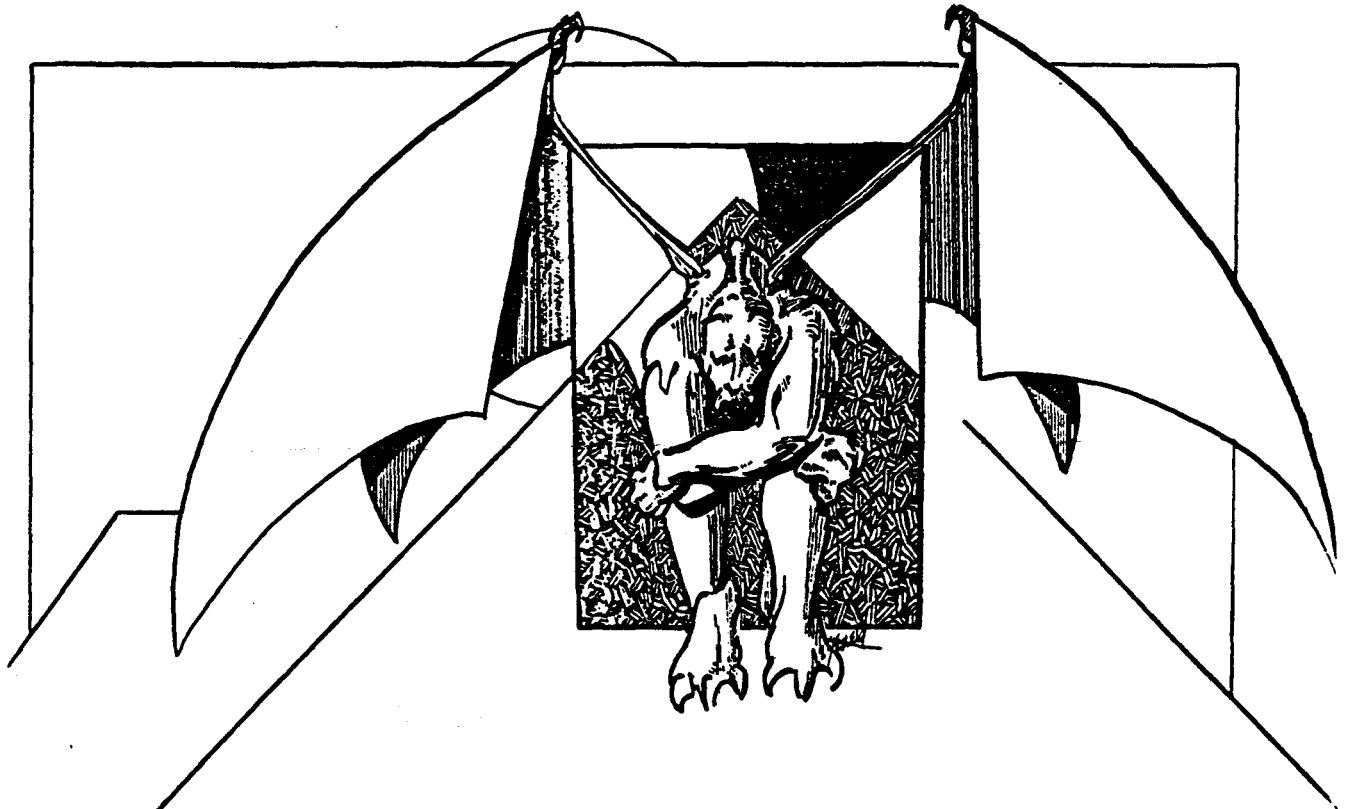


Derogatory Reference 67



Derogatory Reference is written, edited, and published four times a year by

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It is available for, among other things, \$1 (\$2 outside the USA), arranged trade, or letter of comment. If there is an X after your name on the envelope, you should send at least one of the above if you wish to receive the next issue.

Horror and Nameless Abomination Consultant:

Bernadette Bosky

Other Mental Ward Staff: Victoria & Kadmon, computers; Belphebe & Sir Guyon, cats.

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Unemployment cast its shadow over me, like some vile beast squatting on my roof. I'd gone back to school and gotten my Master's degree, more or less on the assumption that doing so would get me a job, preferably an academic one. Unfortunately, though, I'd emerged just as the North Carolina state university system was going bankrupt, and there were few jobs available.

The private sector was producing a few nibbles, and some encouraging evidence that I was employable, but no actual jobs. I was beyond the stage of asking for jobs that people recommended. Kevin Maroney told me about a job he had despised-- grading standardized tests--and when that opened up again, I applied for it.

Measurement Incorporated interviewed me and asked me to do a writing sample. A few weeks later, they called to offer me, not the grading job, but a job as data-entry supervisor, which they thought my computer background prepared me for. It's temporary, like the grading job, and it pays no better, but it seems more interesting, and I suspect it will look better on my resume. As I write these words, I've been working for a week, preparing for the arrival of the graders. I don't know yet what the actual job will be like, but I am optimistic.

A story by Bernadette, entitled "The Interview," appears in the October issue of *BBW* (Big Beautiful Woman, a magazine which makes the reasonable claim that its title is not a contradiction in terms).

Well, to be more precise, it is a version or facsimile of her story, as it has been heavily edited. Vocabulary has been simplified; cliches have been excreted into the manuscript (including one they're so proud of that they put it in big letters on top of the page); and a character--and thus the author--now seems incapable of distinguishing between noneaters and purgers. *sigh* Still, they left enough of the good things that Bernadette put into it that I commend the story to your attention anyway.

I've received a new issue of *Sandcastles*,¹ Vicki Rosenzweig's personal zine. Vicki is one of my favorite writers in all of sf fandom, and this issue is predictably delightful and thought-provoking. One article will probably draw some angry responses, since it discusses the common science-fictional idea that it is human destiny to go into space and calls that idea a religion.

It's always seemed reasonable to me to use the word *religion* for any comprehensive theory of what the universe is and what it's for. That's why Buddhism is a religion, even though it's not theistic. Unfortunately, many Secular Humanists and Marxists have negative imprints on the word "religion," so they act as if it's guilty by association to lump them in with the believers in one or more gods. Their usage would make "theistic religion" redundant and would give us no word for all such systems, so it seems an inefficient approach to language.

Anyway, I imagine many Spacers will be similarly offended at having their approach called a religion. Not me, though. "Human beings are avatars of Mind, whose Goal is to spread Mind to the stars, rather than being animals among other animals" is a religious statement. It's not a statement of Vicki's religion, but it is a statement of mine.

The Real Frank Zappa Book (Poseidon Press tpb) immediately struck me as a good idea. Twenty-five years ago, I saw the first Mothers album, *Freak Out!*, in a record store and immediately decided that it was the work of a delightfully weird mind. But when I bought the album, I noticed that I didn't like the way it sounded. Further Zappa albums reinforced that impression. The lyrics were amusing, if not always terribly subtle ("the father's a Nazi in Congress today"), but I found the music no fun to listen to.

But now, for about \$10, I can get a whole bunch of stuff from Zappa's weird mind, and I don't have to listen to his music. There are explanations of the anthropology of music, in terms of The Blow Job [his caps] after the show; discussions of the Tipper Gore crusade; and all sorts of other delightfully funny material. Unlike the way I felt about the records, I was glad I bought this. Laurie Anderson should do a book.

A recent issue of *Locus* announced that New American Library had purchased the rights to Robert Anton Wilson's "Historical Illuminatus!" series and would soon publish it, beginning with the long-awaited third volume, *Nature's God*. It added that NAL promised not to go out of business. We all had a good chuckle over that, as the series has seemed snakebit. A more recent *Locus* has no listings for New American Library.

That's not as bad as it sounds. Actually, NAL merged with Penguin, which is listed. But the announcement for them says that the first volume, *The Earth Will Shake*, will be published next February, but gives no word on *Nature's God*.

Penguin has done an awful job of packaging one of its books, *Tempter*, by Nancy A. Collins (Onyx pb), complete with ugly cover and misleading blurb. Inside, though, is a delightful mix of rock & roll, vampires, gris-gris, weird old Southern families, and miscellaneous strangeness and horror. I recommend it to one and all.



1. Available for \$1.50 or the usual from Vicki Rosenzweig, 600 W. 218th St., New York, NY 10034

ART INDEX : Gene Gynawicz - cover, Henry Roll-2, Brad Foster-3 Bernadette Boker-4 Cathy Howard-5. Nameless A. Wholla - 6.

One of the things I have always wanted to be in the dubious eventuality that I grew up was a curmudgeon. My image of the curmudgeon comes from examples like H. L. Mencken and Albert Jay Nock: sharp, witty critics of all around them.

The curmudgeon should not be confused with the similar figure of the *cranky old fart*. The latter is nasty, mean-spirited, and generally nowhere near as amusing. It seems that cranky old farts are most likely to condemn that which they can no longer do. The classic cranky old fart was St. Augustine. In his youth, he prayed, "Lord, give me chastity, but not just yet." When the Lord eventually did, he spent much of his remaining years condemning women, and those who could still enjoy them in the ways he used to.

A more contemporary ex-rake was Malcolm Muggeridge. With every anti-sex proclamation from St. Mug, I found myself praying for a God with my sort of sense of humor to grant him one last erection, to make him question all his new theories.

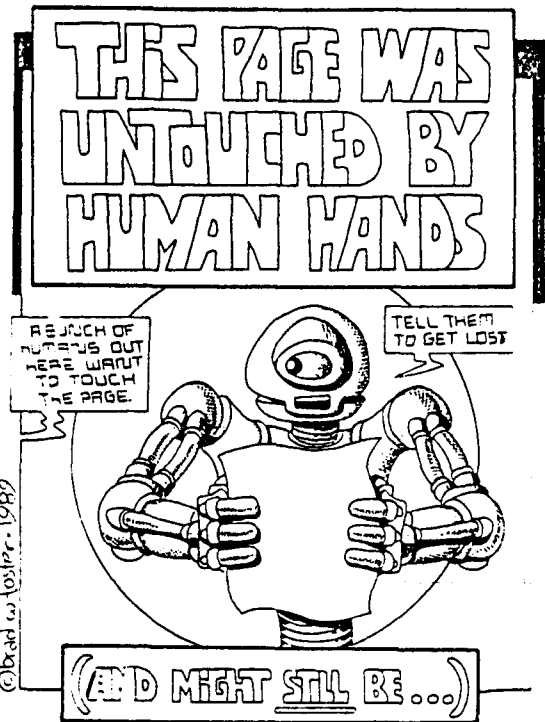
I used to suffer from the delusion that curmudgeons had to be old and male. I now know better. It seems likely that P. J. O'Rourke, for instance, was born a curmudgeon. And Florence King was obviously a female curmudgeon. In books like *Southern Ladies and Gentlemen* and *WASP, Where Is Thy Sting* she took a sardonic look at our culture.

One aspect she was particularly amusing about was sex. She was positive about sex, in a sense twice as much so as most curmudgeons, as she wrote about enjoying men and women. She also mentioned a career as a smutmonger. She never said explicitly which Bee-Line books she wrote, but if a couple of my assumptions about their pseudonyms are correct, she has participated in more of my sexual satisfaction than most people I have met in the flesh.

But then something happened. First, there was *Reflections in a Jaundiced Eye* (St. Martin's tpb), with a bit more nastiness, most of it directed to other women, than we'd come to expect. That was followed by *Lump It or Leave It* (St. Martin's hc), and one is forced to conclude that she has become a cranky old fart.

The Horrible Example is that she has decided that Andrea Dworkin is a pretty nifty person, and that she is in basic agreement with Dworkin's crusade against pornography. She now repents of her work in that field, though she told *Publisher's Weekly* that her efforts weren't real pornography because the characters were nice to each other.

Along with the smut stomping, the nastiness towards women remains and worsens. She herself, she tells us, was able to live alone because she knew how to keep her apartment from looking "sluttish" and thus attracting the wrong kind of attention from men. If today's women don't defend themselves in that manner, she strongly implies, what happens to them is their own fault.



An interesting thing about all this is that King appears to have become a cranky old fart in the same sort of way that her male predecessors did. She reports that menopause took away all her sexual desires, and she is just as happy to be rid of them.

The book is not entirely bad; she has not, after all, become Andrea Dworkin. She still says curmudgeonly things like "Whenever a South Seas castaway novel is plugged with the phrase 'vener of civilization,' you know someone is going to be eaten," and she summarizes prayerful pitcher Orel Hershisier as "Goody Two-Spikes." But I miss the lovable, lecherous old curmudgeon she once was.

Last issue, I prophesied that the Best Nonfiction Hugo would reward nostalgia (Robert A. Heinlein's *Grumbles from the Grave*) over quality (the Panshins' *The World beyond the Hill*). I am extremely happy to have been proven wrong. (The Panshins' book, by the way, has just been published in trade paperback by Tarcher. I recommend it to anyone who wants to read about science fiction.)

Last issue I devoted four pages to the NFL. That was a selfish thing to do, as at least 90% don't care at all about pro football. I'm not going to do that again; this issue includes no football whatsoever.

COMPUTER NOTES

I am no longer angry at Borland. A few months ago, my long-time favorite software company issued an allegedly improved version of their spreadsheet, Quattro. They offered it for \$90 to those of us who had purchased the original Quattro. Shortly after I ordered it, I found that they had made the same offer to people who own 1-2-3 or other competing spreadsheets. I sulked a bit over this. Then, when I got the new version, Quattro Pro, it turned out to be too big and fancy for me. It was slowed down by all the things it could do that I had no need for it to do.

I suppose I can't blame Borland for my not being a "power user," but I was annoyed. Then I learned that they were offering their database program, Paradox, for \$200 to those who had competing database programs, but not to those who had their cheaper database, Reflex. That pissed me off. I'd wanted my own copy of Paradox ever since I'd started using it in the computer lab at school, and now I was so near and yet so far. I no longer had the student status which would enable me to buy Paradox at the UNC bookstore for the student rate (about \$200), but I still have friends who do. I must admit that it was less honesty than penury that kept me from taking advantage of this.

Happy ending! Borland issued a new version of Paradox, 3.5, and made it available for \$150 to Reflex owners. It is the best database software around, and I'm glad to have it.

I am somewhat less pleased with another Borland product: their word processor, Sprint. It has some advantages. It creates files compatible with the other major WP programs, so if you have access to another computer with, let us say, WordPerfect (as I did at school), you can transfer files. But it has drawbacks.

I suspect that somewhere before release, Borland lost confidence in Sprint, so they "released" it the way that studio "released" *Baron Munchausen* or Tarcher "published" *The Earth Will Shake*: in semisecrecy, hoping they'd recoup some of the money they'd pissed away, but nobody would notice and laugh at them. Pity, because it's a good program. I wish they'd at least do an update to make it compatible with current versions of WordPerfect, etc.

I have another enjoyable new piece of software. HiTech's Looney Tunes Print Kit offers a chance to do dot matrix or laser versions of pictures of Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Sylvester, et al. They make the crude blunder of omitting my hero, Wile E. Coyote, but at least they don't compound it by including that ultimate personification of Evil, the R--- R-----.

My main complaint is that I can't just plug it in with PrintShop, PrintMagic, Fantasy, etc. and have them all work together. Is it any wonder Macintoshes are so popular?



If I didn't read *Publishers Weekly*, I wouldn't know that Jane Haddam, author of the new mystery novel, *Not a Creature Was Stirring* (Bantam pb), is actually Orania Papazoglou. Knowing that, I bought and read the book, since she is also the author of such excellent mysteries as *Sweet Savage Death*.

I'm glad I did know enough to pick out the book. It includes perceptive portrayals of two groups, the Armenian-American community in which detective Gregor Demarkian lives and the loathesome rich WASP family in which the murder takes place. The mystery itself is cleverly designed. It's the first of a series (much less of a problem in mysteries than in fantasy/sf), and I recommend it to one and all.

I'm not sure why the author is calling herself "Jane Haddam"; perhaps it's a pun. (Her brother Adam wrote *Fleas*.) Putrid pseudonyms run in the family; her husband, William DeAndrea, has written murder tales under the *nom de plume* of Phillip DeGraves.

I'm afraid I sympathize with the kind of artistic mind which wants not only to be paid for creating art, but to deliberately offend patrons with things like Piss Christ or vegetable autopedication, and have the patrons still have to support them.

Piers Anthony fandom got in touch with me today. They're selling his books, Xanth calendars, t shirts, etc. They call their business Xanth Trading Company and abbreviate it XTC, and say that they operate out of Magic Dust Village.

I hope this mailing does not fall into the hands of Generalissimo William Bennett, or any of his troops in the War on Drugs; as some of you may know, certain phrases in this ad are homonymous with terms used in the dread Drug Culture. If they ran it through a computer, as they might well do, the machine would probably say that the organization publishing it is To Be Watched.

Of course, you might point out that treating these phrases as drug terms would be ripping them out of their context, but that is the way computers have always worked. There has been some progress in training computers to recognize context, but there has probably been more progress in training government employees to read like computers, albeit much more slowly.

In any event, I hope that the Xanth people are not treated as badly as the ones who were caught selling dangerous light bulbs. That's right--light bulbs. This is not a lightbulb joke; it's real. It was called Operation Green Merchant.

It seems that the drug warriors found a small industry pandering to those who would grow their own vegetation, even if such vegetation is in violation of our nation's drug laws. The particular sort of paraphernalia they were providing was light bulbs. In a rare display of moderation, Operation Green Merchant refrained from interdicting these dangerous bulbs at their source, by attacking General Electric and other such corporations. But the operation did succeed in shutting down several companies that sold those suspicious bulbs with their possibly unlawful uses. (One is reminded of Sigmund Freud's anecdote of the man convicted of possessing burglar tools who then asked to be charged with adultery on the grounds that he also had a tool for that.) Don't you feel safer now? Just don't listen to those who say that when light bulbs are outlawed, only outlaws will have light bulbs.

The government seems to be giving the name "Operation" to those of its crusades which do the most to harass innocent people without catching any actual wrongdoers. Consider Operation Sun Devil, which appears to have been an attack on computer crime by people who can barely figure out how to read a digital watch. These experts decided that "cyberpunks" had stolen a secret telephone company document worth thousands of dollars, so they seized anything vaguely technological-looking belonging to anyone who was believed to associate with the alleged cyberpunks. The secret document turned out to be available to the public for \$12.

On the other hand, if you want to read a book about real computer crime, discovered by a competent person, let me recommend *The Cuckoo's Egg* (Pocket pb), in which Cliff Stoll tells the fascinating tale of how he discovered and apprehended a computer cracker who apparently was doing genuine harm.

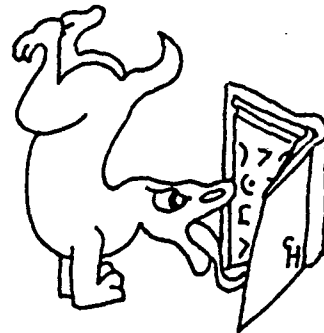
RoVacon is named after Roanoke, Virginia, but is held in the nearby town of Salem. Like many sf conventions, it is largely devoted to Star Trek, other tv shows and movies, role-playing games, costuming, and other lesser-breeds-without-the-law nonliterary interests. Some such conventions, offen-

sive as they may be to print-sf purists, have knowledgeable people on the concooms who invite interesting fan and pro sf writers. For instance, Bernadette and I regularly attend SciCon, a similar gathering held in Virginia Beach every November. It has interesting fan and pro guests of honor every year. RoVacon is moving in that direction. Rebecca Ore¹ is working with the con committee, recommending literate types. Bernadette and I were included in that group, and so we attended.

There was a sizable and mixed guest list, as shown in the Program Book. Forrest J Ackerman, venerable fan of sf and horror films, was the Guest of Honor. John Gardner (the one who writes the James Bond books--~~not~~ the-dead-one) was Special Guest, and there were guests from "the World of Art," "the World of Science," "the World of Media," and "the World of Literature." Each of these fields had its own Guest of Honor or "Teacher Emeritus."² We were in the World of Literature, with Rebecca and George Alec Effinger.

This was, suprisingly enough, my first in-person encounter with either Ackerman or Effinger; unsurprisingly enough, I enjoyed both. Inspired by meeting Effinger, I read his *Zork Chronicles* (Avon pb). As you might guess from the fact that it's a novelization of a computer game, it is not High Literature, but it is fun, with in-jokes (the protagonist belongs to the Supernatural and Fantastic Wayfarers Association) and other amusements.

Ackerman had a number of delightful tales and memories to recount. The program book showed a photo of him at the very first World SF Convention, dressed in a silly-ass costume. When those who read the stuff and/or do zines start to take pride in our ancient ancestry, we should recall that some of the other con attenders can trace their heritage back just as far.



1. *Human to Human*, the third volume of her Alien trilogy, is coming out in paperback from Tor at about the same time as this zine. Buy it.
2. This phrase was used as if it meant "good teacher." *sigh*

THE LAW IS AN ASS

The Gary Gilmore case had the wondrous effect of making a fool of almost everyone who came near it. (And so I wonder about my own hubris in writing about it now.) The opponents of capital punishment were left in the position of defending a singularly unsavory malefactor. The supporters of capital punishment looked even worse, as Gilmore made it clear that the death penalty had been a stimulant, rather than a deterrent, to his crimes. Various writers indecently exposed their naked avarice in rushing to get large contracts to write about as many gory details as possible.

But perhaps the highest comedy came when Gilmore, in a moment of either despair or spite, prevailed upon his girlfriend to smuggle him a load of barbiturates (thus showing the incompetence of the prison's security system), which he used in an attempt to take his own life. The prison authorities, predictably, went to great efforts to save him, so that they could then kill him a few days later.

The people who performed this bizarre caricature of rescue were not gibbering loons; they were government functionaries, performing their duties as specified in the law. Nor can we quite blame the lawmakers, for I do not see how it would be possible to write a law specifying at what stage a convict is "going to be executed anyway" and thus not worth saving.

What we have is a situation where the laws, none completely unreasonable by itself, have combined to produce a situation where people are required to act idiotically.

The supposed glory of the American system is that we have "a government of laws, not of men." Sounds good, doesn't it? Fair, impartial, etc. etc. And yet the best we can say about such a system is that it is as good as its laws are. (In fact, there are cases where the people are better than the laws. 300 years ago, Great Britain maddated the death penalty for a great variety of crimes including pocket picking, blasphemy, and consorting with gypsies. As a result, judges & juries went to great lengths to avoid convicting people of such crimes as these, even when the weight of the evidence was against them.)

"Government of laws" sounds almost religious, as if the laws came from some Higher Power. Who do you think makes the laws?

Consider taxes. Everyone knows that a good tax system will go easy on the poor & harder on the rich, will give some sort of recognition & reward to socially useful activities, and will not by its own mechanism, become an additional burden upon those it serves.

Does anyone seriously believe that I am describing anything even remotely resembling what the Internal Revenue System does? The forms are complex, the system is inequitable, and everyone knows that some of the richest people of all pay almost no taxes.

And so there is a cry for tax reform. We've already had several tax reform bills. They are the federal equivalent of what local reform governments do--make a big show of closing down the local whorehouse the first week in office, and then go back to business as usual (with the whorehouse opening a block away two weeks later).

Yet even those lawmakers who are trying to do the right thing have problems. The tax laws are immensely complex, and yet many parts of them, taken in isolation, seem quite reasonable. It's just that all together, they create chaos.

The tax laws present another problem with the concept of "government of laws." When there are enough laws, government of laws becomes government of men. The Offensive Holding Principle takes over; there are now so many laws that an effort to enforce them all would bring the system to an ass-grinding halt. So it clearly is with the tax laws. I have no idea how many people have actually filled out tax forms without breaking any tax laws, but I suspect that Neil Postman's estimate--13 per year--is reasonable. In a situation like this, obviously the IRS agents have to exercise discretion in deciding which of the rules will be enforced. In other words, it's a government of men.

And so it goes. Even some of the best-intentioned laws are destructive. People should not be discriminated against because of sex, race, sexual preference, etc. That is self-evident. And yet laws based on that sensible & human premise seem to lead to more trouble. Sears Roebuck has filed suit in federal court saying that it is literally impossible for them to fulfill all the quotas the government has set for them. (For instance, they had to give preference to veterans, which loads the dice in favor of males. Now they are supposed to hire more women, but they are not allowed to make spaces for these by retiring male employees early, because that would be unlawful age discrimination.) You may say that this is a ploy used by racist sexist pig capitalists, and I'm not sure I'd argue with you. It may also be true.

Obviously, we need laws to protect us. It's a pity that one of the main things we need laws to protect us from is other laws.



SMILE BUTTONS OF THE UNIVERSE