

# GILGAMESH

Number 37 -- January 31, 1971

Terry Carr

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Love is never having to say "You're welcome."

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Talking with Carol over dinner tonight, I discovered myself launching into a Carr Scientific Sortie. You've all heard of the famous Carr Scientific Sorties, or maybe you haven't. No matter. I said to Carol, "I have a new explanation for senility."

She said, "Oh?"

"Yes," I said. "See, it's a matter of brain cells, which are used for storing memories, information, that kind of thing. There are a lot of brain cells in the brain, which can sort of be considered a community of these cells. But as a person gets older, he has more and more stuff to remember, so he needs more and more brain cells. Now, scientists know that a single cell exhibits behavior patterns that are reflected in the larger world of animals and even human beings -- energy intake, reproduction and so forth. So what we essentially have here, in the brain of an older person, is a community of very small beings, or things, and it's getting crowded."

"Crowded," Carol said.

"Right, crowded. Because older people have all this information to store in their brains, so they have to manufacture all these extra brain cells. So we have an overpopulated community. And of course we know from studies of animals and even human beings that in overpopulated communities the individuals take to killing each other, or even killing themselves, and that the birth rate, or rate of reproduction, goes down. You know that from the animal behaviorists, for instance."

"Sure," Carol said.

"Well, that's the cause of senility. These people's brain cells are dying like flies, and there are no new little brain cells coming along to learn the business, so all sorts of information is lost and thus older people suffer what we call senility. You see what I mean?"

Carol said, "Yes. But think of it this way. Suppose the brain cells don't increase in number; instead, each little cell just has more to remember and do. Brain cells are used to make logical connections and things like that too, you know; they have a lot of stuff to do. And when they do this stuff, they move around, spinning and wriggling. But when a person gets older, his brain cells have

so much stored in them that they're fat. So even though there aren't any more brain cells, things are still crowded, because all the little brain cells are now big fat brain cells. In fact, things are so crowded that these brain cells don't have any elbow room and they can't wriggle and turn around like they do when they're working. So they just can't work much anymore. And that's why."

I thought about her explanation for awhile and then I said, "You know, you may be on to something. See, it's an illustration of the yin-yang principle. That's what the yin-yang symbol is all about; it's a closed circle, representing a finite community, and inside it is a dark part and a light part. Now, what this means is that the dark part represents stuff and the light part represents space, you know, room to move. So that's what yin and yang are: stuff and room. We need them both."

"I think you've discovered something," Carol said.

"Yes, I do too," I said.

"I think you've discovered the Carr Metaphysical Sortie," Carol said.

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The interlineation at the head of this GILGAMESH was spoken by Carol a day or two after we saw Love Story. What? you cry, appalled, You mean you went to see Love Story? Sure we did. The thing was, we'd just seen The Owl and the Pussycat at the theater next door, and that was so absolutely nothing that we figured we'd go see Love Story because at least we'd have a reaction to it. Besides, we were curious.

Well, I guess it was interesting. I'm a notorious sucker for tear-jerkers (scratch a cynic, etc.)...I mean, I hardly managed to see what was happening during the end of Imitation of Life. So I figured, well, this was a movie that was all tear-jerker, and Vincent Canby in the Times said that for what it was it was good. So I brought a hanky. And by the time we were ten minutes into the movie I'd conceived a passionate hatred for Ali MacGraw, this smug smartass who was the heroine who was to die tragically at film's end. How was I supposed to feel moved and sad about the death (so painless and without visible drain on her features that it was to all intents strictly symbolic) of this creature? How was I to empathize over the tragedy of a perfect marriage shattered by untimely death when the relationship of the couple in the movie consisted solely of making wisecracks at each other?

And yet, you know, after the movie I looked around at the audience and various people here and there were wiping their eyes or sometimes still bawling. There was a couple a few rows behind us, maybe in their early forties, who were both bawling and dabbing at each other's eyes, and then they hugged and kissed and comforted each other and got up and left, no doubt to go home and screw. Whatever turns you on, I guess.

But we saw a good double bill more recently: The Passion of Anna and The Wild Child. I love Bergman's movies, and seeing him work in color was a particular treat. We enjoyed the picture even though we couldn't figure out much of what it was about. The Wild Child was, after its reviews, strangely bland, artless and naïve. But interesting.



We get letters:

JOANNA RUSS: So glad to hear that Terry is in love with me, in a polite way or even impolite way. It's nice. Of course there's the natural animosity of writers for editors and vice versa, but Terry's a hybrid. So I can love half of him back, at least.

As you can see, GILGAMESH arrived. You write very nice letters. (Is GILGAMESH all Terry's?) I read it & enjoyed all thru, especially the part about me and the part about Pyewacket. Somebody in your household, probably both of you, projects his/her soul into cats and the cats respond by blossoming for you as they do for nobody else.

I've decided that for me Esse Est Conversation, i.e. I exist insofar as I talk about it, and that Conversation is the first need of my nature. At the gate to Heaven I'll be jumping up and down and making talk noises while various blessed souls sit on me, holding my mouth & saying "We'll never get in if you keep talking!"

The trouble with living among academics is one starts becoming an academic, worrying about classes, etcetera, and imperceptibly the writing starts taking a back seat. Helas. Not that I don't do it, but one starts feeling just a little bit unlike oneself - really 'tisn't me, but I've begun being rusticated & domesticated & so on. Very hard not to take on the coloring of one's surroundings. But where to earn a living, hey?

It was a lovely lunch/rap/phone call in NYC. The Statler never did find out that I made all those calls, tho' they snagged me for another 2 days' rent (leaves 2 days unpaid for). Har har har har.

O tempora O mores. O Times O Daily Mirror. And so on.

Write write write.

Talk talk talk.

{(Yes, GILGAMESH is all mine; I forgot to put my name on the last issue through sheer inadvertance, due probably to some drug-sodden condition or maybe to forgetfulness. Carol does a thing called GEORGE for Lilapa but it's all mailing comments and therefore can't be shown to unmembers. She's a Scorpio.

{(The manic outgoing antics of Pyewacket weren't due to any mystical power either of us has over cats, though: Pyewacket is Bob Toomey's kitten and she responds to him to the extent that she needs someone to respond to. Mainly she's just freaky all by herself, Bob says.

{(Editors have no natural animosity for writers, except for bad writers, who cause them extra work. Don't try to stir up the waters, you rabblrouser you. Editors love writers as long as they stay in their place.)}

GREG BENFORD: Hoo boy, Terry, you couldn't have done a better job of disemboweling Joanna Russ if you'd really tried. What the world needs now, to steal a phrase, is fewer grim doctrines, and Women's Lib as it falls plonking from the mouth of Joanna (in your version) is grey, grey, grey. Ten minutes of supplication, indeed, over a joke about hen parties!

Practiced as I am at reeling back aghast, I've been doing a lot of it lately at the breathless commentary excreted from the common-lot intellectual magazines re: the emancipation of servile women. Such is the power of imitation; in one year a decent idea has congealed into doctrine.

For where is her sense of humor? Doesn't all this -- that tingling thrill when you discover that you never really understood Wuthering Heights, not knowing it was a prototext for the Good Fight -- remind you of the world-swallowing pretensions of Marxist dogma? In 1935 everybody knew that automobiles were an effusion of the sellout middle class, one more device to shore up the class system. Now everybody knows they are sex symbols and objects of enslavement of the suburban housewife. Fashionable bullshit is still bullshit.

Joanna is intelligent and talented; too bad she doesn't come through that way in GILGAMESH.

Say, could we start shopping around for a better word than "groovy"?

{(Actually, what the world needs now is fewer reactionaries and fewer congenital cynics. Where's your sense of humor, man? I spin out a line like "...Carol's ten minute testimony and summation to the jury..." and you reel back aghast, crying, "Ten minutes of supplication, indeed!"

{(As for Wuthering Heights, go back and read that section again too: I said in the best black and white that Ace's Xerox machine is capable of, "I don't mean she explained it in terms of women's lib," and here you are assuming that she did. Some days there's just no talking to you. What we actually discussed the book in terms of was art, you should pardon the expression, and when Joanna sidetracked to make that observation about Heathcliff being the only example she could think of where a woman writer had used a male character as an elemental symbol, it was strictly in passing. I sidetracked a lot longer myself telling her about the elements of the novel that were direct reflections of the Bronte family's own history.

{(But you're right, I didn't do Joanna justice by just summarizing things she said. I wanted to repeat a marvelously illustrative anecdote she told about male attitudes among the faculty at Cornell, but I forgot the details of the dirty joke that started it all. She was having lunch in the cafeteria with various male types, one of whom told this dirty joke which, like lots of dirty jokes, revolved around the assumption that women are empty-headed unpersons good only for screwing. Joanna got bugged and left the table. Next day the guy who'd told the story ran into her and said, "I'm sorry we upset you. Come join us today and I'll promise not to use dirty words."

{(A better word than "groovy"? Yeah, that would be cool.)}



Thurs., Jan. 21, 1971 San Francisco Chronicle

# Science Fiction Star



CHELSEA QUINN YARBRO  
"The characters stand on my brain"



By Ruthe Stein

LIKE DEALING cards in Vegas or moving furniture, writing science fiction used to be something that men did.

But that's all changing, says Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, newly elected secretary of the Science Fiction Writers of America and the author of more than 30 short stories and two novels in the process.

"Twelve percent of SFWA's members are women, and the number is on the increase," she says optimistically.

It used to be that the best way for a woman writer to get something published was to write it under a man's name. It was only after much prodding from her fellow female writers ("We stick together") that V. N. McIntire owned up to being Vonda McIntire.

When Anne McCaffrey became the first woman to receive the science fiction Hugo in 1968, she had not even prepared a speech, because she was convinced that it was "a man's award," recalls Mrs. Yarbro.

In the past, women didn't read science fiction, Mrs. Yarbro believes, and says from experience, "You can't write it unless you read it." An avid reader since age eight, her Albany home is filled with thousands of books.

One reason women weren't attracted to science fiction was that there were no female characters in the stories for them to identify with, she feels.

"The women were dehumanized. They were either portrayed as ding-a-lings who went off into a corner and shrieked a lot or as super-masculine and obvious-

ly evil." The latter were always pictured on the cover of science fiction books wearing "brass bras."

But the "rules" for writing science fiction are loosening up, and with this has come more believable female characters.

A few years ago, Mrs. Yarbro wrote a heroine into one of her stories, had second thoughts about it and changed it to a boy. When the story was sold recently, the editor wrote to find out if it would be "all right" to change the boy to a girl.

There has also been less emphasis on gadgetry in science fiction and more concern with developing the story, according to Mrs. Yarbro, who feels this

will appeal to women.

With obvious delight, she notes that science fiction is more popular than ever, pointing out the increasing number of science fiction shelves in book stores.

Much of the recent credit for "turning people on to science fiction" goes to the television show "Star Trek" and to films like "2001: A Space Odyssey."

"They let people see that science fiction is more than just mad scientists and monsters," she says.

Mrs. Yarbro's career began three years ago when, after years of writing plays and short stories for general magazines, she got a note from an editor saying they didn't print science fiction. "I realized that

was what I had been writing all along."

Like most budding writers in this field, Mrs. Yarbro is all too aware that one does not live by writing science fiction alone. Until she was "a victim of the recession," she had been working full-time as a statistical map maker. Her husband is an artist and inventor.

It was through her map making work that she first became concerned with ecology and "the ways man is abusing the land," a topic she has written about at length in her stories.

One of them — "Frogpond" about a man who, while running away from the highway patrol, comes upon a town that is dying off from pollution — was refused "across the board" when she first submitted it to magazines a couple of years ago. Now that ecology has become "fashionable," however, her story was accepted within two weeks.

How does Mrs. Yarbro get ideas for her stories? "The characters stand on my brain and pound for attention," she says. The problems arise when "they don't come equipped with a story."

