

OOPS....

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This started out as a nice, normal letter to Alankin for
inclusion in F/R 476, but for reasons that begin to become
apparent about page 5, I just couldn't wish it on him. Ergo,
my first decimal oscillator.

May 5, 1983

Dear Alankin and CULT:

Okay, here I am again. After a string of four F/R's in a row, I
was forced to take a break by the vagarities of the rest of my
life -- assorted trips back to Peoria to pick up some things, a
couple of conventions -- relatively unimportant but necessary
weekend user-uppers like that.

Before I get to mailing comments, a couple of items you might get
a chuckle out of (?) (out of which a chuckle you might get?)
(?!?). First of all, there was a robotics convention in Chicago
a couple of weeks ago -- a trade-show type exposition designed to
demonstrate the state of the robotics industry and interest
potential users of the product. I wasn't able to go, but it was
well covered on the local news, and the hit of the show, in terms
of entertainment value, was a robot Blackjack dealer. He/she/it
was programmed to stand pat on 17 points or more and draw another
card on 15 points or less. If it had 16, it would point to the
ceiling and say, "Look at that." It would then pull a 5-spot out
of its sleeve and lay it on the table. If you called it on such
tactics, it would exclaim, "My cards, my rules!"

As you can see, I've kinda, sorta joined the computer revolution.
This part is being done on our Apple II at the office in my spare
time; the mailing comments may be done here (depending on how
non-busy we stay) or on a more standard typewriter at home. It
helps to kill time during slack periods, and gives me needed time
on this machine to learn all its intricacies.

Not a whole hell of a lot else is new. I've been reading a lot
recently -- mostly mysteries, as there have been a slew of new
ones in some series I enjoy. I can recommend BANKER by Dick

Francis and ICE by Ed McBain (Evan Hunter in a clever plastic disguise, for those of you who didn't know) as nice, competent standard fare by each of them -- nothing unexpected, but quite pleasurable. If anything about the two books bothers me, it's the way each was promoted. In each case, the publisher went to great pains to claim that this was a "breakthrough" book for each author. I always hate that term -- breakthrough book -- as it seems to denigrate everything the author has done before. BANKER is definitely not the best that Francis has done -- my own favorites, in order, are his second (NERVE) and his first (DEAD CERT) books respectively -- and it's not even the best he has done for this publisher (who just took over his books recently) -- REFLEX still remains the best Francis that Putnam has published, in my opinion. As a result, I just don't know what qualifies a book to be a breakthrough book. GOD EMPEROR OF DUNE was certainly the most static, and I think the worst, of the Dune novels, yet it is the one that made the NYTimes Bestseller List for weeks and weeks. THE UNDERGROUND MAN was not the best Lew Archer novel, but that's the one that cracked bestsellerdom. And on, and on, right up to the present, where a cloth edition of a movie novelization (!) made the list.

I guess I just don't like the idea of promoting the hell out of the current book by an author by implicitly suggesting that the rest of his works should be re-evaluated downwards. On the other hand, the book business is in trouble, and anything that will help the sale of books is to be encouraged, I guess.

That the book business is in trouble (at least the cloth book market, anyway) was forcibly brought home to me the other day. I will often wander into bookstores and buy something on a whim -- just because I think it will be a good read. Well, I was in Crown Books the other day and I happened to see the brand new Donald E. Westlake novel in the Dortmunder series -- I forget the title, but it was the same cast of characters as in THE HOT ROCK, BANK SHOT, JIMMY THE KID, etc. I picked it up and though I'd buy it -- I'd enjoyed the others in the series -- until I saw the price; this little book, which (if it runs true to form) is a comic caper novel running 160 to 180 pages of the amusing but not terribly significant variety was priced at \$19.95. Now I know that it costs more per book when the print run is low, but at that price I can't afford to buy cloth books. Hell, at that price, the cloth book is rapidly becoming a dinosaur, literally published only for libraries. And that would be a shame -- for all that I think the computer revolution is wonderful and I stand in awe of the information sources it will open up in my home, there is still something about the feel, and especially the smell, of a cloth book that I will miss.

May 17, 1983

It seems that the last two weekends have disappeared without my

noticing them. Anybody see them go by? What did they look like? Were they fun?

I'm back at the office, but this time I have the last few mailings, so I'm going to attempt to do some mailing comments from here. I'm going to forget about the rest of 470, it being too far in the dim remembered past to worry about, and move on to 471:

OLD SMOKEY: Your comments about the Viet Nam picture are an interesting sidebar, but I don't think it invalidates my point. It's like finding out that the girl in the famous Kent State University/National Guard incident picture (the one kneeling on the ground over a dead body, screaming) wasn't a student, but rather a 15 year old drifter, groupie and sometime prostitute. It's all interesting, but it does nothing to mitigate the impact of the picture. That's assured with the first national exposure, and the sidebar, interesting though it may be, just never catches up.

MEGRET: Strange -- I'd hate to think bribery is BARRED in such a fine organization.

MORNINGSTAR: How dare you attack my old alma matter (MSU) that way? Who do you think you are, spreading scurrilous and misleading propaganda like that? Remember, truth is no defense!

SMITH: Your comments in your f/r about the NASFIC bids are interesting; I can easily see a case made for supporting Austin (they seem like a fine group), although I'm for Columbus. The really interesting thing about the race is that I can't tell who it's between. Just about everyone I talk to claims that it is now a two way race, but the players differ from conversation to conversation. Either it's between Austin and Columbus, with Detroit out of it, or it's between Austin and Detroit, with Columbus out of it. It seems that the Austin bid is the front-runner now -- surely they are the most talked about, and one would hope that would translate into votes. My own opinion is that Detroit is the weakest of the three, partly because they seem to have made a nasty habit of partially self-destructing every few months, and partly because they are campaigning almost exclusively in the Midwest, while the election will be held on the East Coast. One of the wearying lessons we learned from Chicon was that you have to campaign as or more heavily in the region where the site selection is to take place (the East Coast this year) as in the region that is up for selection (the Midwest this time around).

GAYLE: ReYrCt to Michael and Jim -- I don't know what applies generally about men marrying/not marrying "smart" women, but I remember reading an interesting study (in PSYCHOLOGY TODAY or some journal of similar contents) a few years ago on the psychological factors involved in choosing spouses among athletes. The thesis was that there was a trade-off of beauty for power.

Thus, a beautiful/pretty/good-looking (pick any applicable adjective) woman went looking for a man who, all other things being relatively equal, exhibited power, being defined as a combination of commanding economic potential, acceptable looks and the ability to garner good press, thus propelling her along with him into the spotlight, and "potential" (whatever that is). He, on the other hand, was seeking (again, all other factors being relatively equal) good looks and presentability. A true marriage made in heaven! There was some speculation in the article that many of the same factors also applied to political marriages, but with less success ratios, as "success" and "power" in politics was still only potential at the time of most marriages, while an athlete already had some sort of track record established, since his whole career occurs at a much earlier age.

On to 472:

DAVE RILKE: YaleF and I have had some battles in our times, but I must rise to his defense against Ted White's charges. If I recall the situation correctly, Ted was not asked to moderate the Lee Hoffman interview because, at the time we put the program together, Ted was not showing up on our membership lists. Now, I don't know whether he joined late, or alternatively that he was a member but the info didn't get forwarded to YaleF, but in either case, it can't be said to be YaleF's fault.

Please note that nothing contained herein is meant to be a general defense of YaleF to the charge of being an asshole -- but if he is, it ain't for the reasons Ted states!!!

ALANKIN: Yeah, I also saw FITZCARRALDO, and sorta liked it. But I thought that Herzog had already made that movie (driven man of vision challenges and destroys those around him in search of his own private El Dorado) better in AGGUIRE, THE WRATH OF GOD. Also, I thought that he had LIVED the story better, as shown by Blank's BURDEN OF DREAMS.

And, this particular road seeming to go ever, ever on, to 473:

Hmmm, so YaleF is the now the yo-yo. Hmmm. Maybe I'd better leave that one alone.

JESSIE: No, dammit, I don't want you to tell everyone all about that. I want you to tell ME all about that!

GAYLE: I didn't enjoy FRIDAY all that much. My reaction to it

was a form of a good news/bad news joke. The good news is that Heinlein has learned how to tell a story again -- the bad news is that he doesn't have much of a story to tell. What interests me about the Hugos is the apparent bias against a book in a series winning the Best Novel Hugo. I personally was really pulling for Gene Wolfe to win a Hugo at Chicon for the second volume of The Book of the New Sun series -- I thought it was head and shoulders above anything else written that year, and it would have been nice for a home-town boy to win, etc. -- but it wasn't to be, and I wonder if the fact that there was "more to come" didn't have something to do with it. If that's the case, will the last book in the series also fail to win because of the bittersweet knowledge that there is no more to come?

Tell me, is there anyone out there who wasn't disappointed in the last episode of M*A*S*H? Or any two out there who were disappointed for the same reason? How do you end an ongoing American institution like that series, anyway -- what would work for you probably wouldn't work for me. I thought they did a good job of tying it up under the almost impossible circumstances of trying to please everybody. For instance, the Chicago Sun-Times critic liked the leave-taking part but thought Hawkeye's breakdown superficial and shallow.

By the way, someone out there (I forget who) said they liked the time-capsule episode just before the last one. That time capsule scene was actually the last piece of film shot. So you, at least, DID like the ending.

MEGRET: Would I care to expand on my comments on social climbing in fandom. I don't know; that sounds like a dangerous thing to do. It all goes back to "world-view"; I have watched the world, and I think I know what makes it go -- what motivates people to do the things they do. But a lot of people out there don't share my world view -- some see only a slight variance, others more, and the degree of variation stretches out from there to positions diametrically opposed to mine. Now, every time I sit down to say "This is the way this particular corner of the world works," there are a lot of people who indignantly rear up and claim, "Oh, no, it doesn't, you fugghead!" That's fair (all but the "you fugghead" part, anyway), except that I'll happen to use Joe Phan as an example, and Joe Phan thinks I've libeled or slandered him because that wasn't his motivation at all. I, on the other hand, think that it really was and Joe just doesn't know himself. I never mean such discussions to be personal attacks, but too often they are perceived as such. This has resulted in (a) my having made too many unintentional enemies over the years, and (b) a growing caution on my part on entering into these discussions, as life is too short for bloodfeuds.

Having said all that, yes, I will try to answer your question. But since I don't know you (and many other Culties) well enough, yet, I will limit my examples to either generalities or myself.

I guess I'd better start with a pet theory of mine, which is that people join hobby groups in order to fill a void that exists in their life without the group. You become a fan (or a model railroader, or a member of an amateur theatrical troupe, or whatever) because it fills some sort of need you have -- whether for companionship, or something to do with your hands, or an expression of artistic talents, or something. To my way of thinking, two of the biggest, most imperative "needs" of humankind as a social animal are the need to feel important and the need to achieve something.

The "achievement" need is the old Existential question of how do you take your self-aware life in what is really a random, chaotic, meaningless universe and give it some sort of order, structure and meaning? According to the theory, you do so by continually striving to achieve something that will live on after you, even though a part of you knows it won't survive your death in any kind of meaningful way. On the important level, read Hemingway on the essentially self-deluding attempt to build a warm, safe, comfortable niche away from the real world out of love (A FAREWELL TO ARMS) or The Cause (FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS) or courage (THE SUN ALSO RISES). On the trivial level, I now have permanent fame (of a sort) in fandom -- each Worldcon Program Book from now as long as they are published will carry my name as the co-chair of Chicon IV. It was the perfect existential quest -- meaningful while trying to achieve it, meaningless now that it is over (although my name will be there after my death, who the hell will care -- who cares who was the chair of the 1947 Worldcon, for instance).

So much for the need to create meaning. Now for the need to feel important. This one is easier, as it is more basic. An awful lot of groups that lack the ability to intellectualize/rationalize the search for meaning still exhibit this trait -- witness Nancy's comments about her son and his friends. But when I have to state it, it goes something like this.

It's a big world out there, especially when you look at it in the generic sense. We all have the desire for a moment in the sun -- for our share of glory and recognition and fame -- but damned few of us are lucky/aggressive/talented enough to achieve it in the real world, by which I mean the world taken as a whole. We can't all be Gandhi, or John F. Kennedy, or Jane Fonda -- or even Billy Carter, for that matter. So we come together in sub-cultures, and try to achieve some fame there, because it's better to become a big fish in a little pond than to remain a little fish in the ocean. Take me, for example -- I auction art at conventions. I do it because I am good at it. I do it because I like to help out conventions, and having put a few on myself, I know how important an art auction can be to the difference between a profit and a loss. I also do it because it allows me to get up on that stage in front of a significant portion of the convention and be somebody -- to perform -- to be a BNF -- (translation: an IMPORTANT PERSON).

Another example: Among some of my closer acquaintances/friends in fandom are Craig Miller, Ron Bounds, Tony Lewis, Bob Tucker... (there goes Propp, name-dropping again!). Why? Well, I like their company. We share a lot of common interests. We have worked with each other on various projects, and come to know/like/respect each other. We consider each other fun to be with. And, in addition, each of us is a BNF -- we have each of us achieved some notariety in fandom, and the association with each other feeds and re-enforces that identity, both for our own self-image and for each other.

I feel impelled to state two caveats here: I have a lot of friends in fandom, and many of them are not BNFs. I like each and every one of them. I will not mention any of them here only because to do so in this context might imply that they are somehow "second class" acquaintances, which is most definitely not the case. That is what I mean about making unintentional enemies. Also, I like to think that I am more complex an individual than someone who merely befriends others for his own advancement, or for what they can do for him. If I am giving you the impression that I am shallow, a user of other people, then either (a) you are reading this wrong, or (b) I am stating this very badly, or (c) I don't know myself nearly as well as I think I do. I think, or at least I'd like to believe, that it's one of the first two choices.

Okay, lets expand things a little. The last assumption/theory is that I'm nothing special. (Shut up, Yale!) I'm not different or extraordinary or alien with respect to the rest of you -- what makes me tick is pretty much what makes you tick. And if the above is part of my motivation for why I'm in fandom and what I do there, then because I'm nothing special, it's got to be part (not all) of the motivation for why a lot of other people are in fandom and what they do there. That applies to fandom in general and to the various subcultures (convention running fandom; SCA; the various clubs; fanzine fandom; apa memberships -- all of them). And that's a form of social climbing -- what is social climbing but the attempt to rise to the top in a social (i.e., group) setting or endeavor?

Christ, Megret, I promised myself I wasn't going to do this again for awhile -- bare my soul in first draft before an open-ended group of acquaintances trailing off into absolute strangers. AAUGH!! There is no way I can send this out to Alankin for inclusion in his F/R, either -- hell, I'd be responsible for bankrupting him on his pub date all by my lonesome. Well, friends, welcome to my first d/o!

Now I can only hope that Dian H. was right in her recent f/r; I'm not sure I want to see the responses to the last couple of pages.

Any GOON SHOW fans out there? I'm beginning to feel like Eccles:
"I talk to the trees, that's why they put me away...." (to be
sung to the tune of the song of the same name.)

COURT: Somehow I missed that you were in ARSENIC AND OLD LACE.
A lovely show -- what part did you have? I was Teddy in an
amateur theater production in Peoria some years back.

MICKY: I just flipped a coin, and you're a girl.
Congratulations!

Court, Peter and Ole Smokey -- good meeting you at Marcon.

Enough, already. I still got to photocopy this off tonight.
Thank Ghod the office copier will do both sides; I may be able to
get this off for a \$.20 stamp.

Ciao,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Larry".