turns his head ever so slightly, looks at me out of the corners of his eyes, thinks for a few moments, then finally says, "So, what are you doing here?"

"I'm enjoying the con."

"No, I mean . . . aren't you kind of out of your element here?" He stumbles over the words.

"Well, no, not really. I'm a fan."

"So, how do you do that? How do you be both a pastor and a fan?" He almost sounds as if there must be some law against it.

"Actually," I say, "I've been doing it for years."

"But . . . what do you think about all this?" he asks, as his arm makes a wide arc, indicating the entire con suite.

I respond with enthusiasm. "Oh, I enjoy cons a lot. I usually get to see some of my fannish friends, go to parties, and do some work on the con. I helped set up the art show this afternoon. There's some great stuff this year."

"Yeah, well, isn't that kind of a contradiction . . . being religious in fandom?"

"No, not at all."

This conversation is a composite of many that I have had during my

years in fandom. While discussion of our mundane lives is relatively rare in fandom, any mention of my profession nearly always provokes a reaction. Sometimes I am greeted with stunned silence as the other person does not quite know what to say, and may in fact, be mentally reviewing hiser previous comments. A few times, persons have simply turned and walked away, leaving nothing more to do with me. Others have launched into a long monolog on the subject of Why I am Wrong.

Most often, as in the conversation above, fans will try to reconcile in their own minds what they see as two contradictory pursuits. The term "clergy fan" is seen as an oxymoron. How can someone who is a pastor enjoy fannish activity?

There are those in fandom, like many mundances, who believe some or all of the following stereotypes:

Pastors . . . do not go to parties.

...have closed minds.

...are only interested in "winning converts."

...only talk about religion.

...are all over the age of fifty.

...do not have fun.

...are judgmental.

...are always serious.

The mischievous side of me delights in blowing some or all of these stereotypes. Watching fans try to match their preconceived notions of what a pastor is "supposed" to be with their experience of meeting me as a fan can sometimes be rather humorous. They may start apologizing for using four letter words,

show signs of embarrassment over certain buttons they are wearing, or take great pains to let me know where the non-alcoholic beverages are to be found. Surely, no other profession has this kind of effect on people.¹

Many fans understand the stereotypes for what they are. One of the most gratifying reactions I have received came from the fan who, upon learning I was clergy, spent a few seconds thinking, then said, "Oh, that's right. People like you make the best pastors. You enjoy laughing."

Other fans understand that one of my roles is that of a counselor and will begin sharing with me their personal problems. I have heard fans express grief over the death of a family member, anger at the loss of a stillborn child, and doubts about a marriage or other relationship. It occurs to me that they choose to tell me about these issues because they may have no one else with whom they can share them. This is a sad situation. There are many lonely fans out there needing supportive relationships.

The reactions that I appreciate the most are from fans who show a genuine interest in me, my point of view, and how I came to be a clergy fan. I have been involved in many late night conversations about religion and religious issues.

The best discussions are those that involve an open and frank dialog. These will often start with a

question about why I chose to become a pastor or what my personal religious life means to me. We may discuss the definition of "God" or what it means to be a part of the church. As long as both of us are willing to listen without judging, I have a great time! The conversations I enjoy the least are the ones in which the other person wants to have a "debate" or presumes to know what I believe without asking me first.

That sfans enjoy talking about religion seems perfectly natural to me. Both fields deal with the questions of "Why?" Each one looks at the purpose and destiny of humankind, explores what it means to be alive, and encourages thought on moral and ethical issues. Storytelling is also important to both.

Panels on religion and sf are among the best attended at cons. The Usenet news group <rec.arts.sf.fandom> has several active religion threads going at any one time. Books and stories dealing with religious themes frequently show up on the Hugo and Nebula ballots. When word got out that I was working on this article, I received several e-mail re-quests for copies.²

Strange as it may seem to some, fans want to discuss religion.

One side effect of being a clergy fan is that I am often asked to be on "Religion and SF" panels at cons. I enjoy doing this and we often have some fascinating dialog between the panelists and the audience.

One of my favorite panel topics is "How can sf treat religion realistic-

¹ I can guarantee you that English teachers get a lot of such garbage! -ed.

² Sorry I took so long to get it into print. -ed.

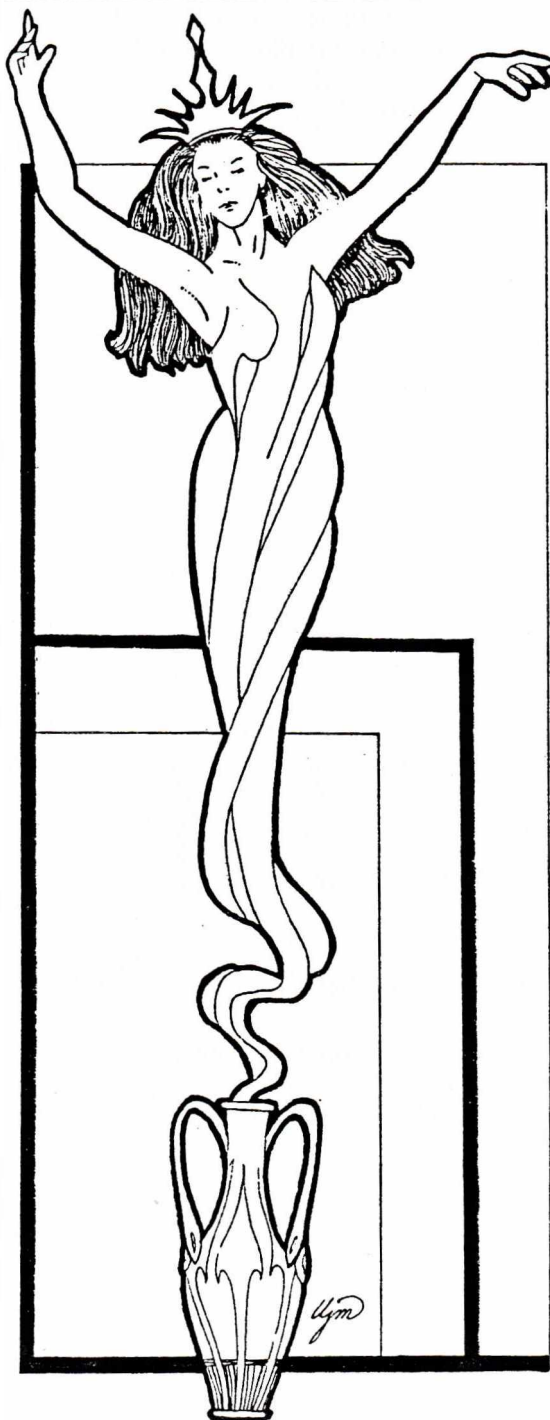
ally?" My own view is that too much of the sf that deals with religious issues does so very superficially. Most characters who practice some kind of religious faith do not seem "real" to me.

Faith is more than an agreement with a set of proportional statements of belief. It's not simply a collection of Dos and Don'ts, either. It is a way of life based on a relationship with something beyond oneself. This "something" may be a particular religious group, the universe in general, or "God," however God is understood by the particular person of faith.³

Most writers seem to miss this, opting instead for characters with very simplistic faith. There are the characters whose faith is so flimsy that they either use it for controlling others, or have it shaken when a "belief" is disproven. While there are many religious people who may behave in these ways, that's certainly not the whole story.

What I'm really saying is that I never see *myself* in sf. Certainly, there are very few Protestant clergy in sf. The few there are tend to be fundamentalist control freaks. Since the best-known Protestant clergy in our society are the televangelists, this may seem perfectly natural. They *do* make easy targets, but they are not the whole story.

The relationship between science and religion is one obvious starting place for writers who want to deal with religious issues. One of the reasons why some fans cannot



³ According to this definition, fandom is a religion. FLAWOUT-ed

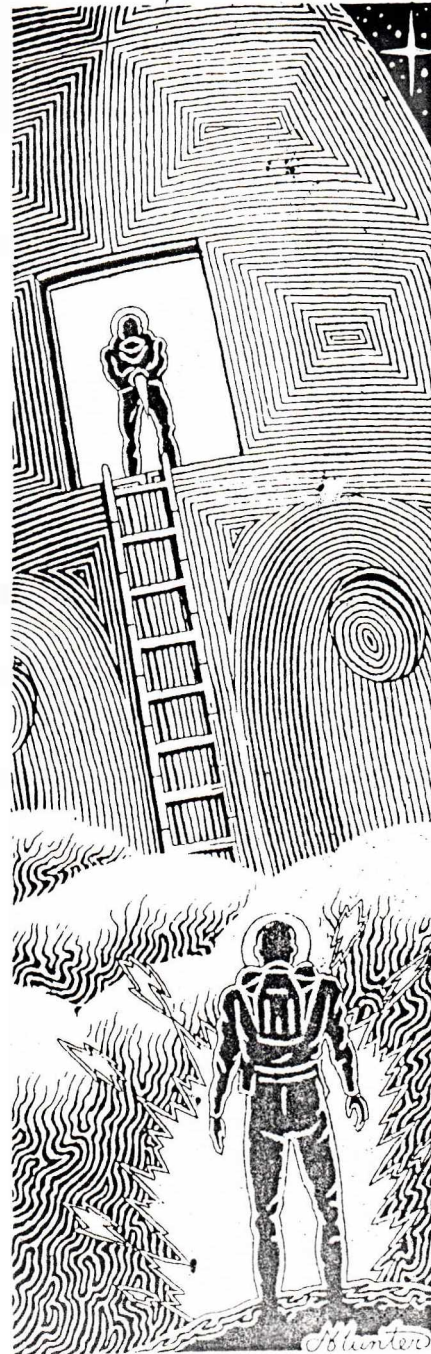
understand how clergy can like sf is that they think that science and religion, by their very natures, must be in conflict. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I grew up in a household in which religious faith was very important. My parents also stressed the importance of science for understanding how the world works. We never saw this as a contradiction. I still don't.

Science wants to know why things happen or how things came to be. Religion focuses on the purpose and the meaning of how things are. They look at the same phenomena with different kinds of questions.

Sf is one of the most popular forms of reading material among clergy. When we meet for clergy gatherings we will often discuss sf in all its forms—the latest books, movies or TV shows. Many clergy I know have large sf libraries. When some of us were unable to receive a TV station that carried *Babylon 5*, we had a whole network of clergy who passed around videotapes of the show made by other clergy. I once played *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* with a group that was made up entirely of clergy & their spouses, the only exception being the DM.

Why aren't more clergy involved in fandom? I think there are several reasons. Being the pastor of a local church or the rabbi at a synagogue can be very time-consuming and exhausting. We have vacations and "days off," but otherwise we are on call 24 hours a day. Parishoners do not schedule heart attacks, deaths, or emotional breakdowns around the



pastor's fanatic. Part of our calling is to be with people in times of crises like these. There is often no one else available to provide this kind of emotional support. Yes, most of us need to take more time off for relaxation. We tend to push ourselves very hard. Clergy burnout is a significant problem, but it may be that fanatic is just a bit too much like some of our regular routine.

A few months ago, my secretary and I were collating the Annual Reports for the churches in our parish. We had each page laid out in order on the tables. We carefully placed each sheet on a stack, including the cover, then stapled them all together (three staples!) when we got to the end of a row.

Yep, you guessed it! The thought occurred to me while we were in the midst of doing it, that it was very much like putting together an issue of a fanzine. If I had arrived home that night to find a fanzine that needed collating, I would not have done it. Better to curl up with a good book, instead.

This experience led me to think about how many other things we do regularly are very like some kind of fanatic. Planning youth events or organizing retreats or camps requires many of the same skills and involves many of the same headaches as conrunning. Much fanwriting is centered around telling stories of personal experience and how that experience changed us—just like many weekly sermons. Most clergy do not want more meetings on their

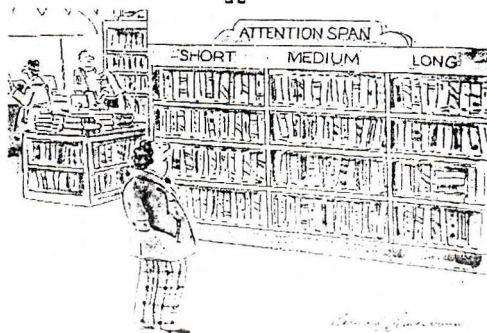
schedules, and that may include sf club meetings as well.

The stimulation of exchanging ideas and meeting new people who share similar interests are also very similar in the two groups. Clergy often look to each other for emotional support in much the same way that fans do. Many of the intrapersonal needs that are met by involvement in fandom can be met in similar ways by groups of clergy.

So, why am I a clergy fan? One reason is that I enjoy being around people who neither other clergy nor my parishoners. The variety of people within fandom has a special appeal. I firmly believe that more clergy need to experience the variety of relationships that are available within a place like fandom. Like many fannish groups, we also tend to be insular!

When I get together with other clergy and we discuss one of the latest new sf books, I'll issue an invitation to come with me to an upcoming con. Who knows? Maybe I'll recruit a few more clergy fans. I would hope that if there are more than just a few of us around, other fans won't have to ask, "So, what are you doing here?"

Ω



BRAVO, BABYLON 5

By Fr John R Blaker

For some time I have been interested in the remarkable way in which religion is handled in *Babylon 5* as opposed to shows like *Star Trek* and its various spin-offs and followup shows. I think that it is an indication of a rediscovery of the importance of religion and spirituality in human life that is happening throughout American society as we approach the millennium and as the population ages. Experience from the first millennium shows that religious fervor and interest in spiritual matters increases as the turn of the century approaches. As people get older and they begin to experience the death of parents and friends they start to realize their own mortality and many find that their lives lack much of a spiritual dimension.

Throughout human history, religion and spirituality have played an important role, but, by and large, both science fiction and fantasy have not reflected that fact. In the case of science fiction it has often been because it came out of a materialistic world-view that was more interested in the accomplishments and possibilities of human activity and of science. Fantasy has tended to avoid the subject for a number of reasons. Many fantasy stories involve the quest, which tends to take front stage. We're more interested in the character's interest in the object of his quest. Also, many fantasy writers do not wish to endorse a particular religion. Science fiction writers may also not want to get into the area of what

major religion wins out in their postulated future.

Another difficulty is that it is very hard to come up with an invented religion that is as complex as the ones we have on earth and yet not bog down a story with details of how it works. Many science fiction stories (and fantasy ones as well) postulate a world culture and a world religion (if religion is touched upon at all).

Star Trek is a case in point. Those worlds which have religious beliefs (Earth does not appear to be one of them) have a single belief-system for their entire world. The religion of Bajor, for example. There doesn't seem to be any other religion on the planet. All Klingons share the Klingon religion. All Vulcans have their Vulcan mysticism (very vaguely defined, at that).

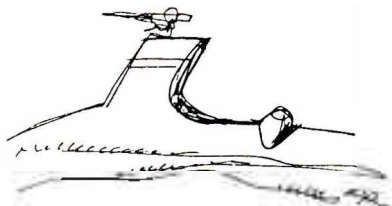
Babylon 5, however, makes a serious effort to remedy this situation. Certain of the races seem to have world-wide religions. The Minbari and Centauri are good examples. Others have a more complex religious structure such as Earth and the Narn. Earth has just as much religious diversity as it does now. The Narn have a single religious hero (whose name I can't spell) but they have at least two factions within the religion. One could make an argument for the Minbari having more than one because the warrior caste seems to have its own religion extolling the military virtues (the cult of Mars, if you will) and the religious caste has a different one even though both revere Valen.

Here is another difference. In general, *Star Trek* and its various adjuncts such as *Deep Space 9*, do not treat

religion with much respect. They're always finding people who must be cured of worshipping the computer god. Even the Bajorans are mistaken in the object of their worship. The prophets seem to be beings from the Gamma Quadrant. The difference in *Deep Space 9* is that the Federation does not seem too interested in curing them. The Klingon religion is focused on their legendary hero of the past, Kahless. This too doesn't seem to require remedy from the Federation.

Babylon 5 doesn't do that. It treats all the different religious traditions of the characters with respect and dignity. Religion is presented not as something that the producers and authors are trying to put over on the audience and readers but as something that is an important motivating force in the lives of the characters. I think that science fiction and fantasy are now beginning to appreciate the interesting and complex role that religion plays in a society and are beginning to make more use of that in developing alien cultures and beginning to treat the religious convictions of the characters with more respect. As a professional religious type, and as an avid reader of the stuff, I am very encouraged by this trend and I hope it continues. It makes the characters more realistic in their motivations and reactions to the events in the stories and makes for more interesting worlds.

Ω



Pelbaredux

Russ Chauvenet in *Detours* 63¹ says, "Thanks to your too-long review of [*The Pelbar Cycle*]...I ...skip almost all you say of things I don't like in these 7 books." Well, as the dear departed Laney wd say, "You may be right." (I think he got it from H. L. Mencken). But then LRC has the temerity to ask, "How in the world did Art manage to absorb all this stuff??" That leaves me with the question of how in the world did Elarcy know he didn't like what he didn't read?

But at least he had the decency to say *something*. Pelbar isn't a "cause" to me (likely or unlikely), but I did like it enuf to read it all the way thru (altho I'll admit it was slow going at times) & reread a lot of it while I was writing my opinions, in the interest of fairness. I didn't spend the time I did on it bcoz Prof Williams is giving me a % of his royalties, but bcoz I thot it was an interesting riff on my favorite subgenre, the post-holocaust (or "cozy catastrophe", as Brian Aldiss calls it). I didn't think Pelbar or I deserved the thunderous silence we got from the rest of the apa. But now I get my revenge! Yahahahahah! U think what I wrote in YHOS 55 was too long? YOU FORGOT THAT THERE WERE 3 MORE BOOKS TO GO!

Seriously, even if u arnt interestd in what I think, I am interested in what u think, especially compared to other stories of that ilk. Or is fandom at last slowly sinking back into the mundane? Enuf kvetching. On with it.

¹ Mailing 241, Nov 97.

☐ Glossary (severely abridged!)

Ahroe: guardcaptain of Pelbarigan, wife of Stel, mother of Garet. A central figure in *The Ends of the Circle* and *The Dome in the Forest*.

Atou: the Sentani name for God.

Aven: the Pelbar name for God.

Aylor: an old Atherer fisherman-philosopher who befriends Gamwyn. Shortly after Gamwyn leaves, he sets out to fish in the South Ocean and never returns.

Bival: Southcounsel of Threerivers until replaced. Wife of Warret. A designer of considerable capacity, but quick-tempered until events grind off her edges.

Blu: a Shumai axeman who took over Tor's running band in *The Dome in the Forest*, then married Rutban Tromtrager of the dome and settled with her at Pelbarigan. Serves the Pelbarigan guardsmen as a scout and tracker. Fond of roast woodchuck and popcorn.

Broad Tower: at Threerivers the largest of the four towers, shaped like a Nautilus shell on its side. The home of the Protector. Built extremely sturdily, it is really a separate structure in itself.

Brudoer: the more intense and penetrating of the identical twins whose plight and adventures constitute the main action of this story. *Book IV Part of the Shell*

Celeste: a young woman from the dome (see *The Dome in the Forest*) who settles at Pelbarigan.

Craydor: designer and builder of Threerivers, a woman with an extraordinary range of talents who believed that design should be applied to all aspects of life, in relation and agreement.

Gamwyn: the more innocent and guileless of the identical twins whose plight and adventures constitute the main action of this story. *Book IV*

Garet: son of Ahroe and Stel of Pelbarigan. See also *The Ends of the Circle*.

Heart River: formerly known by Americans as the Mississippi, renamed by Amanda Pell in one of her rare moments of whimsy.

High Tower: a Tusco city providentially destroyed in the moments before its inhabitants intend to cut off Gamwyn's foot in a ceremony of punishment.

Innanigan: the largest of the eastern cities, lying south of the former American city of New York.

Iso River: once known as the Missouri, this river flows into the Heart somewhat south of its former course.

Jaiyan: a large Sentani trader who occupies the east bank of the Heart at the northern border of Tusco country. Fascinated by an organ he has dug from the ruins of an ancient church, he reconstructs it and devotes all his energies to it. Eventually he becomes the organist of Pelbarigan.

Jamin: the retarded son of the Sentani Jaiyan, a gentle, gigantic adolescent. Later an employee in Ason's stone quarry.

Jestak: a Pelbar of Northwall who was instrumental in uniting the Pelbar with the Shumai and Sentani. See *The Breaking of Northwall* and *The Dome in the Forest*.

Northwall: the northernmost of the three Pelbar cities, and at the time of this story the most open to the Shumai and Sentani, who have surrounded it with farms and industries.

Pelbar: the Heart River people living in three cities—Northwall, Pelbarigan, and Threerivers.

Pelbarigan: the largest and oldest of the three Pelbar cities, founded by Amanda Pell (or Pel), a former metallurgist from Peoria, Illinois, before the time of the fire.

Pell, Amanda (sometimes spelled Pel): founder of the Pelbar after the time of fire. Ms. Pell was spelunking in the Ozarks at the time of the holocaust. Not only a feminist, but also a disliker of men, she imprinted her views on the society she eventually founded on the east bank of the Heart River. An extremely able administrator, she not only founded a society, made its laws, and gathered its basic scriptures, but she also projected a future direction for its people all in the nine years between the time of fire and her death of radiation sickness.

Peshtak: a violent and often vicious group living in what Americans knew as Pennsylvania, especially in the mountains. Because of pressures from the east, they are beginning to migrate westward into the Heart River country.

Sentani: one of the three central tribal groups of the Heart River country. They are further divided into three groups: the Long Lake Sentani, the Tall Grass Sentani, and the Sentani of Koorb. The last group formerly ran its winter hunts through Pelbar country and now has integrated most markedly with the Pelbar. All Sentani are descended from a group of Explorer Scouts led by a Memphis watchmaker named Antonio Sentani. At the time of fire they were on an outing in a coal mine in Tennessee.

Stel: husband of Ahroe, the guardcaptain of Pelbarigan. His story is extensively told in *The Ends of the Circle* and *The Dome in the Forest*.

Tantal: a group that lives on the south shore of the Bitter Sea near the former American city of Cleveland. About fifteen years before the disruptions at Threerivers a large force of Tantal invaded the Heart River country and was defeated at Northwall. (See *The Breaking of Northwall*.)

Threerivers: the southernmost Pelbar city, located near what Americans knew as Grand Tower, Illinois. It is also the youngest of the three Pelbar cities, built by Craydor, an extraordinary genius of design and organization.

Urstadge: Many years before the building of Northwall, a Shumai hunter was asked by his eight-year-old son, after a long train of other questions, what was the name of the place they lived in. The reply was "Shumai country." Naturally the boy wanted to know where Shumai country was. The hunter rose, threw a stick in the fire and said, out of the blue, "Urstadge. The name of it all is Urstadge, and beyond that is only the sea. Nothing is beyond the sea." Somehow the name stuck and spread, after his friends stopped laughing. The known world, and the unknown beyond it, became Urstadge. Even the Innaniganis and the Baliganis picked it up. In fact, after long discussion, they decided that they had originated the term and invented an etymology for it.

. PELBAR cont. We're all familiar with that part of Murphys Law wch i call Goal Frustration. You start out all pumped up to do A, but find out that you have to do B first, & in order to do B, C has to be performed, but you have to find D wch is necessary to make C work. And on & on sometimes, b4 u finally get back to A, by wch time u dont really feel like doing it any more.

This is what happens to our "hero" Stel. Pelbar is expanding, with a colony at Iver (Green Bay?) on "The Bitter Sea" (L. Michigan). To shorten the long trip, Stel has been reinventing the steamboat. The teknoogy of making parts, making them work, adapting a sailboat etc is difficult. Immersing himself in this, Stel neglects his family relationships, wch are further complicated by Ahroe's preoccupation with her job as delegate to the Federation conference, wch hopes to pull together the Shumai, Sentani, Pelbar, & now the Peshtak, who have become more amenable since the Dome dr has cured their plague. However, they are still paranoid & hard to deal with. Ahroe & Stel now have a dotr, Raydi, about 7, in addition to Gareth, now grown & a Guardsman & a rebellious teenager, impatient with his visionary father & his slow progress & many failures in getting the steamboat to work. In addition, Stel's poetic habit of punning & rhyming in his conversation has become a source of irritation, especially with Gareth.

Raydi is also rebellious & sensitive to the parental rift, but tends to blame it on her mother, & cant understand why she has to stay with Sagan, (Stel's mother & Protector of Pelbarigan) while Stel goes north & Ahroe south. She stows away on the steamboat, undiscovered until its too late to turn back. Enter the Tantal, the Nazi-like people based at Ginesh (Cleveland?), who are still smarting from their defeat at Northwall in Book I, & spoiling to get even.

There is a skirmish & Raydi is captured, wch sets in motion the rest of the book. Like Book IV, *The Fall of the Shell*, the title of Book V, *An Ambush of Shadows*, has a double meaning. In Stel's desperate effort to rescue Raydi, he is constantly dealing with shadowy shapes in the forest or the shadowy Tantal ships lurking in the lake fog. In his mind, the

ambiguity of Ahroe's & Gareth's feelings for him saps his normal positive religious attitude, & he has a crisis of faith. There are rumors that Desdaan, a Sentani delegate to the Conference, has been seen in Ahroe's company a lot, & of course people assume the worst, altho she has in fact, been faithful, as has Stel. Portain, the guard capt on the boat, falls overboard & gets tangled in the paddle wheel & is rescued by Stel, wch leads to her trying to seduce him. He resists, but wonders why. Another shadow.

On his way to Ginesh, he manages to rescue a Peshtak girl & set up an uneasy alliance with a small Peshtak band, who normally wdv kild him in short order. He also finds a crater where there is easily obtainable phosphorus & a sulfur spring, wch gains him the awe of the superstitious Peshtak. With his rudimentary science nolej gained from the Dome People, he puts 2+2 together & devises a crazy scheme to burn down Ginesh. He takes the place of a castrated Peshtak who had escaped from slavery, & bids up their underground.

Meanwhile, Raydi is being brain-washed in a Tantal family, & recognizes Stel on a visit to a museum where Stel is scrubbing the floor, almost blowing his cover. More shadows to deal with. She resists the brainwashing at first, but conveniently for the plot, caves in to the Tantal mindgames just b4 Stel rescues her, making his job that much more difficult.

After the chase & the battles, she still hates the Pelbar & loves the Tantal. They return to Pelbarigan, where Ahroe, Gareth & Stel are reconciled, & Raydi suddenly switches back. The motivations & actions of A,G&S are well handled, but I found Raydi's behavior hily unlikely, & the whole brainwashing bit cdvbn left out as far as I'm concerned.

The American-Christian charity i mentiond in Book II continues in this one. Stel frequently clobbers his enemies & then to their bewilderment turns around & helps them. This odd duality is remarkd by a Peshtak when Stel begs to give water to some suffering Tantal captives. The Peshtak growls, "You make no sense, Pelbar. You design the burning of the whole city, and then you worry about these two pig-snouts."

In the midst of all the hurly-burly, Stel comes across a book, wch he realizes is the one that the Atherers (the black peopl of the delta) have been looking for to match their scraps abt The Lost One who anchors their religion. He also sees that it is the foundation for the Pelbar worship of Aven, & probly the Shumai Atou, Sentani Sertine, etc. He thinks that it will help to unite all the disparate peopl once again.

Let me hasten to say that Stel's view (& presumably Williams) is definitely not an evangelistic one, but more like that of Peter J. Gomes in his recent best-seller *The Good Book*. In addressing the convention, Stel says:

"...Much of it is hard to understand. People will take it differently. They will argue endlessly about it. I can see that some people will insist their way of seeing it will be the only possible way. Some may well use it to justify their aggressions--in fact, that is done in the book itself. It's no solution to all problems, but its range of possibilities seems unlimited."

Yet he also gets that unconscious American attitude mentiond by Robertson Davies (Q27,p5) into his pacifistic speech urging the formation of the federation:

"...Someday we may find peoples beyond the sea. We will need to incorporate them into our system as well." and earlier, explaining to Garet: "If all the tribal gods, which are nothing but different names for many of the same things, will give way to this, we'll have a further unity."

In an epilog, a Peshtak envoy conveys a message from the convention to the Innanigani frontier, asking where the boundary is between them & Peshtak territory. This throws the legislature into an uproar. They react as if a bear had come out of the woods & askd for a meeting. One voice of sanity keeps asking "What is going on in the West?" We wont find out until book VII. First, we pick up from the end of book IV, & go on a fascinating detour with Tor & Tristal.

BERTIE, SI; HUGO, NO!

THE TITLE of *Song of the Axe* myt lead one to xpect a sword& sorcery epic or even a gory slasher tale. Nothing (well, hardly anything) cd b further from the truth. In fact, action-adventure lovers in general may find it downright talky. I didnt. What Tor & his nefu Tristal talk abt btwn fyting bad guys, deeds of derring-do & a harrowing Scott-like trek across new glacial ice coming down into Canada (see maps), is Tor's filosofy & spiritual outlook, wch he hopes to impart to Tristal, having no children of his own. Tristal goes along with it, but becomes increasingly restive as they get farther & farther from home (Pelbar-igan). Besides being unable to grasp his uncle's hily unorthodox vu of life, Tristal is torn btwn loyalty & admiration for Tor on the one hand, & on the other, his promise to return b4 7 yrs & marry the drop-dead gorjus Fahna, doir of the renownd Jestak. (see book I).

Even in a revu of this length, Tor's filosofy is difficult to sumaryz. If i'm ryt that the Shumai (in spite of their lyt hair & blue eyes) correspond to the Lakota Sioux, or perhaps the Cheyenne, then Tor's spirit-ual attitude comes from the heart ratheren the head. It is founded in the daily life of the hunter & his closeness to the earth, the plants, the animals, the weather. It is not fatalism or any other "ism." The closest thing i can think of is John Muir's outlook: "when you start pulling on a thread in Nature, you find that everything is connectd to everything else."

Well, not quite. Williams seems to be trying on every cultural approach to "The Good Life" in his magnum opus. In "Axe," we bump into some more difrent ways of life: a society of tyrannical semi-telepathic priests who use hang-gliding from the face of the new glacier to keep th eir subjects in order; a sortof Elizabethan Britishire completely surrounded by ice, but surviving thru hot spings wch kept the ice back in a 60x40m area; a remnant of Portland, OR, wch had enslaved the "Carvers" of the north, the totem pole makers, who understood Tor & Tristal better than any of the others.

Williams is also to be complimented for his courage in tackling another "culture," wch to my nolej hasnt been approacht by any sf writer i know of. Joe Haldeman touchd on it in *Forever War*, but gingerly. Im talking abt the "Gay World"--homosexuality. It is indicatd on the map as the "Mad Axeman's Area."

As T&T run northward, they come across traces of another Shumai band. They are surprised, as this is unusual. It is 20yrs after the "Breaking of Northwall" & most of the tribesmen have settled down around the cities for an easier agricultural life. Tor's sensitivity tells him something is wrong & they try to avoid contact, but blunder into the other group anyway.

The other axeman (leader) is suspicious, since they are "man-lovers," unacceptable in the other societies along the Heart. They have formed their own little society of 19. In spite of Tor's diplomatic efforts, there is a fyt, two of the exiles are kild & one injurd. There's a long chase, Tristal is capturd & torturd, rescued by Tor, & mor hunters, including the bitter leader, are kild. The remaining few, now leaderless & without survival skills, bcoz their leader had kept them dependent on him, ask Tor to be their new leader. He refuses, & i found the foloing xchanj interesting:

"Anything that so focuses the urges exaggerates them. You have to concentrate your thinking on things which do not involve any urges, normal or abnormal."

"Abnormal." The man snorted. "You are a person of no understanding. The way you are has to be the only way a person can be. Unimaginative. It is because of people like you that we've been driven off like cattle to a frozen waste like this. Just because your kind is in the majority. We're normal enough."

"Is it normal to be so dominated by a ferocious axeman like that one?"

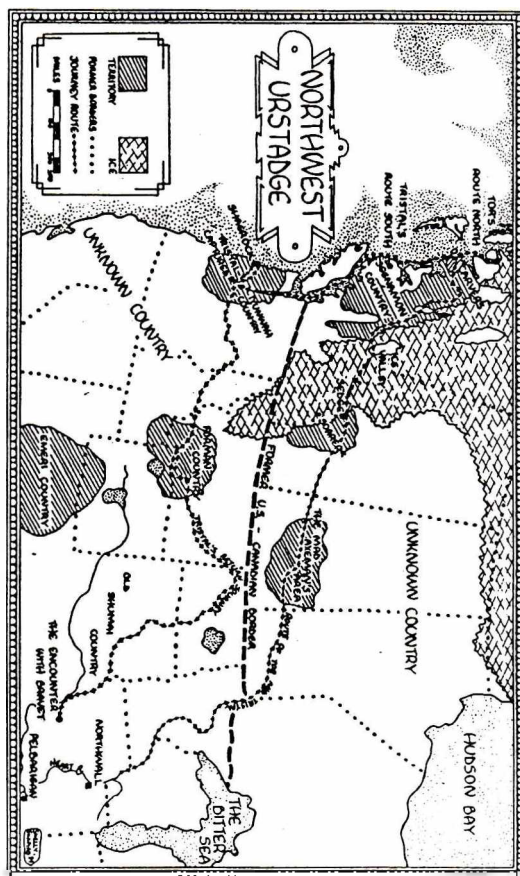
"That was a mistake."

"But one not possible for me. Is it normal for me to have one hand?" Tor asked mildly. "I can't accept myself as any less a man, any less worthy, but it is not normal. It is a variance from the norm. It is a disability. You have to compensate. You have to struggle. You will never have anything but a struggle until you drop the whole question and look somewhere else. (ch 5, pp25-26)

The argument goes on for another page or two, but the question of homosexuality, personal responsibility & social stigma gets muddled & left hanging, altho i think the author thot it settled to his satisfaction, & said no more abt it. I wd guess he thinks sexual orientation is a matter of choice. Y he brot it up when he didn't have to--i wonder.

Not content to be #1 axeman, #1

guru in spiritual matters, & xplorer xtrordinaire, Tor reinvents the balloon to escape The Ice Valley, but Tristal is a hard nut to crack & Tor finally gives up on converting him to his way of life, leaving Tristal everything he needs, disappearing into the fog somewhere in the Alaskan panhandle. The nefu lives up to the chalenj, escaping from slavery & making his way home in time to wed the lovely Fahna & fix the dastardly vilan who had desyns on her. Like Gamwyn he also brings back a band of exotic newcomers for Pelbarigan to assimilate.



BOOK VII: The Sword of Forbearance

As I indicated in my editorial, I found enuf to like in the general approach of the Pelbar Chronicles, to keep going & finally make it to the end. For one thing, it isnt heroic fantasy with a thin patina of magical hitek weaponry to disguise it as sf. Neither is it a John Wayne movie, with the "hero" automatically defined as good & those who oppose him as evil, which makes it OK for him to blow people away & wrong for anybody but his helpers to do it. Nor is it as I feared at first, another feminist tract that assumes if we just let women run things all will be well, or even a macho cardstacker that says "See, the girls had their chance & they blew it, so lets give the power back to men where it belongs." In fact, one of the things that kept me reading was the assumption that women were human beings with most of the same faults & virtues as men.

The last book has Stel, Ahroe & Garek taking center stage again, & at last bringing about the unification of Urstadge (North America). The "enemy" this time is Innanigan, a thinly disguised midwesterner's vu of New York. There is a real villain, too bad to be true, of the classic "shoot first & ask questions afterward stereotype." His name is Borund, a civilian "ad-visor" to the Innanigani troops who meets a small force of the Federation, led by Garek, seeking to establish a border at the Cwanto (Susquehanna). Borund overrules the more cautious military commander, &

orders the bowmen to shoot at the end of a prisoner exchange. The Federation's much smaller force reply with rifle fire & retreat, with the Innanigani getting the worst of it.

The pattern of Federation attempts at diplomacy followed by arrogant Innanigani rejection & attack is repeated thruout the book with hostilities slowly escalating as each side comes up with better weapons teknology, until the Ini discover an ancient Trident sub with viable mis-siles aboard.

Meanwhile back at the ranch, Heart, thar's trouble a brewin' as Stel pursues his headstrong xploration of the new/old by studying "the" Bible & gathering a few followers who help him to make copies. In delicious irony, the religious right demand that this subversive book be banned bcoz it conflicts with the Scripture accord-ing to Pel (see glossary). The Protec-tor tries to defuse the situation with a compromise, asking Stel to surrender his & any other copies to the library, where those so inclined might read & compare "under supervision." Stel refuses & hides his copy where the authorities cant find it. He is arrested & thrown in the pokey, where some bully boys work him over.

Later, he escapes to the wilds, getting his kicks on old 66, with Ahroe in hot pursuit, symbolizing Law'n'Order vs Civil Rights & all that. She catches him in a reprise of bk 2, cant persuade him "to do whats right", ie; come back & "face the music" (with the danger that the Bible will be lost forever). She is xasperatd by his stubbornness, slaps him around a bit (he is wounded & still in poor condition from his beating in

jail). He flees again & takes refuge in what was the present day Meramec Caverns in Missouri. Ahroe gets lost in the maze, but Stel rescues her and disappears again, leaving her the Book & a goodbye note. She returns to Pelbarigan, but too late to heal the split between L&O & CR.

"Liberals" start leaving for North-wall, but the Protector, with Ahroe's help, avoids repeating the mistakes of Udge in *The Fall of the Shell*. & makes some concessions.

Stel recovers & makes his way to Baligan (Balto-DC?) an ally of Innanigan. He becomes less of a person & more of a doomed Christ-figure, as his unpland actions (seeking for glass-es to help his eye wch was damaged in the beating & also a young girl abt Raydi's age who turns out to be the dotr of the Ini ambassador) leads to a break between I&B, wch helps Pelbar in the now full-scale war. Borund, by ambushing a Pelbar patrol in wch Garet & the son of Baligan's military chief are killed, gets the war started, but helps to alienate Baligan. In revenge for that "betrayal," Borund bullies Ticent, who has spent years studying the sub's nukes, to arm two of the warheads & sneak them into Bal-igan's harbor.

Stel happens to intercept a message to the Innanigani ambassador, & guesses whats going on. He & Jestak & others board one I boat; the other gets away. Stel & the others dis-mantle the timer & trigger, but it goes off bfor they can get it overboard. Jestak & the others are killed, but Stel survives, & joins those pursuing the other nuke boat with Borund aboard. Borund seeks to escape detection by leaving Ticent with the nuke & taking

a smaller faster boat. The nuke goes off, wiping out Borund & Co, & almost getting Stel.

When the truth gets out, Ahroe is able to negotiate a peace with Borund's now stronger opposition. Just bfor the peace agreement is signed, Stel is assassinated by a crazed Tantal in revenge for the burning of Ginesh.

His martyrdom gives hope that Urstadge will once more be "one people, as he wished.

The epilog had a nice touch. 20 years later, a strange ship is sighted coming into Baligan Harbor, with equally strange looking almond eyed people aboard. Also on board is an old Shumai with one arm. It is Tor, who has gone completely around the world!

So, Russell, altho the series was too long & the revu was too long (al-tho it was really a critiq, & thus de-serving greater length) I'm glad I spent the time in did in Williams' world. I feel more kindly now toward the Midwest, & in fandom, toward the socalled "Wimpy Zone." Even if u don't revise yr opinion, I hope that some Faps will "dip their toe in" & not hastily withdraw it, bcoz "the water's fine!"



ART CREDITS

Covers	John Waible
2	Harry Bell
5, 10	Alan Hunter
6, 13	Bill Rotsler
9	Linda Michaels
11	clip

...AND THERE WAS

WHO

AND IT'S GOOD!

MICHAEL AGINS & NABITS