

The Dillinger Relic 56



The Dillinger Relic 56



DR is written, edited, and published every other month by

Arthur D. Hlavaty

PO Box 52028, Durham, NC 27717, 919-490-1570. 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

Copyright 1988 by Arthur D. Hlavaty.

All rights returned to contributors.

The Mental Ward Cast: Bernadette Bosky, lover and spouse. Victoria: Victor VPC II (IBM-compatible) computer. Kadmon: Kaypro 2X computer. Ruby: cat.

5 November

Another issue of DR (the 55th) is printed and has been committed to the mail, a fact I regard with surprising equanimity. Contrary to popular belief the Post Office does in fact include competent people. It may be forbidden from discriminating in favor of competence when hiring, but it's also forbidden from discriminating against it. In particular, the man who handles bulk mail at Durham's main post office is quite good at his job. (I once arrived as he was getting an award for it.) He asked where I'd been (I sent the previous mailing first class, so he hadn't seen me in four months), and we chatted briefly and got the mailing into the postal system. He has several times commended me on how well I prepare the mailings, a task that strikes me as thoroughly elementary, since it's all going at the same rates, so there are about three lines to fill out and one computation to make. This leads me to wonder if he goes home and writes in a diary, or some zine I know nothing of, "Contrary to popular belief the mail-using public does in fact include competent people...."

6 November

Robert Anton Wilson has branched out into the theater, and achieved a notable artistic success with his first play, *Wilhelm Reich in Hell*, now published in trade paperback by Falcon Press. As one might guess from the title and the fact that the play is published with a preface, there is a George Bernard Shaw influence here, but Wilson inspires us to question all our presuppositions and alleged knowledge, not just the sort of social and political ones Shaw was interested in.

The play centers around Reich because it deals with some of Reich's central ideas, including sexual and political repression and the relationship between them. Reich is presented as he was in life, someone with genuinely new ideas who was persecuted and suppressed for them, but at the same time having elements of fanaticism, intolerance, and hunger for martyrdom in his own makeup. The play, presented as a music-hall entertainment, is witty and thought-provoking, with a stunning ending.

Falcon Press is also reprinting some of Wilson's best nonfiction books, including *Cosmic Trigger*, *Sex and Drugs*, and *The Illuminati Papers*. Their books aren't available everywhere, so you might wish to write to Falcon Press, at 3660 N. 3d St., Phoenix, AZ 85012.

11.11

The science-fiction community is full of people who believe that the academic study of literature is all pompous jargon-laden gobbledegook; Academe is full of people who believe that science fiction is all subliterate trash. There are those, however, who believe that there need not be conflict between the two groups, including Bernadette and me. (There are those who believe that both criticisms are correct, but that's another story.) Indeed, Bernadette lives in these two divided and distinguished worlds.

This was a weekend in which she got to demonstrate that, by delivering a paper at the Southern Atlantic Modern Language Association, and then going to Virginia Beach, where she was Fan Guest of Honor at SciCon. Appropriately enough, her paper was on the way the desire for academic respectability has shaped sf criticism. A further good omen was the fact that it turned out to be possible for us to attend both of these overlapping events without missing anything vital at either.

We took off for Atlanta early Thursday morning, with the assistance of Michael Grubb, who drove us to the airport. The trip was uneventful, but as soon as we got to the Hyatt Regency, we discovered that the high status of this academic gathering was insufficient to protect us from the sort of hotel problems that plague mere sf cons. In the early afternoon, the hotel was nowhere near having enough rooms ready for the people attending the conference, so they required us to stand in line to check in and then return in a few hours to stand in line to get our keys.

After the first line, we went to a session on critical theory. We missed most of the first paper, but the next two were the sort that could stand as horrible examples. Impenetrable terminology, no reference to anything but other people's theories--the works. We were informed that poststructuralism is not the same thing as postmodernism, and that one (I forget which) is both philosophically and politically correct, perhaps even capable of overthrowing capitalism all by itself if it were taught at enough schools. One of the few things I thought I had gotten out of one paper was that the speaker was viewing with alarm Benoit Mandelbrot's suggestion that more aspects of human life than we had thought could be represented mathematically. The designated responder, summing up the papers, said that in fact, the speaker was in favor of Mandelbrot's approach. The speaker replied that no, he really did think that Mandelbrot's approach was a Bad Thing. Aha, said I, not only does no one else understand these people, but they don't understand each other.

But I am being unfair, and getting ahead of my story. Of course, the session on critical theory would be the most abstract and jargonish. And even at that, the last paper, presented by our friend Bob Mielke, was comprehensible and even fun. With great wit and knowledge, Bob compared the radical Situationist attacks on education, which helped inspire the Paris student riots of 1968, with current conservative critiques like Allen Bloom's, finding sizeable similarities.

After the session, we went out to a late lunch, with Bob and others, and returned to pick up our room key. For some reason, we were as-

signed to a maximum-security floor, the 21st. Any time we wanted to get to this floor, we had to use our room key to convince the elevator that we belonged there. Maybe it was because we are the sort of low-class scum who don't have credit cards; that explained why we had to put up an additional deposit of \$30.

The next morning, Bernadette and I went off in different directions, she to a session on Freshman Comp, I to one on contemporary American lit. It was a most interesting one, including discussions of Flannery O'Connor, John Cheever, and George Alec Effinger, the last of these by Vernon Hyles, no stranger to combining sf and academe, whom we've been seeing at the Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts for the last few years.

Lunch was a formal banquet. It would seem that we have progressed past the "rubber chicken" traditionally served at such gatherings; the one I attempted to eat appeared to be polystyrene. The main speech, however, was quite enjoyable: a scholar telling us about his adventures in editing a mass of occult papers found in William Butler Yeats's house.

The session after lunch was highlighted by a paper by N. Katherine Hayles, who has written a fascinating book--*The Cosmic Web* (Cornell tpb)--on the effect of new scientific paradigms on literature. This paper continued in that vein, discussing Chaos Theory and Non-linear Analysis.

And then it was time for the session including Bernadette's paper. She maintains that sf has been in the curious position of seeming to be just on the verge of academic acceptance for the last twenty years. Thus, a disproportionate amount of recent sf criticism has been devoted to making that last push to get it over the threshold and through the door, by finding respectable ancestry, by promoting those sf authors who have been accepted, and now perhaps by joining with other groups, such as Black, feminist, and gay critics, in looking at the whole question of how the literary canon is formed and perpetuated.



Cabbage Patch Madonna

In her presentation, Bernadette showed how the session itself and the papers in it, including her own, offered examples of what she was saying. The session was on "SF and Canonicity"; one paper was on Mary Shelley; another discussing a little-known George Eliot novella about precognition; the third on Ursula K. Le Guin, often referred to as either a good sf writer or too good to be an sf writer, depending on the critic's preferences. Bernadette was also able to point out an example of the sort of careless terminology in discussing sf that would probably not be acceptable in a higher-prestige area: One panelist used *pulp* as a sort of generic term for bad sf, rather than referring to a specific era and style.

After the session, Vernon Hyles joined us for dinner. As we'd approached the hotel, I'd had a feeling of *déjà vu all/over/again*, as we passed the hotels at which last year's worldcon was held. The place where we had lunch the previous day turned out to be one we'd eaten at during worldcon, and when I went to check out a shopping mall near our hotel, I found it was the same one we'd been entering in the opposite direction last year. So we returned to the Marriott Marquis, now deserted as compared to the way it was during worldcon, or the way the Hyatt Regency now was, and had an enjoyable dinner at the same restaurant where the three of us had eaten at worldcon, after which Vern was kind enough to drive us to the airport.

The plane brought us to the Norfolk airport late Friday evening. Cathy Doyle picked us up there, with a report that the hotel had made a few blunders (apparently nothing comparable to the mess in Atlanta), but other than that, SciCon seemed to be off to a good start.

The next morning we appeared on our first panel, at the civilized hour of 11 AM. We discussed The Future of Fanzines with Mary Gray, Kip Williams, and Bud Webster. Bud has returned to fanzine production with a new issue of ANIARA, the first in eleven years. It's available for the usual from Bud Webster, 8047 W. Broad St., Richmond, VA 23229, and I recommend it. The panel was fun, and we decided that fanzines have a future.

In fact, that went so well that we co-opted Bud for our next panel, on the same sort of sf-academic questions Bernadette discussed in her SAMLA paper, but this time from the sf side. Bud was there to represent the antiacademic viewpoint, while Bernadette was now defending Academe to an sf crowd, instead of the other way around. SF writer A. J. Mayhew spoke as a writing teacher who finds sf a useful source of good examples to teach her classes. This likewise turned out to be a good panel, of the sort where the panelists appear to be not too far from coming to blows, but are all enjoying it and not taking it personally.

In the afternoon I took part in a writer's workshop for the first time in my life. Allen Wold was running it, and he invited A. J. Mayhew, former Marvel Comics editor Jo Duffy, and me to join in the criticism. Ten writers wrote opening sections of stories, intended to hook the reader, and the four of us then offered criticism and suggestions. I started out a bit uncertain, but as the session continued, I found

myself speaking up as if I knew what I was doing, as indeed I may have.

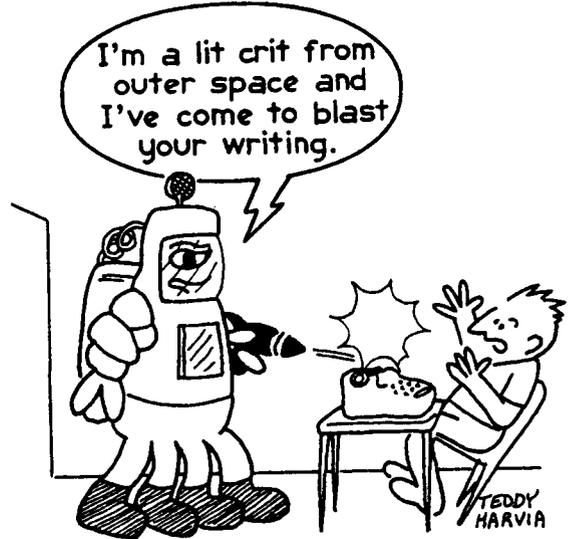
There was a banquet supper, with better food--and far more options--than SAMLA's banquet had offered. We joined prestidigitator Curt Harpod and a friend of his at one of the small tables. There were presentations at the banquet. Due to stereotypically fannish organization on the part of a previous concom, I received a plaque commemorating my term as Fan GoH two years ago at the same time Bernadette got one for being the current Fan GoH. (Curt, who'd had the honor a few years before me, had presumably gotten his plaque already.)

In the evening's entertainment, Bernadette and I did a performance of "The Island of Dr. Gernsback." As some of you may recall, that is a fannish parody we wrote a few years ago and performed earlier this year at Corflu, the fannish fanzine con. The Corflu show was organized by Bill Bowers and run in his fanzine, OUT-WORLDS, in three editions--video, audio, and print. Someone on the concom had seen the video tape and suggested we do a repeat at SciCon.

But we had a different audience this time. SciCon attracts many gamers, costumers, and Dr. Who fans, among others, and relatively few fanzine fans; we realized that large portions of the fanzine-fan version of "The Island" would confuse or even insult much of the current audience. Fortunately, we'd thought of this in time to do some rewriting, and the performance, if not as wildly successful as the one at Corflu, seemed to go over well.

The next morning, Bernadette delivered her GoH speech. In my obviously unbiased view, it was an excellent one. She began with some autobiographical material and concluded with a warning against the all-too-common fannish practice of assuming that all those who don't belong to our particular subgroup are "mundanes." Weirdness, she said, is where you find it, and she gave examples of interesting non-standard behavior by all sorts of people, including her own family. She mentioned the three most important things she had learned: 1) The human spirit is like a knife that sharpens, rather than dulls, with use. 2) People are not paying anywhere near as much attention to you as you think, and that is a good thing. 3) "There is no pilot. You are not alone." (a quote from Laurie Anderson)

On the way home, we stopped at Water-side, a gentrified Norfolk mall rather like Baltimore's Harbor Place or Boston's Faneuil Hall. We would have done lots of shopping, but we were foiled by a truly stupid bank machine. It did recognize that I had money in an account at another CIRRUS bank, but when I asked it for some of the money, it spat out my card and announced that it was about to give me the money. I took my card, which it then informed me was the signal to stop the transaction. When I tried again, it insisted that it had already given me as much cash as I was allowed to take out in one day. I checked the next day when I was back in Durham and discovered that at least I wasn't being debited for that *transactio interruptus*.



13 November
PUBLISHERS WEEKLY reports that a book store in Indiana which sold books offensive to police officers has been charged not merely with obscenity, but with "racketeering," which is considered much worse. This is not, as you might have guessed, the dumbest legal move to be reported in this particular issue. That award goes to a divorce court in Virginia.

There are, in some jurisdictions, laws requiring that if criminals write books about their crimes, the profits therefrom should go to their victims. I'm of two minds about such laws; I can see the reasons for them, but they do have a chilling effect on the writing of certain kinds of book. At the very least, the laws should be carefully limited; I was glad that a court allowed Sydney Biddle Barrows to keep the money from her book, *Mayflower Madam*, on the grounds that the crime of brothelkeeping has no victims to turn the money over to.

To suggest that the victim of a crime should be forced to share book profits with the perpetrator sounds like some sort of bizarre and pointless parody, but it has now happened. In 1985, Charlotte Fedders divorced her husband, a high official in the Reagan administration (he gratuitously added), because he had been habitually beating her throughout their marriage. She then wrote a book, *Shattered Dreams*, about the whole story, and Harper & Row recently published it.

Ex-hubby then sued for a share of the book's profits, on the grounds that the book couldn't have been written without him, which is certainly true, and that she had given him insufficient emotional support, no doubt because of a selfish concern with her own bruises and fractures. Remarkably enough, the court agreed with this alleged reasoning, and ordered that 25% of the royalties be turned over to ex-hubby. The case is on appeal.

15 November

Back in the 60s, Lenny Bruce said, "Marijuana's going to be legalized because all the law students smoke it." One man took him too seriously; I can see him now, passing a joint around with his classmates and saying, "Someday *suuuckk* I'm gonna be on the *suuuckk* Su-preme fuckin' court."

And now our Supreme Court has been saved from Ginsburg the Dope Fiend. I wonder how many of his erstwhile supporters are now privately saying that Reagan should have known better than to pick a Jew. Needless to say, I feel sorry for Ginsburg. I feel sorry for anyone whose violations of tribal tabus are treated as if they were crimes. (On the other hand, that gross conflict of interest in his past should have been sufficient to reject him.) I do not in the slightest feel sorry for Reagan or Meese.

It brings back memories: A Republican president trying to put a hardcore right-winger on the Court; a lawnorder attorney general being taken by surprise twice when his investigations failed to turn up embarrassments in the candidate's past; a competent conservative being rejected, so the administration picked an obscure one in the hope that there wouldn't be anything in his record for his enemies to fasten on. The first time it was G. Harrold Carswell, the man who inspired one of his congressional supporters to say that the mediocre people deserved to be represented on the Supreme Court. He too had a fatal flaw in the eyes of his supporters, if not to those with a more liberal approach, though his did not surface until a few years later when he was arrested for importuning a plainclothesman in a public rest room. Nixon finally settled for Harry Blackmun, who I am glad to say was a great disappointment to his followers (being on the prochoice side in *Roe v. Wade*, for one thing). I hope history repeats itself here, too.

21 November

The other day, I took a somewhat different shortcut through Durham and, for the first time, found myself driving past the Judea Reform Congregation. Some of you may recall that I mentioned a while back that I had been thinking of attending services there. I myself recalled it, and so I called up to find out when the services were. The rabbi's recorded voice informed me that shabbos services are at 8 PM Fridays.

And so, yesterday evening I dressed myself in some semblance of respectability, tie and all, and arrived at Temple at 8 PM. It turned out, however, that the service was almost over. Too late, I remembered that once before, when I'd called the temple and spoken to an actual unrecorded person, I had been informed that on some occasions, they have earlier services, for the children. That's what this one was, and it had achieved quite a turnout of its chosen audience. Despite the earlier hour, most of the minuscule congregants appeared to be up past their bedtime and intent on demonstrating that fact. Oh well, that's obviously not a fair test, so I'll try again some other time, first making sure that it's not a children's service.

A few issues ago, Bernadette reviewed *Communion*, Whitley Strieber's best-selling book

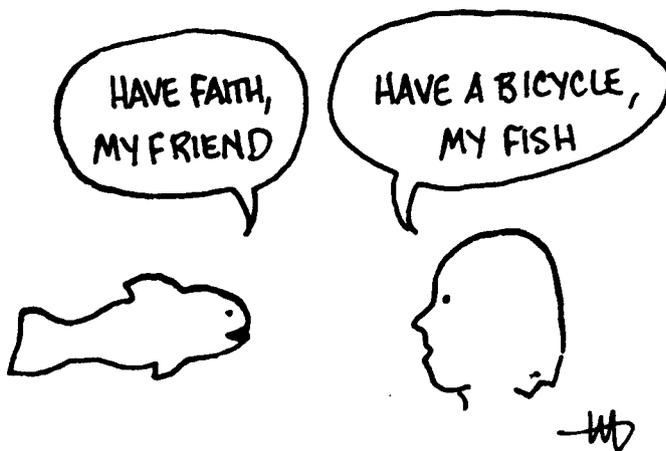
about some experiences which may or may not have represented contact with extraterrestrial beings. She pointed out that Strieber does not say that he has in fact met extraterrestrials, but that the book opens some interesting possibilities.

The book has since garnered a number of reviews, much more hostile than hers, from those who believe that it panders to the all-too-prevalent beliefs that space aliens are about to announce their presence, solve all of Earth's problems, and bring us lots of cargo.

Perhaps the most curious of these is a review by Thomas M. Disch, reported in *PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*. He pointed out that Strieber is a horror writer, one of a group who are paid to scare readers, often by finding new ways to give verisimilitude to the fictional horrors they describe. Perhaps we should consider the possibility that *Communion* is a particularly clever work of fiction.

One point about this approach is that it would seem to apply to Disch himself. He is a first-rate write of horror, often of a paranoid sort, one who has expanded the boundaries of fiction with such things as the computer game *AMNESIA* and a selection of deadpan satires in *CRAWDADDY* in the 70s. (I remember one particularly funny one which suggested that Bob Hope was the secret master of the US government.)

With that in mind, let's look at some of Disch's own writings. There was that curious bit about the "Labor Day Group," a collection of dissimilar writers (George R. R. Martin, Barry Longyear, Vonda McIntyre, and others) who were allegedly working together in some sinister and inobvious scheme. More recently, there was a suggestion that sf writers who signed an ad for a memorial to the Challenger astronauts were all (including such notorious militarists as Isaac Asimov) secretly doing the Pentagon's bidding. These seemed absurd and, to those mentioned, insulting. But perhaps we can assume (as seems reasonable) that he couldn't have meant them to be taken as factual, and then they could be considered as an interesting new form of paranoid horror fiction.



22 November

Kevin Maroney & Michael Grubb were visiting, and somehow we got on the subject of people who've done studies of J. R. R. Tolkien's languages, even written poems in them. I'm afraid I said, "Elvish is everywhere." Before cooler heads could prevail, we got to, "There's a little bit of Elvish in everyone except the anti-Elvish--Terry Brooks. There's a little bit of Elvish in Stephen Donaldson, but it's trying to get out."

There may not be many people who have to have that reference explained. Skid Roper & Mojo Nixon's song, "Elvis Is Everywhere," proclaims the Divinity of Elvis, and an alarming number of people almost seem to be taking the idea seriously. From *Elvis after Life* (by the author of the bestselling *Life after Life*) to the tabloid headline proclaiming PHOTO OF ELVIS CURED MY CANCER, we seem to have an actual religious phenomenon going on. I mean, the Beatles may have been more popular than Jesus for a while, but this is ridiculous.

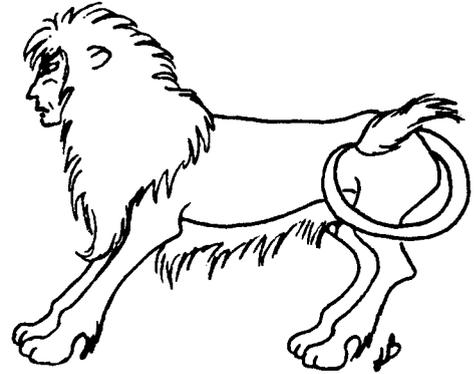
The most curious thing about it is that I would have thought that Elvis, inspiring as he may have been as both singer and symbol early in his career (I certainly found him so), would seem to have done as thorough a job of debunking his own divinity as could be imagined. He did not die young, and the longer he lived, the more damage he did to his image. He made many awful movies, and even more awful records. We have copious documentation that, in his last years, he was a nut and a junkie, and if a religion of Elvis got under way, it would appear that they would have to replace the Cross with the Toilet. He even committed what one would think would be the one unforgivable sin for a sex idol: He got fat.

(Bernadette suggests that as his admirers grew old and fat, they were glad that their idol had changed with them. Perhaps.)

Alfred Bester, who died recently, hit the sf field at about the time Elvis hit the music scene, and made a comparable splash. There was *The Demolished Man*. There was a novel that should have been called *Tiger, Tiger*, but the publishers decided to give it the meaningless sci-fi title *The Stars My Destination*. There were brilliant stories, like "Time Is the Traitor" and "The Pi Man." Damon Knight described Bester's approach with a phrase from one of his own stories--"enchantment and dazzlement."

But there was more than the stylistic fireworks. "Starcomber" ("5,271,009") is known for its protagonist's charming way with words, but it also offered a brilliant satirical critique of half a dozen of the standard sf stories. "The Men Who Murdered Mohammed" has a delightfully human first-person-omniscient narrator, but that apparent gimmick is inextricably tied to the story's theme about the nature of time and memory. "Fondly Fahrenheit," as Robert Silverberg points out in *Worlds of Wonder*, is an example of stylistic innovation which also turns out to be precisely the right way to tell that particular story.

(There is also a Bester book, written at the same time, which demonstrates that the Bester approach could apply to a "mainstream," mimetic tale. Bester called it *Who He?*, an excellent title for several reasons, and his



publishers demonstrated that sf has no monopoly on stupid, pointless titles by renaming it *The Rat Race*. I believe it's been out of print in the US for 30 years. There was a British paperback, published by Hamlyn, a few years ago. If you see a copy, grab it.)

Bester did not die young. But after this remarkable creative explosion in a few years, he left the low-paying sf field for greener pastures as editor of *HOLIDAY*. For almost twenty years, he was gone, but he'd left behind an important body of work. People looked at the novels and stories, with new ideas seemingly thrown out hither and yon, and wondered how much more he could have contributed had he stayed.

In the 1970s Bester returned and perhaps answered that question. First there was a novel, variously entitled *The Indian Giver*, *Extro*, and *The Computer Connection*. Rather than a good title suppressed by the forces of Mammon, we now had Bester groping for a title and failing to find a good one. That was typical of the book. It seemed like a Bester pastiche--pleasant, amusing in spots, but a disappointment. To be sure, it had ideas, but virtually without exception they were the same ideas he'd given us before.

That book was followed by *Golem 100*, perhaps the one inadvertent self-parody more cruel and destructive than Vonnegut's *Slapstick*. The stylistic tricks that were seasoning in earlier books are loaded on with a shovel. What once had been slightly naughty hints now were spelled out and looked ugly; Bester had written an alarmingly *cruel* book. It was an embarrassment and a shock--kindly old Uncle Alfie chuckling to us about the pleasures of killing and raping. There was another book--*The Deceivers*--but I sometimes think no one read it, lest they find something even worse. I know I didn't read it.

The 70s stuff will be forgotten, of course. Nothing can eclipse the body of work Bester put together in the 50s. Perhaps in 100 years, the later stuff will be dug out of a musty library, and someone will devise the theory of a "second Bester" to explain it. And sometimes I wonder if that awful 70s stuff was Bester's last gift to us--reassuring us that we needn't feel the loss of the writing he didn't do when he first left the field.

23 November

I am glad to see that some of the sf critics and scholars who used to devote much effort to digging up tedious old 19th-century writings of historical (and no other) interest have begun to discuss the good contemporary writers. Thomas Clareson is an excellent example of this trend. A few years ago he did a study of Robert Silverberg in the Starport Readers Guide series, and now he has done an equally perceptive and more comprehensive book, in the same series, on Frederik Pohl. It's a thorough, thoughtful, and well-written book. My only complaint is a minor one: The list of Pohl's work at the end has a surprising number of errors for half a page. Several novels (*Slave Ship*, *Drunkard's Walk*, *The Cool War*) are not considered "major" enough to list; *The Years of the City* (by Pohl) is attributed to Pohl and Kornbluth, *Wolfbane* (by Pohl and Kornbluth) to Pohl and Williamson, and *The Starchild Trilogy* (by Pohl and Williamson) to Pohl by himself.

Thanksgiving

We have one problem with our neighborhood: It's too respectable. Now you may not think of that as a problem. When we told this to Bernadette's sister Anita, she asked, "Is it too safe, too?" But it is a problem because our neighbors reportedly call up our landlady to complain if we let our lawn grow too long. For instance, there's our next-door neighbor, whom we have been referring to as Dr. Preppie. (He is a cardiologist, with a name that is a collection of Anglo-Saxon last names with no apparent first name.) He seems pleasant enough, but he could easily be the sort who phones in complaints about unmowed lawns. Not that we wanted to protest this oppressive respectability or anything, but recently we purchased a pair of pink plastic flamingoes and put them out in front of our house. (We have named them Fred and Ginger.) I'm sure it's just coincidence, but there's now a sign in front of Dr. Preppie's, announcing that the house is for sale.

The neighborhood, however, was not entirely made up of normal people, even before we moved in. The woman who lives behind us keeps a searchlight trained on her house all night. She's not the one I want to tell you about, though. (Her husband was recently killed in an auto accident, and this may be part of her adjustment to widowhood.) The woman who dropped by our house to complain about the spotlight sounded rational at first. Then arose the question of why she didn't simply pull down her shades. At this point she informed me that the effects of such rays go through window shades. Perhaps encouraged by my failure to ask if she were out of her fucking mind, she favored me with a few more of her theories on sinister entities in the world around us, some of which might be too outre for the supermarket tabloids. Eventually, she tired of explaining these things to me and departed.

Today I went to dinner at Charlie and Carolyn Martin's. (Bernadette was likewise invited, but is too busy working on her dissertation.) There were about a dozen people there, and all of us brought dishes of food, with mitts to handle them, and I think only one of the guests brought mitts that didn't look like animals. One of the guests, who works in the Duke

physics department, told us about a call he had received, asking about the effects of microwaves and proposing some, shall we say, nonstandard theories about such effects. It turned out to be our neighbor.

28 November

It would appear that the followers of Ayn Rand are now undergoing a feeling all too well known to sf readers; the Establishment has noticed their favorite writer, but has--they feel--gotten it all wrong.

Specifically, James T. Baker's *Ayn Rand* was recently published as the 501st volume in Twayne's United States Authors series, indicating that Rand has been recognized in one Establishment collection, if not a particularly exclusive one. But the newsletter of the libertarian Laissez-Faire Book Store, which had been enthusiastically hawking the book, has switched to more measured praise, apparently as a result of attacks from Rand's followers.

The book strikes me as a reasonably even-handed, but flawed treatment of Rand, recognizing her strengths in telling stories and presenting the conflict of ideas, but also aware of her flaws, such as the joy-of-rape love scenes and the belief that her entire philosophy can be logically derived from two tautological axioms--"Existence exists" and "A is A." There are a few notable defects, though. For instance, Baker seems unable to stand Rand's atheism. This inspires perhaps the book's worst cheap shot, the unsupported suggestion that Rand adopted atheism as an act of unconscious submission to the conquering Bolsheviks. One minor annoyance is that Baker seems unable to describe Howard Roark's architecture in terms other than as "erections," which are "massive" and "bigger than those of other men." If he's hinting at something, it should probably be spelled out; if he isn't, his editor should have gently suggested a change of terminology.

The Donning Company sends along *Imagination*, a collection of paintings by David A. Cherry. (You'll recognize some of these from book covers, particularly books by his sister, C. J. Cherryh.) It's an 8.5 X 11 paperback, about half full-color renditions of the works, and the other half the artist's explanations of how and why he paints. For what my untrained opinion is worth, I enjoyed both the paintings and the text.



5 December

This evening I attended Allen Wold's birthday party. There too were many of the other Triangle Area sf writers, such as Karl Edward Wagner, David Drake, A. J. Mayhew, and Bruce Hunter. It was an enjoyable evening for me, except that Bernadette was not present. Once again, she was home working on her dissertation. It's an awesome job, at least the equivalent of writing a full-length book. I'm sure she's going to do it, but it certainly isn't easy.

One result of this massive assignment is that we may not be able to make our annual Christmas visit to the Chicago area to see Bernadette's mother and sisters. I have mixed feelings about that, my relief at avoiding holiday travel more than outweighed by not getting to see them.

"He looks really cute on the tube, but I'm not completely sure about his politics." A few months ago it was Ollie North; now it's Gorbachev.

15 December

It seems to be a time for fiction about historical people; first it was Wilhelm Reich, and now Bruce Duffy's *The World as I Found It*, which is primarily about Ludwig Wittgenstein, including his interactions with such other philosophers as Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore (as well as family and unknown, possibly fictitious, friends and acquaintances). It appears to take few liberties with known historical fact (Duffy mentions a couple of minor ones in his introduction) and fewer liberties with standard novelistic form. What I found particularly fascinating about this book is the way it shows what it is like to be absorbed and obsessed by allegedly dry academic questions of epistemology and metaethics, to the point where they are the most important issues in one's life. The early parts of the book strikingly illuminate this aspect. I thought the book wasn't able to maintain this high level of interest to the end, but I like the picture of Wittgenstein it presents.

18 December

Having done that nasty bit about Thomas M. Disch's reviews, I am reminded that some of them are straightforward and excellent. In *PLAYBOY* he does a marvelously condescending discussion of Kurt Vonnegut as a garrulous old uncle who can be really charming, or bore the whole family to death, adding that Vonnegut's latest, *Bluebeard*, is mostly an example of the former. Bullseye.

Christmas

Here we are, still in Durham. Bernadette is working hard on the dissertation.

A few years ago I saw *NATIONAL LAMPOON'S VACATION*. It made me aware of the kind of ambivalent reaction I have to slapstick--amusement, combined with an awareness that this sort of thing could actually happen to me. *VACATION* was a particularly good example of this phenomenon because at least at the beginning it was all made up of credibly realistic horrors--things like pain-in-the-ass relatives and driving into bad neighborhoods which, by being so believable,



are in a sense more horrifying than your average Stephen King novel. If there was any relief from these feelings, it was the way *VACATION* piled on horror after horror to the point where the protagonists seemed to have acquired a kind of cartoon-like invulnerability, or else they couldn't have made it through this far.

John Hughes, the creator of *VACATION*, has now returned to that approach in *PLANES, TRAINS, AND AUTOMOBILES*. This time, not only are the farcical horrors individually realistic, but they are never piled on past the extent where it's easy to suspend disbelief. The result is, I suppose, a better esthetic experience, if a less comfortable one. In any event, as before, the horrors are quite funny, and this time there are excellent acting performances by John Candy and Steve Martin as well.

**BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED* is the latest in the most popular subgenre of the sf film--the Cuddly Alien movie. This time it's Mommy, Daddy, and Baby robots come down from the skies to save an equally cuddly collection of human beings from nasty old big business and gentrification. It's well done of its kind, and I'm sure there's nothing to the paranoid theory that these movies themselves are made by evil space aliens to soften us up for the invasion.

Tricks, by Ed McBain (Arbor hc) is the latest in his highly successful 87th Precinct series. His hand has by no means lost its skill, but there's a kind of bleak unpleasantness that's been more and more obvious in the series since *Lightning* a few years ago. Everyone on the force seems to be getting shot, or losing a lover, or just giving up. I hope that, like Travis McGee's mid-70s depression, this is transitory.

6

10 January

Once again, we're a little late, folks. I have excuses, which I'll get to in a moment. This is, in a sense, the last page, although there are four pages after it, since I am now using the magick of word processing to separate out the special-interest sections (computers, football, fanzines), so those of you who want to skip that sort of stuff will find it easier to do so. I did that last time, and it occurred to me after it was all printed up that it didn't look as if there were a Last Page. Page 12 was the last page, even though it didn't look like that. This time we have a Last Page.

The trouble with the excuses is that they start after the year began, so I was already late. Basically, we've had some of the weather I moved down here to escape. Last Sunday we had an ice storm. That in itself wouldn't have been all that bad, but apparently the electrical wires down here are not built to handle such things. Numerous parts of the Triangle Area, including the Mental Ward, were without electrical power. I remind myself that people lived this way for millennia before electricity, but then I ask myself two questions: How? and Why? On the other hand, this adventure took place while we were being visited by our friends Honey and Carey Woodward, who were on the East Coast seeing relatives, and we had a most pleasant evening of candlelit conversation. The next morning the power returned.

Then we had a snow storm on Thursday. People down here tend to think of snow as some sort of alien Northern thing that is impossible to deal with. In particular, there were major panic runs on all the local supermarkets, as people ran around buying food as if they'd be snowbound for weeks. It snowed all Thursday, but as early as Friday noon, the roads were navigable. (At least for those who have radial tires and some feeling that snow is a natural and manageable, if not pleasant, phenomenon. We are equipped with both of these.)

In any event, I now have the rest of DR not only written, but camera-ready. One good thing that has happened to Durham is that we now have a Kinko's Copies, with a self-service copier that does reductions, as well as ordinary copies. I really like that; it gives me another tool for zine design. I can do the reductions myself, setting the machine to Dark Copies so as not to lose information, then paste up the reductions and make camera-ready copies light enough so as not to have to worry about paste-up lines. Wonderful toy Kinko lets me play with. *He/reallyy/reallyy/yoves/as/Yittle/boys/and/girlye/* (Obscene song reference)

Bernadette is still working hard on the dissertation. She's getting a brief extension and should have it all done by the new deadline. After that pressure is off, we have some amusements ahead of us. March 16-20 we return to the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, which this year returns to Florida (specifically Fort Lauderdale), after three years in Texas. This year once again we're both chairing sessions, though once again it was not the ones we'd hoped to organize. (Bernadette was too

busy with her dissertation to get hers organized.) So we volunteered again to chair sessions that were put together out of "orphan" papers. Bernadette is chairing one on Religion and Fantasy, while mine is on The Comic in Fantasy and Fantasy in the Comics. (Maybe it sounds more prestigious if I leave out the second half of the title.) April 29-May 1 is Contraption, in Michigan, where I am Fan Guest of Honor. I do wish that and Corflu hadn't been scheduled for the same weekend, but I don't know if we'd have been able to get out to Seattle for the latter.

Getting DR out this late enables me to review a book that I read this year (1988). There's a special reason for that. Some of you may have a vague feeling of *deja vu* when you see Rebecca Ore's *Becoming Alien* (Tor pb) in the bookstores. What you may be remembering is that the book was widely reviewed early last year (by Orson Scott Card in F & SF, for instance). The usual problem with sf books is that they don't get reviewed until they're off the stands. Tor overcompensated by sending out very early review copies long before the book was available. Anyway, this *is* the book Card said all those nice things about, and he's right. As might have been predicted from the shorter works that won Ore a place on the John W. Campbell ballot, this tale of a young Earth man in an interstellar training academy (and how he got there) shows fascinating inventiveness in alien races and societies. I want to recommend the book now, while you can actually buy it.

Another sf book that just came out is one that I read a couple of years ago. The trick is that Barrington J. Bayley's *The Rod of Light* was published in England in 1985, but has just now had its first American edition (an Arbor House hardcover). This one has as its protagonist a robot (it is a sequel to his less successful *Soul of the Robot*), which some would say he might as well do, since none of his characters are particularly human. Nonetheless, this book has the usual Bayley trait of thought-provoking philosophical speculation, and I recommend it for that.

ART INDEX

- Tara Wayne--cover
- Nina Bogin--2
- Teddy Harvia--3
- Hank Heath--4
- Laurel Beckley--5
- Cathy Howard--6
- Steven Fox--7
- Olivia Jasen--8
- Dave Collins--9 (UL)
- Bill Ware--9 (LR)
- Henry Roll--10



From Silent Tristero's Empire

Jackie Causgrove writes:

One of the problems with singling out a breed of dog as a killer is exemplified by your example of pit bulls being banned all over the place while Spuds Mackenzie is featured in TV commercials. Spuds is a Stratsfordshire Terrier. Pit Bulls are a breed not recognized by the American Kennel Association--the main authority on determining canine bloodlines--and therefore, according to some dog people, Do Not Exist as a breed. They are, instead, treated as a type of dog labeled by the layman as a breed, but which does not breed true, or has such a checkered lineage that its ancestry can't be determined. I've seen pit bulls, and they don't look anything like a Stratsfordshire Terrier, save in the body's basic build (which is similar to any bulky terrier, such as a bulldog). The head shape is entirely different. Pit bulls look like mutts; they are usually brindle-coated, or caramel, brown, chocolate, or mottled gray in color. Their ears usually droop, rather than standing erect like a ST's, and they are generally a helluva lot meaner. STs are called "pit bulls" by a lot of people who don't know any better, and some who *should* know better, and that complicates an already complicated situation.

Su Crites writes:

Yes, dog people who know about these things (persons such as myself, she said modestly) knew right from the first that Spuds is a bitch. I don't know bull terriers well enough to judge from the face (it is true, though, that a judge qualified for certain breeds who has to look underneath to tell the sex is not much of a judge--or maybe the dog is questionable), but like all short-haired breeds, a male dog jumping from a diving board as in some commercials would show unmistakable proof of his masculinity. Not that I'm the kind of weirdo who goes around staring at dogs' delicate areas...who told you that about me?

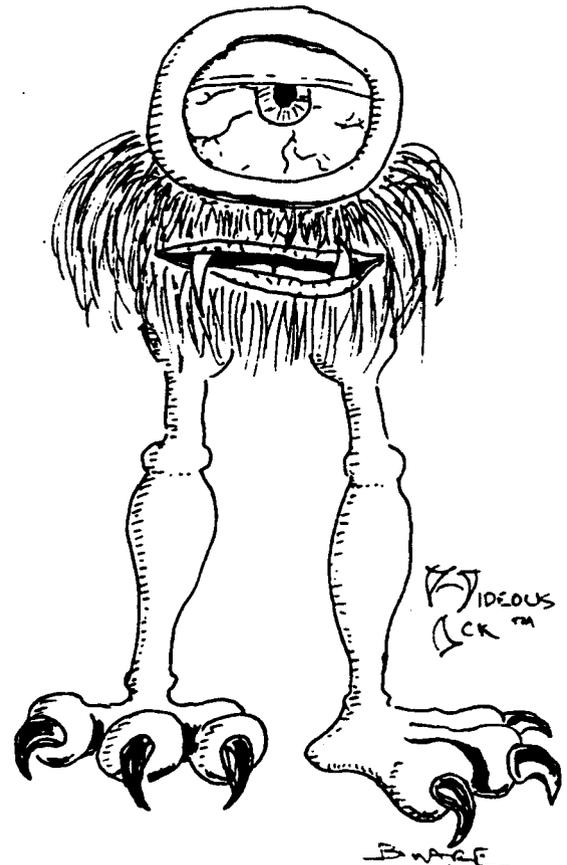


Fanzines

Walt Willis is one of the great names in Fannish Fanzine Fandom. Until about 22 years ago, he published a zine called HYPHEN. Now he has revived it with issue #37. It's a time-binding issue, including reprints of classic fan articles by James White and Bob Shaw, a delightful brand-new trip report by Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden, and--connecting the two--a 22-year letter column. The latter is something I would never have expected to work, but Walt makes it work. As fannish fanzine writing, it is not for everyone; indeed, I suspect that large portions of it are unintelligible to those without a background in the subculture it comes from, but if you like that sort of thing, this is an excellent example of it. (Available for the Usual from Walt Willis, 32 Warren Road, Donaghadee, Northern Ireland BT21 OPD.)

The opposite fanzine approach is well represented by FOSFAX, a monthly zine devoted to reviews of sf books and the discussions started by those reviews. You won't find the finely honed and crafted essay, but you will find an ever-lively lettercolumn, currently featuring Dean Koontz, Alexis Gilliland, Lawrence Watt-Evans, Susan Schwartz, Janice Eisen, and Mike Glicksohn, among others. I thoroughly enjoy this zine and suggest that those who enjoy talk about sf send \$1 or the Usual to FOSFA, PO Box 37281, Lexington, KY 40233.

A little of both approaches (and some miscellaneous) is found in FANTHOLOGY 1986, a collection of the year's best fan writing (in the opinion of editor Mike Glycer, whose lengthy and thoughtful summary of the 1986 fanzine scene leads off the volume). I'm biased in its favor because I'm in it (represented by "I Was a Teenage Cyberpunk for the FBI and Found God," which some of you may remember); but I'm in good company, with excellent writing by Avedon Carol, Jeanne Gomoll, Dave Langford, Tim Jones, Skel, and Greg Bennett, among others. I recommend (to one and all) that you send \$3 to the publisher, Dennis Virzi (618 Westridge, Duncanville, TX 75116), for this.



Neep-Neep Notes

Lee Ann Goldstein called to discuss her Golden APazine. She wasn't quite sure whether she'd wind up sending in originals, copies, or a disk. She has WordPerfect, while I have PC-Write, but her program can generate WordStar text files, and mine can read them. It appears that WordStar is the *lingua franca* of word-processing programs, with newer ones able to translate to and from WordStar, and some, like PC-Write, having their own commands for deletions and such, but also being able to use the WordStar commands.

I'm having one second thought about PC-Write. One thing I miss about WordStar is having the page, line, and column where the cursor is located displayed on the screen at all times. With PC-Write, if you want to find out where in the text you are, you have to stop, use a command to call up the information, and then type either ESCAPE or ENTER to return to text entry. The only complaint I've ever heard about WordStar's continuous display of the cursor location is Jerry Pournelle saying that seeing the numbers on the screen constantly changing distracts him. Jerry Pournelle is a touch typist. If he'd look at the keyboard when he types, the way God meant for people to do, he wouldn't have that problem.

BORLAND FLUNKS THE TURING TEST

Borland makes excellent software. I enjoy Reflex, which does seem to do just about everything I want a data base to do at half the price of dBase. Everybody who uses it says good things about Turbo Pascal. But the company is fallible. A while back, I bought their spell-check program, Turbo Lightning. Like any good spell-check program, it is designed to allow the user to add his own dictionary up to the limit of the disk the program is on. So there I was, adding, as usual, fannish words, obscenities, and even really foul words like "meese." It wasn't that particular word, but at one point, the program informed me that I had used up all the room for additional words. This is not supposed to happen. It's not as absurd as getting a DISK FULL message when I know I have a few million bytes left (which has happened with other software), but it's wrong. So I called them, and they said they'd get back to me. Since I thereafter got PC-Write, which includes its own spell-check, I did not pursue the matter.

Three months later, they have gotten back to me, in a manner of speaking. They sent a letter, to "Aurthur Hlavity," which reads as follows:

"Dear Mr. Hlavity:
 "We appreciate your comments and suggestions regarding Turbo Lightning and have passed them on to our development team. We consider our customers' suggestions very carefully when planning future versions of all our products.
 "Thank you for your interest in Borland International and our products."

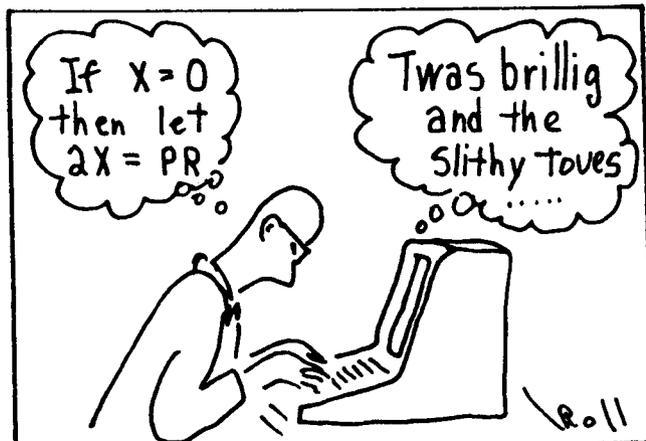
Nevertheless, I have bought another Borland product--their new spreadsheet, QUATTRO. As you may remember, last time I mentioned that I was using the student version of LOTUS 1-2-3. I was having no problems with that until I installed XTREE, a very useful utility program

which makes it much easier to figure out what one has on the fixed disk. *Post hoc*, and maybe *propter hoc*, 1-2-3 announced that it would not function without the original disk. This is an example of copy protection, which is something you really ought to use if you want to make life difficult for legitimate users of your software without keeping it from being pirated.

I bought a fixed disk so as not to have to fiddle with floppies. I copy new programs onto the fixed disk and toss the disks into a drawer, and the only thing I do with floppies is back up important data. Not only did I not want to use the floppy every time, but that was the one disk I couldn't find in the drawer. Feeling that Lotus owed me one, I acquired a copy of regular 1-2-3 of--shall we say?--dubious provenance. I couldn't get the printing installed on that.

On the other hand, I have a program called DUET, which prints 1-2-3 spreadsheets. I didn't get it for that; I got it as a print spooler, but it doesn't work with PC-Write. I called up the company that makes DUET and their technical person tried it and said, "What do you know? It doesn't work with PC-Write." He will allegedly get back to me. That was two months ago. (Bernadette made an interesting point when I got off the phone. I was relieved that it turned out to be a real problem, rather than the technical person saying, "Look on page 23 of the manual, dummy." But the latter kind of problem is solved right away, whereas the former is more serious.)

In any event, I got sick and tired of going through two different programs to print my spreadsheets and I still felt bad about using pirated software, even from people who have it coming to them, and when QUATTRO came out, I bought it. It works well, and immediately converts 1-2-3 files. (Of course, my opinion on spreadsheets is not terribly informed because I use almost none of the fancy graphic equipment that comes with them. I keep apa accounts, use the spreadsheet to type up orders and then automatically add up the price, and found it extremely helpful in dealing with SFPA's complicated Egoboo Poll.)



FOOTBALL

There used to be a great tradition in the NFC Central: About a month before the season ended, the teams would begin to realize that one of them would win the division, and thus would have to play in the postseason. This prospect terrified all of them, and they would then start losing all their games, except for the games between two NFC Central teams, which would sometimes wind up as ties. The emergence of the Chicago Bears as a powerhouse ended that tradition, but it returned this year all over the league.

The AFC East was perhaps the leader in the rush to mediocrity. For a while, it appeared that the strike, by reducing the number of games to fifteen, was the only thing that could prevent the division from winding up in a five-way tie with all the teams at .500. The Indianapolis Colts wound up a bit better than that because of a schedule that concluded against the wretched Tampa Bay Buccaneers and a San Diego Chargers team which had presciently begun their collapse before many of the teams had even noticed the playoff threat.

Over in the NFC, there was the laughable contest for the last wild-card spot, in which the Minnesota Vikings managed to finish with a slightly less bad record than the St. Louis (?) Cardinals. The Chicago Bears finished with two losses followed by a game they would have deserved to lose, had the LA Raiders not deserved defeat even more. They could be returning to their NFC Central roots, but a more concrete explanation suggests itself. Their running game and defense used to be so good that they could win even with Mike Tomczak at quarterback. But the running game and defense are no longer that good, and Tomczak hasn't improved much. Twenty-two hindsight tells us that Walter Payton stayed around one year too long, so people were asking why he didn't retire, instead of why he did. The relative collapse of the defense (to the point where it wouldn't hurt the team, but couldn't carry the offense) seemed to have several causes: There were major injuries for the first time in three years; they still seem to miss Buddy Ryan, or at least the defense he created; and Mike Ditka's allegedly inspirational leadership has filled the defense with sullen underachievers (Richard Dent, William Perry, Otis Wilson). The Bears are still, of course, a playoff-quality team when Jim McMahon is healthy.

This was a year in which a few individual players dominated, at times almost seeming to win games by themselves. McMahon, John Elway, and Dan Marino did that sort of thing as quarterbacks, as was expected (Bernie Kosar and Randall Cunningham seem to be approaching that level). For San Francisco, Jerry Rice put on an awesome display at wide receiver, catching at least one TD pass in every game he played, whether it was Joe Montana or Steve Young throwing. (Of course, the 49er running game, the other pass receivers, and the new offensive line didn't hurt either.) The Buffalo Bills instantaneously came up with a pair of linebackers as terrifying as the Giants' Lawrence Taylor and Carl Banks in rookies Cornelius Bennett and Shane Conlan.

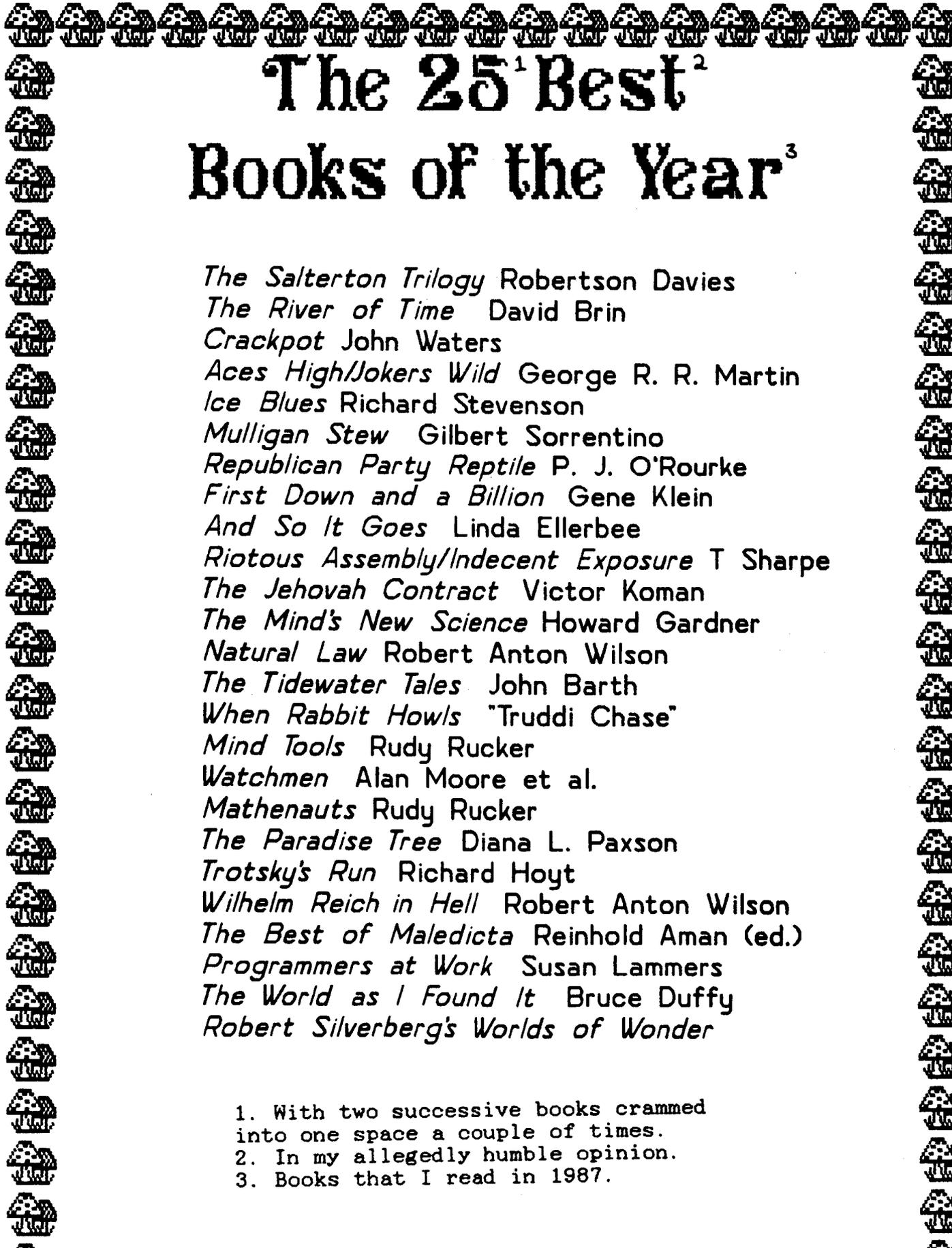
Perhaps the most noticeable example of a player single-handedly turning his team around was part-time footballer Bo Jackson, with the LA Raiders. In a few games (notably a Monday-night one against the Seattle Seahawks) he was frighteningly good. If the Raiders can get him to stick to football and keep him healthy, they will be a force to be reckoned with. In fact, they could even win with Marc Wilson at quarterback. (A sports reporter thought he was offering a rhetorical question when he asked Jim McMahon, "Who couldn't be a great quarterback with the Raiders?" Mc Mahon cruelly, but accurately replied, "Marc Wilson.") He might even wind up like Milt Plum, a weak-armed quarterback who piled up good passing stats against teams busy being grateful that he wasn't again giving the ball to Jim Brown. After Jackson had scored twice, by running over, then around, Brian Bosworth, who is rightly being paid a million or so a year for his strength and his speed, the Seahawks seemed to give up. James Lofton and other Raider pass receivers had much less trouble getting open than Wilson had getting the ball to them.

I saw, and perhaps more relevantly heard, the historic broadcast in which Gayle Sierens became the first woman to do play-by-play on an NFL game. I could damn her with faint praise by saying that she has a more pleasant voice than Marv Albert and makes fewer mistakes than Frank Gifford, but she's much better than that. I hope NBC keeps her and gives her lots of games.

Other good news from the media was ESPN's Sunday evenings: an hour-long summary of the day's games, followed by a broadcast of one. One good thing it did was to bring back Pete Axthelm, whose generally cruel wit I admire. The day after inept presidential assassin Squeaky Fromme escaped from a federal penitentiary and was recaptured, Ax suggested that she had turned herself in after learning that she'd blundered into an area where the Atlanta Falcons' games were telecast.

Here's a factor that could be mentioned more: cheap owners. Consider the Cincinnati Bengals, who trade away high first-round choices rather than pay some rookie a lot, and who had another disastrous year, despite some skilled players and Sam Wyche's innovative coaching. Consider the LA Rams, who always have problems with good players who consider themselves underpaid (this year it was Eric Dickerson and LeRoy Irvin) and always finish lower than their talent would indicate. Then look at the league's powerhouse, the San Francisco 49ers, whose owner, Eddie De Bartolo, pays higher salaries than any other team and got in trouble with fellow owners for offering his players bonuses for winning. It's said that free agency would put most of the good players in big media areas. The Rams probably disprove that. Free agency would send the good players to owners who'll pay them what they're worth.

One of the better ex-jock books of recent years is John Matuszak's *Cruisin' with the Tooz* (Franklin Watts hc). The Tooz talks about his legendary off-field exploits without either boasting or cringing and has some interesting things to say about the game, as well.



The 25¹ Best² Books of the Year³

The Salterton Trilogy Robertson Davies
The River of Time David Brin
Crackpot John Waters
Aces High/Jokers Wild George R. R. Martin
Ice Blues Richard Stevenson
Mulligan Stew Gilbert Sorrentino
Republican Party Reptile P. J. O'Rourke
First Down and a Billion Gene Klein
And So It Goes Linda Ellerbee
Riotous Assembly/Indecent Exposure T Sharpe
The Jehovah Contract Victor Koman
The Mind's New Science Howard Gardner
Natural Law Robert Anton Wilson
The Tidewater Tales John Barth
When Rabbit Howls "Truddi Chase"
Mind Tools Rudy Rucker
Watchmen Alan Moore et al.
Mathenauts Rudy Rucker
The Paradise Tree Diana L. Paxson
Trotsky's Run Richard Hoyt
Wilhelm Reich in Hell Robert Anton Wilson
The Best of Maledicta Reinhold Aman (ed.)
Programmers at Work Susan Lammers
The World as I Found It Bruce Duffy
Robert Silverberg's Worlds of Wonder

1. With two successive books crammed into one space a couple of times.
2. In my allegedly humble opinion.
3. Books that I read in 1987.