



Number 6 / August 1960

cogito

MEA VERY CULPA

"I've built a time machine by accident," said Dean A. Grennell. "It's the product of an unholy tripartite miscegenation among hand-loading tools, photographic equipment, and the Gestetner."

"I'm not surprised," I said.

"You know what I'm going to do with it?" hissed Dean A. Grennell. "I'm going to load it into my station wagon, take it east to New York state, and use it to solve the mystery of the ages. I'm going to discover at last who -- "

"HORRORS!" I said. My mind traveled back to the time that I too had built a time machine by accident (an absurdly easy thing to do). I too had lugged the machine east to New York state. There by the shores of Lake Erie I had set it up, climbed onto it, and set the dial for a moment in history some 80 years in the past. I arrived at night, and it was as dark as the inside of the instrument bag of a Russian horse doctor, but I had planned well and knew just where I had to go.

I found my flashlight and flicked it on for a moment till I could orient myself. Then I climbed off the time machine, and crept toward the lakeshore, carrying in my left hand a long, freshly-sharpened cross-cut saw....

"I'll catch him in the act!" said Dean A. Grennell, his voice recalling me to the present. "I'll expose him to the world! Let's catch some sleep because I want to start for New York early in the morning."

Late that night, when all Grennellia was asleep, I sneaked into the basement and made a few simple adjustments in the time machine. Waking in the morning from innocent slumber I wandered into the kitchen to find Dean A. Grennell drinking his breakfast.

"I made a slight mistake," said Dean A. Grennell. "It's not a time machine after all. I'm not drowning my sorrows, only putting the thing to good use. It's really a robot bartender. It dispenses perfect, ready-mixed Nuclear Fizzes out of hyperspace. Complete with a dash of bitters."

"I'm not surprised," I said.

HALT! HUGOS THERE?

Comment on the lead article of "Cogito" two issues ago, "The Medal Monster" in Retrograde #4, was not limited to the letters which squeezed into "Choruspondence" this time. Buck Coulson complained, in Yandro #90, that "the Hugo awards and the International Fantasy awards are not the same thing" -- the terms were used interchangeably in the article. He published in Yandro #91 a letter from me in which I mentioned that Fan-cyclopedia II defines "Hugo" as "The International Fantasy award," but did not print my letter in which I noted that the "Hugo" ballot of 1960 itself refers to "the annual International Fantasy awards, the 'Hugos'."

But this was a minor point. Most of the comment centered on the all-American bias of the awards and the matter of the important contenders which failed to reach the final ballot. Don Wollheim agreed that Brian Aldiss' Starship deserved consideration; it is "a real epic, a near classic...a topnotch item -- far above the rest." (He regretted that it wasn't an Ace book, as it would have been had not New American Library gotten first look at the carbon.) Starship seemed to be the most popular omission in the list of nominees (see James Blish's letter, page 11, for a cavil), though Shangri-L'Affaires in the fanzine category had more than its share of enthusiastic supporters.

Howard Devore surmised that "the selections (were) made on such a small basis that a group of ten people could swing the vote," and he believes that fans and pros who are well acquainted with the field are not voting, but leaving it up to the "comparatively new fans and casual joiners who feel that it is their duty to vote."

There was much discussion as to how the Hugo balloting can be improved so that meritorious achievement, not mere popularity, can be honored. Art H. Rapp suggests changing the selection procedure for the awards: "Retain the popular-vote method of nominating candidates, but let the final choices in each category be picked by persons qualified to judge literary and artistic merit." Rick Sneary advocates that the nominations, not the final vote, be placed in the hands of "a panel of experts." In commenting on P. Schuyler Miller's letter in the July 1960 Shaggy, Rick suggested a panel of 25 experts "who have shown an interest in critical review of the field," with five from England, five from each of the convention-zone areas, and five from the con committee. Their nominations would be put to fandom for the final vote. This plan, I feel, would improve the quality of the Hugo awards, and I would like to see it put into effect for the 1961 affair.

Les Nirenberg had the most interesting suggestion of all, in connection with the matter of recognizing special merit in fanzine publishing. He proposes that "a special Fanzine Hall of Fame be established so

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 RETROGRADE is edited and published every six weeks by Redd Boggs, 2209 Highland place N.E., Minneapolis 21, Minnesota. Associate editor: Marion Z. Bradley. This is issue number six, dated August 1960. This fanzine is available for letters of comment or by trade, but not by subscription. Artwork credits: p 10 - Arthur Thomson (stencil by Stenafax, not Gestefax). The radio receiver pictured on page 4 is a brand new 1938 model Crosley radio, a photo snipped from Uncle Hugo's old Short Wave and Television magazine and reproduced by Gestefax stencil. A Gafia press publication.  
 .....

that all-time greats like Fanac, Hyphen, and A Bas can be recognized." He suggests that "a committee of, say, five BNFs" be elected to choose the fanzines to be placed in the Hall of Fame, and nominates Bob Bloch, Bob Tucker, Dean A. Grennell, Walt Willis, and Boyd Raeburn as members of the committee. But even if Hyphen and A Bas deserved the honor, Les, do you think that Willis and Raeburn could in all conscience vote their own fanzines into the Hall of Fame?

RETROGRADE EVOLUTION

"Do you realize," asks Vic Ryan, "that your fanzine has no honest nickname? Ret is used for John Berry's Retribution, and Retro for Busby's sapszine." Busby himself remarks on this matter in much the same way in Cry #142. Actually the authorized nickname for Retrograde is Trog, and references to it as Ret or Retro in "Choruspondence" have been edited out. However, confusion between the title of this fanzine and the other two titles has led me to change the title of Retrograde beginning next issue. I have always been reluctant to alter a magazine title even slightly (as in Tympany/Tympani and Sky Hook/Skyhook), but if Campbell can change his magazine's title, so can I.

Along with the title change, there will be a new publication schedule -- a new issue every six weeks rather than once a month. Original plans for this fanzine called for 12 issues of eight or ten pages per year. Now I hope to publish approximately nine issues of 12 to 14 pages per year, which, as even a dub at arithmetic like Andy Young can figure out, will give us up to 12 more pages annually than the monthly schedule. A six-weeks interval between issues will probably allow publication of letters of comment in the following issue instead of the second issue following, as at present.

No particular changes in format or policy are contemplated. Next issue will see the return of various departments crowded out last issue and this by Jim Harmon's "The Sounds of Dreaming," and a full-length "Cogito" department. Can you hardly wait?

THE SECRET MUSEUM  
of FANKIND

EXHIBIT #5.

Page torn from my pocket notebook, in which Bob Pavlat pencilled the recipe for Nuclear Fizz. The note is in Pavlat's handwriting, except for the heading and the line at the bottom. This was the first time that fandom outside Washington D.C. learned of this drink. The note was written in the Hotel Metropole bar during the Cinvention, Labor day weekend, 1949.

*Nuclear Fizz*

- 1 shot gin*
- 1 shot coon brand*
- 1 shot lemon juice*
- ice*
- 8 oz. glass*
- cola to fill*
- 1 dash bitters.*

*60¢ - or more!*

"I LOVE A MYSTERY"

Remembered by Jim Harmon

(A mournful train whistle blaring into the night.)

ANNOUNCER: I Love a Mystery, a Carlton E. Morse production, featuring the adventures of Jack, Doc, and Reggie in "Temple of Vampires."

(The train whistle screams past.)

(Music up. Heavy chorded, somber organ rendition of "Valse Triste." The striking of a clock -- an ancient, proud grandfather's clock. BONG. BONG. BONG. BONG.)

ANNOUNCER: Four o'clock high in the air over a certain Central American republic. The private plane of heiress Kitty Larabee is carrying the girl with Jack Packard, Doc Long, and Reggie York to Hollywood from their mission on Kitty's behalf in South America. Jack is at the controls of the cabin plane, and Kitty is saying to Doc...

KITTY: Doc, are you going to be glad to get back to the good old United States?

DOC: Honey, when I think of all them cute little old female women waiting for Doc Long on Sunset boulevard, I can't hardly stand it.

KITTY: But just think of all the dark-eyed, exotic señoritas you're leaving behind.

DOC: Hey, cut that out! You're going to spoil my whole day for me.

KITTY: Reggie, you're awfully quiet.

REGGIE: Merely thinking of that green belt of jungle down there, about the jungle, and the natives.

KITTY: What's the first thing you're going to do when you get back to the States?

REGGIE: Oh, I don't know. Go into a good bar and start a ripping good fight, I should think.

KITTY: You, Reggie?

DOC: I think I know what old Reg is thinking about. It happened a few years ago, right when he first joined up with Jack and me. Reggie was just a kid then. It was on them islands out there in the South Pacific. He saw the natives starting to sacrifice this girl and he waded in and tried to stop them.

KITTY: Did you stop them, Reggie?

REGGIE: No.

DOC: Reg ain't cared much for any kind of natives since then.

THE SOUNDS  
OF DREAMING



A SERIES BY  
JIM HARMON

KITTY: Listen.

DOC: What's wrong, honey?

KITTY: The engine missed. I know it did. I know planes.

DOC: Yeah. Yeah, you are right.

JACK: I've been waiting for you to notice that. It's been going on for the last half hour.

KITTY: Why didn't you say something?

JACK: What good would it have done for me to say anything about it? We couldn't turn back now. We're in the middle of nowhere.

REGGIE: Jack, those men we saw hanging around the plane back at that emergency airport...

JACK: Yes, I think they watered the gasoline.

DOC: Hey!

KITTY: But why would they want to do that?

JACK: Who knows? The A-1 Detective agency has earned its share of enemies around the world. Right now, our problem is finding a place to set down this crate before it's too late.

REGGIE: Jack, there's some open ground I saw over there on the left, around that building.

DOC: Where? I don't see -- hey! That ain't just a "building." That's a doggone temple. A temple almost as big as the Empire State building right here in the middle of the jungle.

JACK: It's our only chance. I'll have to try to set her down over there. Everybody get in their seats and fasten their safety belts.

KITTY: Look! Look there. The door to the luggage compartment is opening.

DOC: A stowaway, huh? Okay, Reggie, you hit 'em high and I'll hit 'em low.

KITTY: The door's opening... It's a boy! Only a little boy.

DOC: Hey, what's a little colt like you doing here?

BOY: I got hungry back there.

JACK: There's no time for questions. We're going in. Somebody take care of the boy.

KITTY: I'll hold him on my lap.

JACK: This is going to be rough.

KITTY (to the boy, unsteadily): You mustn't be scared. You mustn't be scared now.

(The engine drones on, gaining in pitch, and then comes a long, rending CRASH.)

(Silence)

JACK: Uh...out! Everybody out, quick. I cut the switches, but she may catch fire.

DOC: What about food and stuff? We'll need that.

JACK: Go on, get out, you crazy redheaded fool! We can come back for that if she doesn't burn.

REGGIE: Let me help you with the boy, Kitty.

KITTY: I can manage.

JACK: Let's put some distance between us and the plane.

REGGIE: We'll need shelter for the night. The old temple might be a good place.

JACK: Good idea, Reg. Let's get inside.

KITTY: Those paving stones. How old do you think they might be?

JACK: Older than the time of Christ, maybe.

KITTY: But the temple doesn't seem -- deserted.

JACK: Probably the natives in the jungle look after it, keep the vines away.

REGGIE: Just look at the carving on the archway. Beautiful, but somehow sinister. They look like pictures of bats.

JACK: They are bats.

DOC: Hey! Hey, I saw something 'way up there in the shadows. I saw a man flying through the air, and he didn't have no clothes on!

(Music up. The clock strikes: BONG. BONG. BONG. BONG. BONG. BONG.)

ANNOUNCER: Six o'clock in the steaming Central American jungles, just before sunset. Jack Packard, Doc Long, and Reggie York are stranded after their plane crashed, with Kitty Larabee and the boy stowaway. They are sitting just inside the doorway of the ancient temple near the crash site, all except Reggie who is on sentry duty. They are making a meager meal from emergency rations, and Kitty is saying...

KITTY: I never thought a chocolate bar and tomatoes right from the can could taste so good.

DOC: Yeah. I wonder if a square meal put our little pal in a talking mood?

KITTY: He talked to me earlier.

JACK: He did? Did he have any explanation of how he got on board our plane?

KITTY: He said his father put him on board and said that there were good people where we were going who would take care of him. He's been knocking around South America with his father all his life, from what I can gather. All he'll tell me is that his name is Hermie.

DOC: I can think of some guys who ought to be --

JACK: Never mind now, Doc.

KITTY: I was glad I got a chance to change my clothes while you boys were getting supplies from the plane. These are cooler.

DOC: Yeah.

KITTY: Do you like these clothes, Doc?

DOC: I like what's in 'em better.

KITTY: Cut it out, Doc. Jack, how long do you think it will be before we're found? My company is bound to send planes out searching for us when we don't show up.

JACK: It's hard to say. We'll have to hope for the best, and prepare for the worst.

DOC: Jack, do you figure we ought to build a big signal fire?

JACK: No.

DOC: Yeah, but --

JACK: We might attract more than we bargained for.

REGGIE: That seems entirely likely.

KITTY: Reggie! Do you have to sneak up like that?

REGGIE: Jack, there's something coming this way, either animals or natives. Which-ever, there are a good number of them.

JACK: I've been expecting something like this. All of you, come on. Take everything with you. We're going into the temple.

DOC: How come?

JACK: It's safer than the jungle out there at night.

REGGIE: Perhaps we should try to repair the radio in the plane....

JACK: The plane pins us down too neatly. I'm hoping the temple interior may be tabu to the natives.

DOC: Listen to that echo of our footsteps. This place is big.

REGGIE: Do you say that as a man who comes from Texas?

DOC: It's big, even Texas-size big.

JACK: Big enough that I can't reach the roof with this flash. But there's a stairway over there.

DOC: Yeah, but a stairway to where? I don't like what I saw up there.

JACK: You just came in out of the sunlight into the dark. You could have thought you

saw anything. We may be safer up there than we would be down on the floor. The stairway looks solid, but we all better hold hands. Put the boy in the middle.

DOC: Just so long as I get next to Kitty.

JACK: Come on. Watch your step. Look where I point the flash.

(Footsteps fade out and back in.)

DOC: Hey. There's nothing up here. Nothing but a little old ledge.

JACK: What did you expect? A hotel suite? It's big enough for us to camp for the night. The boy! Where's the boy? Didn't one of you keep a hold on him?

KITTY: He's not here. He's fallen over!

JACK: Wait a minute. The end of the ledge is cut off by that pillar but there's a little foothold around it....

DOC: I'll get him. Hey, Hermie....Hermie.... (Voice recedes.)

ELENA: Hello, leetle boy.

HERMIE: H-Hello, lady.

ELENA: You're a nice leetle boy. Such white skin. Do you like Elana? Do you think she is pretty? Her long black hair, you can touch it.

HERMIE: Thank you, I...

ELENA: Ah, your friends are coming for you. You wish to return to them. But first, wouldn't you like me to show you something, something you have never seen before?

HERMIE: I don't know, lady.

DOC (from distance): Hey, Hermie!

ELENA: Of course you would. Come, come...

DOC: Hey! Who are you? Hey. Hey! She just scooped him up in that big black robe of hers and stepped off the ledge with him. No, there's gotta be some way down (fade)

JACK: Just steady me while I take this corner, Reg....

DOC (from distance): Help! Jack, Reggie, help me!

JACK: What's that crazy red-headed Texan gotten himself into now?

DOC: Help me! I can't hold on no longer! I'm slipping over!

(Music up. The clock strikes: BONG. BONG. BONG. BONG. BONG. BONG. BONG.)

ANNOUNCER: Seven o'clock on a high ledge in an ancient Central American temple. There are three people standing on the ledge. Jack Packard, Reggie York, and Kitty Larabee. The fourth person, Doc Long, sits on the floor, his back to the wall....

DOC: You sure pulled me back just in time, Jack. Another second and I'd have been splattered like a ripe tomato 'way down there. But come on, we've hung around here long enough. We got to go looking for the kid.

JACK: No.

KITTY: What do you mean, "no"?

DOC: Yeah?

JACK: We can't all go blundering off in the dark or we'll all get ourselves killed. We'll have to wait for morning.

REGGIE: Jack may be right.

DOC: I don't reckon he is. I'm not going to sit around while some kid is whisked off by some strange female. If you two are just going to stay here, doing nothing we can just call it quits on this "Three Comrades" business. I'm going after the kid and nobody's going to stop me.... (The impact of a fist.)

KITTY: Jack, you hit Doc!

JACK: I had to do it. We might not be there to pull the crazy fool back from the edge of the next ledge.

REGGIE: He's out like a light.

JACK: Come on, Reggie, help me pull the body over here where we won't trip over it.

REGGIE: Righto.

JUAN: Good evening. (Kitty gasps.)

JACK: How did you get here?

JUAN: Why am I here is of more importance. You see, I have your boy with me. I am returning him.

REGGIE: I say, his neck is bandaged. What happened to him?

JUAN: A slight accident. It is of no importance.

JACK: Who are you? How is it you speak English?

JUAN: I am Juan. As to my speaking English -- we know many things here.

REGGIE: Where is "here"? What is this place?

JUAN: The boy is unharmed, you see, my lady. Are you his sister, perhaps? Surely, not his mother?

KITTY: N-No. Neither.

JACK: Reggie asked you what this place is.

JUAN: This? This is the Temple of Vampires.

KITTY: Vampires?

JUAN: Until we meet again....

REGGIE: Jack, did you see that? He just stepped off the ledge and disappeared. He must have been killed.

JACK: I'm not so sure. We'll have to wait until it gets light and find out.

KITTY: But how could he help from getting killed?

JACK: Like a lot of questions, that will have to wait until tomorrow.

(Music up. The clock strikes: BONG. BONG. BONG. BONG. BONG.)

ANNOUNCER: Five o'clock in the ancient Temple of Vampires in the middle of the Central American jungle. Jack Packard and Doc Long climb a stairway up the side of a rock wall....

DOC: Jack, what's the use of climbing this stairway? It's just like the one on the other side.

JACK: There's one difference. We were on the other side. I want to find out what's over here.

DOC: How come you left Reggie with Kitty and Hermie, not me?

JACK: Because I thought Reggie would make a more reliable guard.

DOC: That's a fine doggone thing to say.... Hey. Here we are at the top, and it's just like I told you. It's the same as the ledge on our side.

JACK: The ledge is the same, but not the wall. Look.

DOC: Hey! A door. There's a door in this wall.

JACK: What do you think you're doing?

DOC: I'm opening the door.... What did you expect?

JACK: Maybe we better see where it leads.

DOC: Give me a hand here. It weighs as much as a Texas steer.

JACK: I think it's coming... Look out!

DOC: Hey! Bats! The place is full of bats! Thousands of furry red-eyed bats!

JACK: Close it, quick!

DOC: Flying right in our faces, I can't stand 'em.

JACK: Hurry, get the door shut. There. Most of them are inside, the rest are flying off to the top of the temple.

DOC: Jack, Jack, where did all them bats come from?

JACK: Gathered out of the jungle by the natives, I guess. That explains the name of the place. The vampire bat is found in these jungles.



RETROGRADE - 9

DOC: Hey, Jack, look over here. Look at what I found.

JACK: What is it? Ropes, or vines tied off over here. They seem to reach clear up to the top of the temple.

DOC: Yeah, but what are they for?

JACK: Doc, I think this is how those people in the black robes got on and off our ledge on the other side of the temple. They swung across on these ropes, secured them there, and swung back again. The girl carried Hermie across.

DOC: She would sure have to be a strong little female woman to do that....

JACK: Probably trained for it all of their lives, these people --

HERMIE (calling from distance): Mr Packard! Mr Long! Help!

DOC: Jack!

JACK: Doc, there's just one way to get back over there fast. Are you game?

DOC: I'm ahead of you, scn! I'll loose this here rope, and here I goooooo....

JACK: Wait for meeeeeeee....

DOC: Hey! Hey, this is great!

JACK: Just don't look down. Here comes the ledge....

DOC: Reg! He's on the floor. Jack, what's wrong with him?

JACK: That cord around his neck, you idiot. Cut it!

DOC: Yeah, yeah, I'm getting it loose....

JACK: Here. I'll cut it. He's okay. He's coming around. Hermie, what happened?

HERMIE: That men came back and Miss Kitty went off with him, and he said he didn't want me. He did that to Mr York.

DOC: Jack, how could any one guy do that to Reggie?

JACK: Reg, can you get the boy down the stairway, back to the plane wreckage? Can you do that? Good boy.

DOC: Jack, we're going after Kitty, aren't we?

JACK: Of course we are. Hermie, they used the stairs this time, didn't they? I thought so. All the ropes were on the other side. Doc, the fastest way down is on these ropes, but don't slide all the way; you'll get a rope burn and fall. Just slide a few feet at a time. Got it?

DOC: Yeah, yeah, I got it. Let's go.

JACK: It's a long way down, remember.

DOC: Yeah. Hey, this is what I call an express. Yippeeee....

JACK: Doc, you crazy fool, not so fast. You'll burn your hands.

DOC: My hands, Jack! I'm falling!

JACK: Doc! Doc! (Footfalls on stone) Doc!

DOC: I'm okay. I didn't have too far to fall. I should have listened to you about going too fast.

JACK: There's no time for that now. We've got to find Kitty and that Juan....

DOC: We won't have to look too doggone far. There they are!

JACK: Come on, after them! (Running footsteps.) You, Juan, stop or I'll shoot!

DOC: Hey, we don't have guns. We're fist fighters.

JACK: He doesn't know that, and it looks like he does know what a gun is. (Footsteps ending.) Kitty, are you all right?

KITTY: Jack, it was his eyes...something about his eyes...he made me go with him....

DOC: Jack, he disappeared right into thin air!

JACK: He must have darted through a passageway in the shadows. We got to him and Kitty just in time. (Ominous rambling.)

DOC: Jack, what's that sound? The whole doggone temple is shaking.

(Concluded on page 14)

GIOVANNI SCOGNAMILLO

Allow me to apologise for acknowledging receipt of Retrograde issues #2 and #3 only today. It is indeed mighty swell of you to send me your zine, and mighty unfair of me not to write you sooner. I hope that you'll forgive me if I confess that, being a noofan and one too far away from fandom, I do not have much information about yourself, except that you are one among the early active fen. Of course through the two issues of your zine I have learned a lot about your liking and disliking; also about the books or the records you love best.

## CHORUSPONDENCE

"A Fan's Library" is an interesting column (and so are most of Harmon's comments). I think the best way to know a person is to know the stuff he likes to read or the music he likes to hear best. So far we have in common Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night, Bach, and Mozart.

Do not expect from me an analytical comment on Retrograde. I am so much fond of zines that I'm not able yet to criticize any of them. This lack of critical point of view in one who has spent almost 15 years as film critic may seem strange, although it must be understood that both fandom and zines are so new, seem so original to me that I need a certain time to get better acquainted and thus judge with more knowledge.

Retrograde is, by all means, a personal zine. Yes, it is more than that; it is, as you put it, a fan. That is, the literary projection of a personality expressed through some well-devised pages; it is also the expression of a way of thinking, and thus, of living. Yes, I'll be delighted to read more about it, more things by you and more things chosen by you to appear in your zine.

Well, thanks to you for Retrograde, but I must also thank the one or those who have informed you that in Istanbul, Turkey, lives "The Lone Fan of Turkey." (c/o Banco di Roma, P.K.464, Istanbul, Turkey)

RAY NELSON

I suppose it is no news to you that you are not publishing a fanzine. Not only does it not really deal with fannish things, but it deals with sf as if it was l\*i\*t\*e\*r\*a\*t\*u\*r\*e. You know darn well that what you are really printing is a Little Literary Review. Just to confirm my opinion I sent it to a friend of mine who is the editor of a Little Literary Review and who hates fanzines. He liked it. That's proof enough for me.

When are you going to start running poetry, like a good little review should? When are you going to start talking about the sensitive soul of the poet being crushed, like a flower, under the thoughtless heel of the middle class? Mainly, when are you going to start printing MY work?

No, I guess it's better that you just go on the way you are going. The truth is, you aren't publishing a Little Literary Review either. The truth is, there is nothing else in all the world quite like Retrograde, so why don't I stop trying to classify it and just enjoy it?



I don't believe the statement [in issue #3], "The structure of the human mind provides us with an intuitive belief in an extra-normal unity and direction to the universe." Historically speaking the idea of "unity" is a pretty late-comer to the scene. Far from being instinctive, it seems to be the product of a fairly high level of civilization. Polytheism (including wars between the gods) seems to be more "instinctive." I don't find myself instinctively convinced on any such idea myself. Sometimes I believe in some sort of God and sometimes I don't, but mainly I just don't know. I do not experience the same indecision with respect to eating, sleeping, -----, and ----- . There are times when I can get fed up with any instinct, but I can go for months without believing that there is an extra-normal unity and direction to the universe. Mostly I think the universe is a rather frightening mess. If there is Anybody at the wheel, He must have passed out long ago. (Chicago 37)

JIM HARMON

I got mad when I saw that you were voting for Starship Troopers and "The Alley Man" in the Hugo vote. I think I have found your major weakness as a literary critic. You judge by intent. You recently said that a TV production of "For Whom the Bell Tolls" was preferable to "My Little Margie" for its intent. This also seems to be your grudging attitude toward books and stories. Heinlein's book not only had an execrable philosophy, it failed to present that philosophy successfully, and it failed as a novel -- I'm not even sure that there was an intent to make it a novel. I won't go into details on "The Alley Man," but regardless of Farmer's intent that story was also a failure. Execrable, I think, fits it too.

Then there is the case of Ward Moore's "Transient," which you defended in the letter column of the July Amazing. I am not opposed to literate writing in prozines, but I finally got around to reading (or at least to finishing) this thing after several false starts. I agree with all the readers who wrote in complaining about this story in Amz. "Transient" is not sf or fsy and if we had a right to complain about Howard Browne running detective stories in Amz and Fantastic we can also complain about Cele Goldsmith's more literary but still non-sf tastes.

"Transient" wasn't very good, whatever its intent. The psychological symbolism is pathetically superficial, and the writing style is about on a par with that in Truo Story or Adam. Ward Moore attempted a specialized literary work, but in general his language is of barely competent first draft general-magazines. This aint sf, it doesn't belong in a sf magazine, and it will help kill sf just as fast as Dianetics or deros or water-witching. (Los Angeles 12, California)

JAMES BLISH

You and I have discussed the problem of the Hugo awards before; of course I have no reason to kick, but all the same I share some of your reservations. This year I'd like to put in a plug for one nominee you didn't mention, Kurt Vonnegut's The Sirens of Titan. Certainly the Heinlein is almost wholly admirable (my only beef is that structurally it is rather ramshackle, but Heinlein never was an exponent of the well-made novel and I doubt that he's going to change now). But I think the Vonnegut quite overshadows it for sustained brilliance, originality, wit, and basic content. It would be easy to pick holes in its science, but Vonnegut's livable Titan is no more difficult to swallow than Bradbury's livable Mars, and in this instance I think it's worth the effort.

If the voters pass it over (as I suspect they will; I'm astonished that it got into the nominations at all), Vonnegut may have to blame his own originality, for the piece is so wildly unlike anything else we've ever seen in the field that it might very well create a certain uneasiness. I wonder, too, if another sort of provincialism might not be operating: Vonnegut, a professional writer for the slicks, seems to strike some people as an "outsider," and in addition Sirens did not run in

any of the magazines, which means a lot of readers weren't even aware of its existence until it got nominated.

Anyhow, it gets my vote, and Virginia's, and I think Damon's. The others? Well, the Leinster and the Dickson are workmanlike, certainly, but don't set me to cheering. As for the Garrett-Harris, it's as appalling a piece of whimsy as was ever written by any sweet little old lady -- but they don't usually manage to get their stuff in print. I don't share your apparent enthusiasm for Starship, by the way. Though I am as noisy an Aldiss rooter as you can find around here -- in fact, I'm proud to say that it was I who called him to the attention of NAL's editor -- I don't think he's yet gotten a grip on the novel. This one, at least, is sort of tired. Nobody has ever done "Universe" as well as Heinlein did it the first time, and I have a suspicion no one ever will. As a short story writer, though, I think he's the best man to come down the pike since Budrys.

I wholly agree with you on the merits of "Visit to a Small Planet." Tony Boucher's praise of it I think explicable by his evident fondness for whimsy of all sorts, which was very visible during his tenure at F&SF in the stories as well as in the book reviews. Myself, I agree with Peter de Vries that it's a sin, difficult to define but impossible to forgive. Messiah was something else again, a great performance once it got itself going.

Add one more sf reader with no taste for jazz. In my experience most people who like both also tend to think of both as significant contributions to modern culture, etc. -- the type Amis calls the trend-hound. Now this kind of remark, which may seem to the writer to be only a piece of simple observation, can easily be taken to be unfriendly by readers with raw nerves, and I quote you another: "I seemed to recognize the sincere, polite young man: he was the political science major who makes liberalism a way of life....This autumn he will be ringing doorbells on behalf of the Democratic candidate." This could be taken for a sneer, and obviously was so taken. (Milford, Pennsylvania)

EC: You are right that the remark was taken for a sneer, but it was not meant as one.

DON AND MARY WILSON

Don types: I heartily endorse "The Medal Monster";

I went a step past you and marked both the novel section and the fanzine section "None worthy of award."

"There have been ups and downs in the past, ebb and flow of demand for magazine science fiction," says Mal Ashworth. "There will," he continues, "be no shortage of magazines devoted to serious science articles and factual space travel treatises. But nowhere anywhere -- so far as I know -- is there any magazine proffering a happy hour of romance and fantasy...." The other month I suggested to Fritz Leiber that possibly the new editors of Amazing are slightly more imaginative than the run of sf editors during the past few years, and so boded good for the field. He grunted noncommittally. Then Howard Miller, chiming in, suggested that the real trouble lay with unimaginative readers; at this point Fritz's face lit up with enthusiastic agreement. I thought at the time, and think now, that Fritz was looking for scapegoats. The consensus of Earl Kemp's Who Killed Science Fiction? seems to be "We don't know; all we know is we don't give a damn anymore."

My feeling is that the crucial point in the history of sf has been reached, and passed: the point at which Campbell's quitting the field would have been in time to permit a reviving of imagination in it. I feel that for maybe a year and a half now we have been so far gone that even Campbell's quitting the field wouldn't save us. Campbell, I think, first began genuinely to stifle growth in the sf field in the 1950-3 period. His nemesis and alter ego, Ray Palmer, quit the field in 1957, not too late to stop doing damage.

Mary longhands: Let me just add a note of appreciation. I've never writ-

ten a "fan letter" before, but I would like to say that your writings (along with Harry Warner's) have, for me, been by far the most interesting in the field.

As regards Fanac and its detailing of the "trivialities" chronicled "so faithfully" by Ron Ellik and Terry Carr, my feeling is that unless they can come up with events and insights equal to some of those appearing in the memoirs of such times as those of Louis XIV they are better forgotten. "Trivialities," okay, but minutiae -- no. When fandom can produce someone equal to the Count (I think it was) who upon occasion was overwhelmed by the conviction that he was a dog and who, in order not to disturb the sovereign composure of his serene majesty, the Sun King, thoughtfully stuck his head out of the window before he barked.... Well, need I say more? (Santa Monica, California)

EC: Are there any other fan wives out there who are withholding such heady egoboo?  
# Surely there must be a fan somewhere who is convinced that he is a dog sometimes.

RUTH BERMAN

"Yes, and I've felt pain pain, and that's the worst kind." Ooh. I can just hear Jerry Lewis saying that. Now I am sure that I'm right in planning to not-see the movie. I think you would have been able to see why this play is called "urbane and witty" if you had gone to see the production at the Old Log theater last summer. They did an excellent production. The difference is, I think, that Kreton, even though he is retarded, is a member of his civilization with the same mores as the rest aside from certain specific differences which Kreton recognizes as differences. Kreton of the Old Log and, apparently, the Broadway production, was essentially an unemotional being. The emotions he did have -- pleasure in his hobbies and sorrow at being taken away from the games -- never lasted long, running from pleasure to sorrow to ennui. Kreton himself labeled his emotions as oddities.

Jerry Lewis' comedy, on the other hand, has always been based on a presentation in which Jerry Lewis is a little boy type, emotionally immature, with violent little-boy emotions. Judging by your review he stays this way in "Visit to a Small Planet," thus missing Kreton's objective view of most things, including Kreton's objective view of his own emotions. I think you're right in calling "Visit" a satire on our ideas of heaven. It's also, I think, a satire on our ideas of utopia (which is much the same as a satire on heaven) and our smug ways of viewing ourselves, which as you point out, was not done in a very pointed fashion.

I wish the people who turn pale at The Catcher in the Rye would take up a copy of "Othello" and try reading it aloud. And the ones who are shocked at the politics in 1984 should glance over that fine old classic, Swift's "A Modest Proposal." (Minneapolis 17, Minnesota)

PEGGY SEXTON

I've received fanzines from various people since I expressed interest in joining a fan club, and yours is the best I've seen. The format, writing, everything is excellent. Although I don't agree with everything you said (I liked The Elements of Style), please keep on saying it. In fact, I wish your zine came out oftener.

I'd like to take exception to Seth Johnson's comments about The Catcher in the Rye in the June issue. There seems to be a sort of Boyle's law about whether literature is considered pornography. It's dandy for kids to read the Bible, and "Hamlet" is standard fare for high school English. The immortal Bard is often purple, yea, into the far ultraviolet. But for some obscure reason the fact that Shakespeare has been dead for several centuries makes him a pale enough shade of lavender for tender young minds. Hence Sexton's law: The pornographic content of any given piece of literature is inversely proportional to the time which has elapsed since the author's demise.

When a contemporary author of Salinger's stature writes a sensitive, moving, acutely perceptive account of a confused but extremely aware boy's struggle to find himself (albeit in ways which are sometimes socially unacceptable), the caterwauling about "Let's protect the delicate minds of our youngsters" starts. My advice to Salinger is: Drop dead immediately, and in a couple of centuries you'll be as respectable as Uncle Wiggily! If parents take the trouble to bring up their dear little offspring properly, they have nothing to fear. (Hebbronville, Texas)

JEAN YOUNG

It occurs to me that we have never once acknowledged receiving Retrograde -- ungrateful of us, since it is one of the few fanzines we actually read. We have damn little time these days and read only what we really like. I even recall seeing something in the latest issue that I thought I could comment on -- a real purple-plumed rarity with me. If only I could remember what it was....

Oh yes. "Visit to a Small Planet." We saw it -- I saw it. Who with? Andy or Larry -- I can't remember. Maybe both. Maybe even Little Bill. Anyway, if you approach it as just another Jerry Lewis movie it's not so bad. I was actually amused by the scene in the (hah!) beatnik dive, violently untrue-to-life though it may have been. For the rest I got a few mild chuckles from Jerry Lewis -- one Jerry Lewis movie every four or five years I can take.

I don't know if a really good (to say nothing of Great) play can be written and successfully produced on a science fiction subject or theme. Certainly anything that involves, for instance, a rocketship as a setting will strike people as too peculiar on a stage, too unbelievable, and they won't listen. Not until rocketships are really an everyday thing, and then of course it won't be science fiction.

Fantasy is another thing altogether; there have been fine and successful fantasy plays: "The Green Pastures," "Bell, Book, and Candle," or even "Berkeley Square" (I was in that, once). You could probably produce Bradbury; you could easily lay a scene on Mars because nobody really believes in Mars. It's like laying a scene in heaven. But you couldn't have Martians crawling around the stage unless they look essentially like humans; you could probably green up their faces a bit, but nothing too strong or spectacular -- it becomes either repellent or funny and people won't listen. You could stage or film "The Million Year Picnic," for instance (look, after all, at "The Skin of Our Teeth") -- and I don't say that because I'm such a wild Bradbury lover. It's just that you could do it, and it would probably be reasonably effective, presupposing a good production: good director, good actors, and good set design and lighting in particular. Also, if you're going to have special effects they've got to be well-chosen and well-executed. You need a good sound system and a good lighting crew. There's nothing worse than an outre effect that goofs: disembodied voices that sound, not mysterious or as though they were floating in air, but decidedly as though they came through a tape recorder. (Cambridge 38, Massachusetts)

THE SOUNDS OF DREAMING

Concluded from page 9

JACK: It must be an earthquake. There's plenty of them in this country. The three of us better join Reggie and the boy back at the plane. This looks like the wind-up of the Temple of Vampires.

DOC: If we don't get a hurry on out of here, this will wind up I Love a Mystery!

(Music up.)

ANNOUNCER: The further adventures of Jack, Doc, and Reggie may come back to you at any hour.

NOTE: The mention of the name of the program by a character (particularly Doc) is authentic. Often the scene in the last episode of a particular season or series would be the A-1 Detective agency, Jack, Doc, and Mary Kay would be finishing a bottle, toasting the New Year, and Jack might say, "That should wind up the old year" and Doc would add, "And that winds up I Love a Mystery!" -- Jim Harmon.