

kyben six





Dan Osterman

KYBEN O

is edited and published by Jeff Smith/4102-301 Potter Street/Baltimore MD 21229. Single-issue price is 35¢, subscription is 3/\$1.00. Back issues available at the same price are 1,2,4 and 5. Australian agent is Paul Anderson/21 Mulga Road/Hawthorndene, S.A. 5051. Contents copyright © 1974 by Jeffrey D. Smith; all rights returned to the contributors. The covers are by Dan Osterman, interiors by Paula Marmor, Ron Miller, Grant Canfield and Bob Smith. This is the January 1974 issue and is Phantasmicom Press Publication #27.

DEADLY LOTTER

MICHAEL KALEN SMITH 10/2/73
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I, too, am a devoted book freak; in fact, I make my so-called living as Assistant Head of a branch library in Dallas. I've worked on and off in bookstores, too, and there's considerable overlap in the clientele--like the LOL looking for "that new mystery, you know, dear, the one with the orange cover." Summer before my junior year in high school (back in 1960 this was, before the world changed) I wandered into a newly-opened small bookstore in a shopping center and found a rather elderly gentleman unpacking books and trying to figure out an invoice; he looked so harassed that I stayed all afternoon helping him to get set up. I stayed on for almost a year as a semi-manager, under Mr. Higgins (whose first name I never did discover). Did a hitch in a Doubleday store in San Francisco while I was in college, but the manager was neurotically pro-censorship and refused to carry anything "pornographic"--like Henry Miller or Allen Ginsburg. He also didn't like science fiction ("juvenile junk").

Ellison was also at Southwesterncon in Dallas this summer, the first time I've seen him up close. He read "Catman" to us, the ultimate sex story, which comes out in an anthology sometime this fall, I think. It was 50,000 solid words and when he finished he was dripping with sweat and his voice was nearly gone. But the next day, voice or no voice, he took over the auction for awhile ("...moving right along..."). Offutt was the Toastmaster, and I admit to disappointment: he's not nearly as good a speaker as he is a writer, and he never seemed quite sure what it was he was supposed to be doing. On the other hand, Dave Gerrold was a pure delight to talk with, like wise Burne Hogarth. Ellison must carry a print of "Demon with a Glass Hand" around in the trunk of his car, because he showed it in Dallas, too, with running commentary.

I experienced TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE ("read" seems too tame a

word) a few weeks ago and I can't say I was terribly impressed. I approached it with some suspicion after his last fiasco (which was bad), and while some parts--like the part about the Naval Academy--were pretty good, all the inbetween stuff about Lazarus himself (who has always been one of my favorite characters) was downright lousy. The development of Lazarus' characterization in METHUSELAN'S CHILDREN was ever so much better. Tight continuity was once the hallmark of a Heinlein novel; what happened? One gets the impression that Heinlein doesn't really care about writing fiction anymore; his writing these days is just fantasy-fulfillment (with Laz Long as a schizophrenic version of all the things he would have liked to be) with an increasingly strident political message for icing. It's all very sad. (S(TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE was a pretty bad novel, but the three novelettes inside--particularly the final section--made it for me the best Heinlein book in a looong time.)S)

I was most impressed with Tiptree's lengthy communication--be good to him and keep his letters coming. It's strange: I've read a couple of his stories and I guess I unconsciously assumed he was around 32 or 34. But his letter sounds like he's been around longer than that--or maybe I was right the first time and he's just led an uncommonly full life.

From some of the locs in KYBEN 4, I gather you had some unkind things to say about LA....Well, that's okay: I spent a good deal of time in the Bay Area and farther north, and it seemed to be the prevalent opinion thereabouts that "California" starts at Monterey Bay and goes north; everything to the south is a mistake, a sport of misguided evolution. Southern California seems resigned to an eventual really massive earthquake; northern California can hardly wait--they have plans to turn LA into a nice, 600-mile beach. But what are you, a denizen of Boswash, doing making nasty remarks about LA? I wouldn't live east of the Mississippi again for all the parking lots in New Jersey. Not that I have much use for Texas, either. Portland, Oregon: now there's a nice town. Or Vancouver, B.C.

12/29/73

Ever see THE PRESIDENT'S ANALYST (with James Coburn)? The thesis being that the Phone Company is actually running the world, the major governments being merely its puppets. Actually, I wonder if FPC isn't more inhumanly malevolent. What better modus operandi for a gradual invasion of the earth than to tie it up with telephone lines and coaxial cable? Then, when the big moment comes, they simply switch everyone's number around; maybe your experience was an experiment on their part. The few times I've gotten a consistently wrong number calling me (i.e., not pilot error), I dumped them by answering the phone the second and etc. times with: "Good morning, Federal Bureau of Investigation." Usually works. (S(I suppose I should mention my second phone foul-up. One day my brother called me. He said he hadn't been able to get through and had had the operator connect us. We talked, and then he hung up. I decided to try and call out, and have whoever I reached (I think I was going to call my grandmother) try and call me back. I picked up the phone. No dial tone. Then a voice. "Hello?" "Randy?" I said. We could not break the connection. When I went down to a neighbor's phone to report the trouble, the operator I called said, very impatiently, as if I were a slow child, "It's your area where all the phones are out." I hadn't known there was any area where there was phone trouble, but eventually I did get a dial tone again.)S)

Re Jeff Clark's narrow-eyed observation about NY being "one of the only" cities where you don't need a car. As an ex-Californian (that is to say "San Franciscan"), I consider this a base slander! San Francisco, because of the compactness forced on it by geography (it's a peninsula), has one of the best public transport systems around--not even counting the new subway, which I've never ridden. You're never more than a block from either a cable car, a trolley car, a trolley bus, or a regular bus. And a cable car is a heck of a lot more fun than the BMT. Now, Dallas: there's a town that's going to be in real trouble if the energy shortage gets any worse. Like most cities on the prairie, it's grown radially, and now has a radius of about 60 miles, including the immediate suburbs into which Dallas imperceptibly fades. Not nearly enough radial bus lines and virtually no cross-town buses. Of course, in Texas, everyone simply assumes you have a car.... (S(Baltimore's transit system could use some improvement, but on the whole it's serviceable. All we have is a bus line, but it covers the city pretty well--Ann and I live on two lines here where we are. Plans are being formulized to extend a bus line out to the county college where I work, but when I thought about it, I realized that the extra zone fares they charge for going into the county would mean it would still be cheaper for me to drive. Of course, if gasoline gets much higher (last time I paid 51¢ a gallon...that was on 1/5/74) that may change.)S)

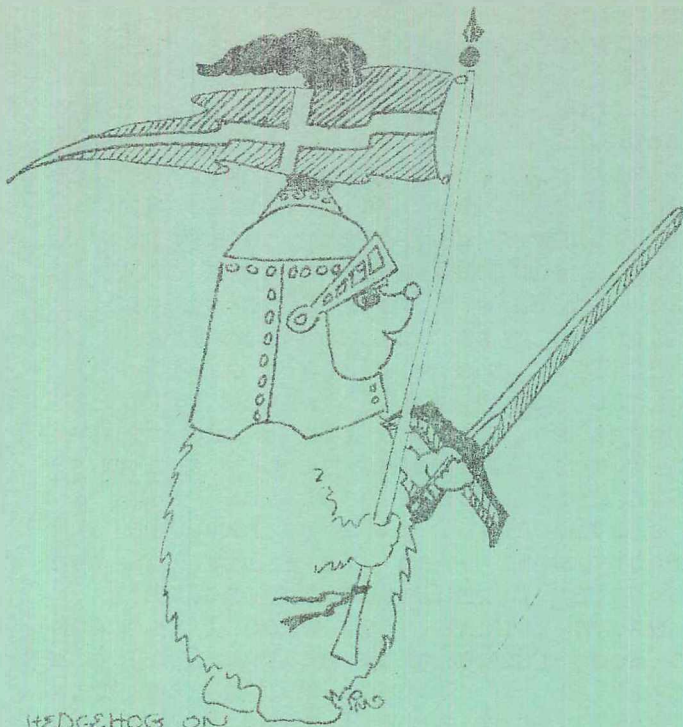
DENIS QUANE 10/14/73
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In KYBEN 4, your accounts of the various conventions were fascinating. Con reports always fascinate me, probably because I've never attended one. I'm almost afraid to do so now; no real con could live up to the expectations I've built up.

My comments on the Tiptree article in my last letter apply equally to the one in #4. I hope you can keep printing his stuff. As to Schweitzer's article (?) in #5, I've said enough on that subject already.

Since Paula Whozis from MIT impressed you as a pest, I'd hate to seem allied with her. However, if you read TITLE you probably already know my views re ANALOG. I've been an ASF reader twenty-three years now, and there have been periods when I've read little else in the way of science fiction. But for most of that time, this has not been true. Most of the ANALOG-readers of my acquaintance do read other science fiction. Perhaps not much of the other magazines, but their paperback reading is not confined to ANALOG-type stories or authors. I know circulation figures don't always prove much, due to the distribution problem--but might it not be significant that ANALOG has the highest proportion of subscribers among its readership are regular readers, not just casual readers attracted by the fact that its covers are more attractive, or it is more likely to be found on airport newsstands than the other magazines. (S(That's my point, too--people either read ANALOG, or they read science fiction. Actually, believe it or not, from 1965-1969 I was an ANALOG subscriber, and read little else in the magazines. But I can't say I read only ANALOG, because that only took a week out of the month. --My tastes have changed.)S)

Your comments on the Hugo awards in #5 indicate that our tastes



HEDGEHOG ON
CRUSADE

in science fiction are probably divergent--if you haven't already realized that from the remarks above. All of the Hugo winners, both fan and pro, were either my first or second choices, with the exception of "The Meeting," and in Drama, where I didn't vote. I suppose on that basis I ought to be remarking on the rare perception shown by the fans--but there is one respect I tend to agree with you, that it comes down to a popularity contest. What else could it ever be? In one respect, however, your grouching about that fact is a little overdone. Does anyone ever vote for any nominee other than the one he considers best? Perhaps you have given more attention to literary standards than the average fan, but if that line of reasoning is carried to its logical conclusion, then the Hugo electors would be limited to a committee of professional critics and Professors of Literature. I'm sure that they would be able to "prove" that their standards and critical perception were superior to your amateur judgements, but would the results be any better than the present system? Most of the Hugo awardees, at least in the novel category, have stood the test of time. And that test is the only way you will ever get away from the "popularity contest."

Your book reviews are a feature you should continue in KYBEN. I too enjoyed THE CRYSTAL CAVE, which I read two years ago, while on a trip to Europe, and THE HOLLOW HILLS, read this summer. Before reading the second I reread the first, and this time it impressed me as slow reading, which it had not the first time around. After that THE HOLLOW HILLS impressed me as being even slower, but I still enjoyed it, and hope that there is another volume, at least. (S(According to a letter quoted in the December FANTASIAE, no sequel is currently planned, but the possibility is open for the years ahead.)S) Somewhat later I read a Penguin paperback (a rather thick one) called ARTHUR'S BRITAIN, concerning fifth century archaeology, and was somewhat surprised about how much is actually known about the period.

Have read two of the Mitch Tobin novels, and intend to get a-round to reading the rest when I get the chance. Had not known that

Westlake was "Tucker Coe." I've enjoyed most of what I've read by Westlake--my favorite is A SPY IN THE OINTMENT--so I suppose it is not surprising that I liked the Mitch Tobin novels, even if I had not recognized the style.

11/10/73

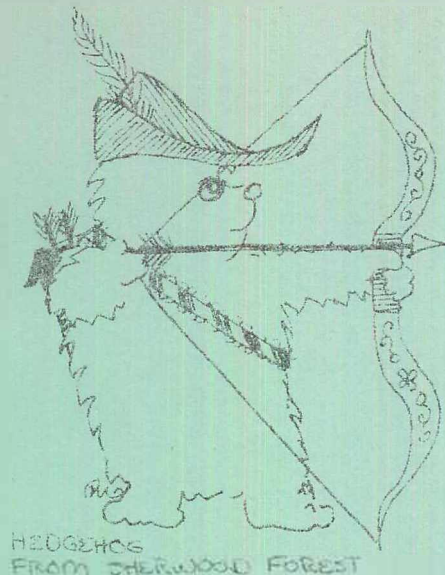
About the Tiptree article in KYBEN 1--the first few sentences had me almost boiling. He appears to be making it a crime to be old (six times repeated in twelve lines, not even including geriatric), fat and a tourist. Granted, being fat is a crime, although one to which I must plead guilty, but no one can help getting old--it's an inescapable part of the human condition--unless Tiptree is actually advocating compulsory suicide at age...what age? Sixty? Forty-five? Thirty?

And as for being a tourist, isn't that what he is himself?

A little further on, it would appear that he excludes the tough, active, non-tourist, local old people from his indictment. OK--but it isn't always that easy, even for tough, outdoors types to avoid the infirmities of age. The spirit may be willing but the flesh fails anyway. And it's even more difficult for sedentary types--say college professors or writers.

But after getting through the attitude barrier of the first two paragraphs, the excellent Tiptree writing comes through again. This was even better than the Mexican reports in KYBEN 3 & 4. The picture of the glacier--that really comes through clear. (It is noticed that he admits to being a tourist himself after all.) If I could say how he does it--well, I've never claimed to be a critic.

The section on pain and heroism--wonderful writing. And it would appear to be an important insight. I'll never again be able to read an Alaiester McLean novel without thinking of Tiptree. It makes me determined to give his fiction another try. But, from the



few stories of his that I've read so far, he seems determined to keep pounding home how fragile we are--physically, but even more so psychologically and socially. And from his analysis here, he would appear to be admitting that the last thing we need is reminders of that fact.

With regard to Shifran's analysis of the parallel world possibility--it depends on three things being true:

1. There are an infinite number of parallel worlds.
2. Destroying alternate worlds is possible--physically possible, that is.
3. There is a way to get to a world having these capabilities from the starting conditions.

Point 1) should be true, if all decisions--not just "decisive" ones, can go either way. In fact, with the indeterminacy built into quantum mechanics, branch points should not depend on human or even animal action. With an infinite number of branch points, then there would in fact be an infinite number of parallel worlds, and it would be true that "whatever can exist (see point two), does"--provided that there is a way to get there. If there is any chain of alternative possibilities that would lead from the initial state of the Universe to a parallel universe with the capabilities of destroying other universes, then such a parallel world will exist--and there will be a further branch point where this possibility will be utilized.

So, since that hasn't happened, either

- a) there are no parallel universes, or
- b) there is no way one parallel universe might destroy another, or
- c) there is no chain of possible alternatives which could lead to the inhabitants of one universe learning how to destroy another parallel universe, or
- d) there is such a chain of possible alternatives, but it takes more than 17 billion years to work itself out (or whatever the age of the universe comes to--the astronomers keep changing their estimates).

You can take your choice--personally I prefer a), but I'll be damned if I know how to go about proving it.

GRANT CANFIELD 10/6/73
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The most interesting thing, to me, in the recent issue was the "Book Reports." I was especially intrigued to discover that we have very similar tastes in mystery reading. I started into mysteries just two years or so ago, starting with the Marlowe series by Raymond Chandler, recently republished as a series by Ballantine. After Chandler I read all of Dashiell Hammett. Suddenly I found myself with nothing left. I had started with the two absolute tops in the mystery field, it seemed. There was nothing left but the dregs.

Not entirely true, of course. I soon discovered Ross MacDonald and read through the entire Lew Archer series. And I discovered Donald Westlake and read everything I could find by him (my favorites are GOD SAVE THE MARK, THE HOT ROCK and a strange little early novel called KILLY). I also read some of his non-mysteries, those that I could find, like UP YOUR BANNERS, a comic tale of interracial romance; ADIOS, SCHEHEREZADE!, in which a porno author goes bananas; and I GAVE AT THE OFFICE, a comic tale of a Caribbean revolution sponsored by American television.

I never knew that Westlake had written in the hardboiled manner as Tucker Coe. This is important and relevant news to me! Monday I will begin checking the used bookstores near my office for Tucker Coe mysteries. Many thanks for opening up a new vein of mystery reading for me!

I also love the police procedurals. The 87th Precinct novels of "Ed McBain" are my favorites. I have to disagree with you about reading them one after another, however. Maybe I'm just a sucker for the series, but I don't find that they suffer at all by being read in volume like that. There have been a lot of 87th Precinct novels, you know, but it's hard to find some of the old ones. Recent novels in the series (FUZZ, HAIL HAIL THE GANG'S ALL HERE, JIGSAW, SHOTGUN, SADIE WHEN SHE DIED, etc.) are easy to find, but you have to

hang out in some pretty decent used bookstores to find THE CON MAN, HE WHO HESITATES and so forth. (S(Signet appears to have embarked on a campaign to republish all the early ones.)S)

I love the Martin Beck novels by what's-his-face-and-whoosit, too. I agree that it's sometimes pretty difficult to get past the "foreignness" of the settings, but what the hell. Incidentally, THE LAUGHING POLICEMAN will appear on your silver screen pretty soon, starring Walter Matthau as Beck. The movie was filmed in San Francisco, and we got to see the busload of "murdered" people. Such a thrill.

BARRY GILLAM 10/25/73
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I also like Sjowall and Wahloo. I've only read two: THE ABOMINABLE MAN and THE LAUGHING POLICEMAN. Their books have a fascinating grayness to them. They dispense with dramatic clues and instead offer the slow accretion of evidence. Their police are bureaucrats, but bureaucrats with a difference: Their constituents are not voters but criminals. Their reading matter is not the key to charisma but abnormal psychology.

I think the "barrier" you feel is part of the authors' intention. They feel that the science of deduction is bunk: most minds don't work that way. In their view the policeman in his habitual, everyday behavior is not so different from the criminal with his "M.O." The novels convey the weary, uninflected life of Beck and his city--as if they were in an almost constant meteorological depression.

You might be interested to know that a movie has been made of THE LAUGHING POLICEMAN with Walter Matthau as Martin Beck. It was shot in San Francisco this past spring and is now being prepared for release. Directed by Stuart Rosenberg, best known for the junk masterpiece, COOL HAND LUKE. Matthau is one of the few actors who might pull it off, but I doubt Rosenberg will let him. (S(People who have seen the movie have been unstinting in their lack of praise. I'll probably go see it when it reaches Baltimore, but I'm not expecting much. These are very much Swedish books, it is a necessary part of them that they be Swedish, and I don't see how anyone can expect them to work transplanted in San Francisco. ## Briefly, on the subject of movies, I urge everyone to see DON'T LOOK NOW and SLEEPER. If a psychic/gothic/thriller can be considered science-fiction/fantasy, DON'T LOOK NOW is my Hugo choice.)S)



HEDGICORN

MIKE GLICKSOHN 11/4/73
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Canada

The new KYBEN arrived a couple of days ago, all battered and dog-eared, and has been enjoyed in between instant replays of the NFL highlights today. It is a lightweight issue (S(You think last issue was lightweight?)S), really, and doesn't call forth much comment from me, but I wanted to be sure you had my new address.

I liked the introductory half page to maximize the Canfield cartoon; nicely handled. (S(How about my brilliant display of Paula Marmor's cartoons this issue? Man, I'm really developing some class, aren't I?)S) My own preference is for blue paper over green, since I find it more relaxing to read and better for reducing see-through. I'm also surprised at the cost of your paper. I've recently gotten a catalog from Walters, the mail-order supply house, and will try to order some Twiltone from them. At just over a dollar a ream, it's bound to be cheaper than the heavy expensive stuff I'm using now, even after import duty and taxes. They also have cheap ink, stencils, stylii, shading plates, etc. No faned can afford not to at least know about them. (S(Well, now I know about them. I wonder what their address is? ## I cannot use Twiltone. I tried once, on PHANTASMICOM 5. The paper absorbed too much of my ink--I did a very poor job on some very fine Tim Kirk illustrations--and also did not feed well on my old, cantankerous, reconditioned Speed-O-Print. It was a total disaster. Except for KYBEN 2, in which a page or two might be Twiltone because I used up the rest of what I had left from PhCOM 5, I've used nothing but the more expensive stuff, out of necessity. ## The most attractive mimeo paper I ever saw was a brown Twiltone. I had an Accounting course syllabus printed on it when I was a student here at CCC, and I've never seen it since.)S)

ENERGUMEN beating out LOCUS was the real surprise to me, too! Thanks for the nice words. As for you being out of step with fan-nish tastes, you must remember that the Hugos rarely reflect the tastes of fandom itself, at least not of that group of fans most active in the production of fanzines. Most of the voters would be just names to you and I; completely unknown to active fanzine fans, yet they still vote a full Hugo ballot. That's why ANALOG-type people do so well.

Jay told us the whole story of returning the Haldebus from Toronto, including various run-ins with law enforcement officers, mechanical difficulties, and the calming influence of a Pure Sweet Femmefan. The whole saga is remarkably funny, although it might not have been to those living through it. (S(I very much regret

that Jay and Alice are no longer active in fanzine fandom. I would have loved to have seen the whole thing written up.)S)

The best part of Darrell's piece was the footnote section, which by being intentionally pointless was at least amusing. Your use of the Steffan illo was also imaginative. (S(I think I was right in recognizing that the drawing belonged with the article, but I sure wasn't right in doing it the way I did. I don't know how that should have been laid out, but certainly not the way I did it.)S)

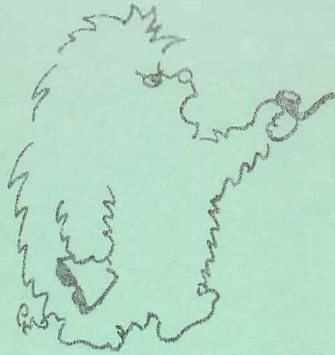
It depresses me to see the number of books you've read recently and realize how very few I've been able to read. I just don't seem to have time anymore. I ought to be writing fanzine reviews for Glycer, but I've been telling myself that for three weeks now...

Oh well, fannish enthusiasm is ephemeral at best, and rekindles as easily as it splutters out.

DARRELL SCHWEITZER 10/7/73
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The point I was making in that letter you printed in the new KYBEN is that if you put off writing you'll never get anything done. The Clarion people insist that you should write every day. Fiction, that is, reviews, LoCs and other fanzine material not counted. How often do you sit down and write fiction? If you turn out a page of a novel then let it sit for months, chances are you will never finish it. I don't believe you will ever finish your novel (S(What novel? I'm not attempting to pretend that I'll ever write any more of that fragment from a couple issues ago. I don't even know what it's about.)S) any more than I do that Don Keller will ever do VALAN AND ISHURTI, which he wrote four pages of over a year ago. I'd be quite surprised to see the manuscripts to either. I don't think either of you will ever become published writers at this rate. For one thing you won't have the technical skill in writing required to sell your work. Don, judging from the two stories he had in PhCOM and the novel fragment, may become a quite good writer thirty stories from now. The same goes for you. If it takes you the rest of your life to get that experience, you may make your first sale at the age of ninety. Or you could do it at twenty-five if you worked at it.

Ted sturgeon advised all the Clarionites to set regular writing hours, such as, say, 7-9 PM every night. Write at that time con-



HEDGEHOG WITH A
HARLAN ELLISON COMPLEX

stantly until it becomes an ingrained habit, and you feel guilty when you miss a session. The serious writer has withdrawal symptoms when taken away from his typewriter.

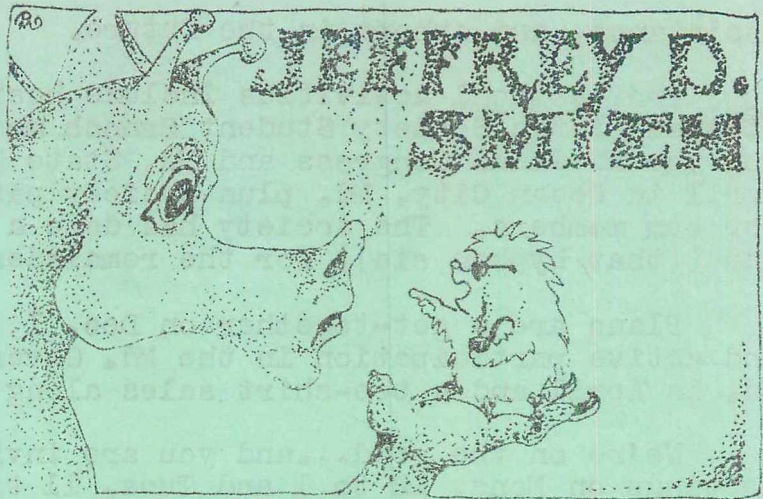
You are very right, however, when you say that I tend to write more about what I have read than what I have seen. To some extent this is necessary in fantasy, since one is writing about things no one has seen (or in historical fiction things no living person has seen), but still my stories lack a certain lifelike quality for this reason. It is what is holding me back right now. The conclusion of the Clarion people was that I was a good literary technician but rather weak on content. Possibly this is due to the fact that I haven't lived enough yet. I have concluded that a true writer must be utterly depraved, and although the Infamous Philcon Orgy helped and the Infamous Clarion Orgy helped even more, I have a long way to go. In the course of several stories of mine that were workshopped it came out that I did not take drugs, visit brothels or murder people regularly. So my stories about such things lacked reality.

Basically what I am doing is writing with other peoples' styles. In other words my fiction is derivative because I haven't found my own voice. I say what I want to say, but it sounds as if someone else has said it. And to some extent I am held back by the fact that I haven't discovered any profound truths lately, or even been touched by the Hand of God. So, you see, I really can't make any Deep Incisions into the Human Condition.

Yet.

However, it certainly wouldn't help if I stopped writing. What I'm writing now are basically entertainments rather than Good Literature. If that's all I can do that's what I will do. Many people make a career out of it. It doesn't necessarily mean hackwork either, because as I see it hackwork is a matter of motivation. If you sit down and say, "Editor X buys this kind of story," then write that kind of story deliberately, it is hackwork. If you write a story and then look around and see that Editor X buys that kind of thing, it's just good marketing. It's rather dangerous to call anyone a hack, save perhaps for people who write to order (like movie novelists), because you don't know why he wrote what he wrote. There's always the possibility that Shakespeare wrote entirely for money. Yes, the greatest author in our literature might have been a gold-grubbing hack. That doesn't change the quality of his writing. Usually we think of hack writing as bad writing, and Art as good writing, but it doesn't necessarily follow.

I'm not going to turn hack. I don't intend to write to anybody-



NAMELESS NATTERINGS

THE RED & BLACK

That is the title of Catonsville Community College's student newspaper, and I mention it here because of my firm belief that it is the worst college newspaper in the world. I don't know quite how to describe it; I can tell you they run stories twice in the same issue, and that Irwin Koch could better the layout with his eyes closed. What I decided I wanted to do was print, in toto and verbatim, one article from the December 12, 1973 issue. I recommend that you get together with friends and have dramatic reading sessions with it. It's fun.

RECREATE ON A FULL TIME BASIS

Sound nice? With the decrease of the work hours in a week. There has many more hours available for leisure activities. Instead of working from 8 to 4, the trend is becoming for 8 to 2. More time to do things; to go places. But won't you get tired of doing the same old things day in and day out? Will you be able to find new and challenging things to do? Places to go? Or does the "beeb tube" still motivate you?

On this campus there is a major for people concerning with educating the public about the use of their leisure time. These students are learning new innovative programs, trends in recreation, program planning and working with special populations. These students are learning to help you, prospective recreators, too make good use of your free time.

Along with the classes, there is a society of interested students here of entitled C.C.C. Recreation Society. The society strives to cover many areas in the total recreation picture to aid in the fulfillment of its participants. Areas covered include Social, Service and Professionalism. The Society consists of a bunch of fun-loving kids; there a great social program happens. A get together is planned on Dec. 1, having some fun things as canoeing, cookout, hiking and the such at a large farm-type area in Westminster. There has been dances parties, games outdoor activities and many other fun times for the Society's participants. Service projects include arts & crafts hour for special and autistic children visiting the college on Nov. 20 student directory for telephoning

assistance, and others in the future.

Professional activities include hosting the first Md. Recreation and Parks Society Student Branch meeting on Nov. 7 and attending the National Congress and Md. State Conference, to be held in April in Ocean City, Md. plus society patches for identity purposes for our members. The society has done a lot but has much more planned ((that hyphen sic)) for the remainder of this semester.

Plans are a get-together on Dec. 1, a Square dance on Friday 14 and active participation in the Md. Governors Conference in O.C., Md. in April and a tee-shirt sales along the way!

We're on the road...and you are invited to join in...Business meetings on Mons. 12 to 1 and Tues. 11 to 12.

Come find out what it's all about in the field of Recreation.

And actually it's worse than that, as the typography is reminiscent of AMAZING and FANTASTIC in its worst period, a couple or three years back. Also, do take note of the upcoming December 1st events listed in the December 12th paper.

That's awful.

YULETIDE

I love Christmas. That's something I inherited from my mother. She is Christmas's biggest fan; there's nothing she'd rather do than give Christmas presents. The money outlay is tremendous, but if she can't spend a small fortune she's unhappy. And, of course, it's rubbed off on the rest of us.

Naturally, so far Ann and I haven't the money to splurge like my parents do, but we spent \$250 on presents this year. That's a pretty fair amount.

I am not a believer in Christian mythology. I personally celebrate the birth of Jesus, not the birth of Christ. But that is irrelevant. Our celebration is materialistic anyway, and that's what we intend it to be. No apologies. Christmas is an orgy of gift-giving and hopefully happiness.

I spent some time this year going over Great Christmases I Have Known, for some reason. Let's see...there was the year I found a jockstrap under the tree...oh well, there must be more interesting memories...How about the year my brother Randy and I laid in our beds all night talking about the strange things we were seeing? "I see a kangaroo with a rabbit's head." "No, that's a rabbit with a kangaroo's body." "No, that's a kangaroo with a rabbit's head. If it were a rabbit with a kangaroo's body it would be smaller." Hours of this drivel, unable to sleep on Christmas Eve.

The classic Christmas story in our house is the present Randy gave me one year. I don't know how old we were, but probably in the vicinity of nine for him and thirteen for me. I opened the box and inside was a cheap little ball-point pen. "Do you like it?" he

asked, pleased with himself; "I know you like to write and draw a lot, and when I saw that I thought I'd get it for you." "Yeah, Randy, it's nice. Thanks a lot." "And," he continued, "I got a real bargain. It was only ten cents."

The ten-cent pen has become a legend. This year he tried to repeat it, but because of inflation the pen cost him 12¢. (He really embarrassed us last year. Last year we had very little money and had to pretty much consider \$5 as an upper limit on all gifts, so we got him an 8-track tape. I expected something similar in return, as we kids never really spent a lot of money on each other. He got us a lamp-table. Ouch. So this year we went hog-wild and bought him a set of stereo headphones--and he said he felt bad because he "only" got us a bathroom towel/rug set.)

Ah, the hours we spent waiting for our grandparents to arrive. When you wake up at 5:30 and know you have to wait until 7 or 7:30... it's sheer agony. But finally Nana, Pop-pop and Mother Grace showed up and everything was right with the world.

Now the foot is in the other shoe. This year my grandfather suddenly died, and after a three-month illness my great-grandmother died the week before Christmas. So my grandmother stayed with my parents the night before, and everyone waited for Ann and myself to get there.

Our Christmases are hectic. On Christmas Eve we stop over my parents', drop off the presents, stay a while, and then go over to Ann's family around eleven. We go with them to Midnight Mass, and after that distribute presents. About three o'clock we go up to bed in Ann's old room. And we have to be at my parents', on the other side of town, by eight.

This year I forgot to wind the alarm clock, so Ann's mother awakened us at about quarter after seven. I flew across the city. I had practically the only car on the road, and I just took off. Five or ten after eight I pulled into the driveway. Matt, my five-year-old brother, was at the door, yelling, "They're here! They made it!"

What a haul we brought home, too. A wheeled utility table, a deepfry cooker, several brownstone large bowls and plates (my mother



did some of her Christmas shopping at the A&P this year); I got a new coat, headphones, an AM/FM clock radio, shoes&slippers&shirts&pants&gloves&wallets (3); Ann got a razor with lots of attachments for manicures and massages and such, a watch, a cookbook, lots of clothes; three games (MILLES BORNES, ECOLOGY, BACKGAMMON); six records. (Don Keller and I always exchange records for birthdays and Christmas. This year I gave him the new Santana, WELCOME. He gave me the new Yes, TALES FROM TOPOGRAPHIC OCEANS. I practically fell over when I saw what it was, because I wasn't expecting it for another month or two. Talk about surprised! I was surprised by a couple things this year--like the new clock-radio Ann gave me; my old one was falling to pieces, but I was able to use it and I didn't expect a replacement. But the Yes album I didn't even know yet existed.)

Can you believe all that stuff? I sometimes think my mother is a crazy person. That's ridiculous for Christmas-giving.

But I love it, and I wouldn't want it any other way.

PHILCON 1973

This year's was probably the most unusual I have yet spent. This year I was a...huckster.

I had been under the impression that this year would be somewhat similar to last year, in that our group would consist of a dozen or so people. Instead, it was three. Jeff Clark has moved to California, Don Keller to Philadelphia, and several others just didn't come. I went, Ann went, and Sue Wheeler went. (Incredibly, Saturday evening Pat Sullivan and Charlie Hopwood showed up for about four or five hours--two of them devoted to dinner--and then drove the 100 miles back to Baltimore. No way I'd do that!)



I cleaned out the closet and had a grand total of five boxes of books, magazines, comics and fanzines. As this was a clearing-out operation, I arbitrarily decided that everything would be a quarter. Everything. Jim Freund said, "Okay, I'll take those hardbacks." So I gave them to him. He couldn't believe I was serious. It was a pretty good deal on a lot of things. NEW WORLDS. VISION OF TOMORROW. Book Club editions. What can you lose for a quarter?

The best-selling prozine was ANALOG. This didn't really surprise me too much, since I feel that there are ANALOG fans and there are science fiction fans, and while they overlap to a fair extent they are nonetheless separate. I was able to sell most of my awful Charles Neutzel novels, and some of my old Ayn Rand and Gore Vidal. Huckstering was a fun thing to do, and I enjoyed it, but I wouldn't want to make a career out of it. Once every five

years or so...

I was the third table on the right. David Schweitzer had the second, and the NEW LIBERTARIAN NOTES or whatever had the first. When Jim Freund went dashing up to his room to get his list of books, he stopped to tell someone about the bargain table. "It's just to the right of the Libertarians," quoth he; to which the other replied: "Nothing is to the right of the Libertarians."

We sold about \$75 worth of stuff, not a fortune but enough to pay for the cen. Not bad. The Schweitzers informed me that I'd never be a good huckster, but then I don't want to be.

--No mention of Philcen 1973 is complete without a word or two on the hotel it was held in. It is called the Philadelphia Marriott Motor Hotel, despite the fact that it is not in Philadelphia. (I'm not certain but I believe it is in Bryn Mawr.) It is ...shall we say huge? There were at least four conventions and a football team in there while we were there. Ten wings are devoted to rooms, and getting from one wing to another could be quite traumatic. The trick is to always travel on the second floor, as that is the only one of the six floors that goes to all ten wings. Take the second floor and follow the arrows to your room, my son; nuthin else'll do.

So actually, once we know the plan, it wasn't too bad. But it was a pretty ridiculous place, and I don't look forward to the opportunity to go back.

For one thing, there's no place in or anywhere near the hotel with decent food and decent prices. Oh, for even a MacDonal'd's!

BITTERSWEET REVENGE

I assume that all of you, since you read this publication so avidly, are tremendously interested in me as a human being and hunger for more information about me. This being so, let me tell you about a recent television program.

It was called THE GIRL MOST LIKELY TO... and it was horrible. The first half was devastatingly good, about an ugly girl who is humiliated by everyone she meets. I imagine this brought back unpleasant memories for just about everyone who saw it. It was very well-done, very sad. Then the girl was in a car accident and when she came out of the hospital after plastic surgery she was beautiful. She set out to seek revenge on all those who had humiliated her.

I thought I was going to like this. Revenge can be a lot of fun. I must admit to having a bit of a sadistic streak--not in the direction of whips and boots, but in the enjoyment of others' discomfort. (To those who believe in astrology I can get away with this by blaming it on being a Scorpio.) I was looking forward to seeing the tables turned and the humiliators humiliated.

She went out and killed them all.

You, the viewer, were supposed to appreciate this, and cheer and yell "right on!" and glory in her victory; at the end the detec-

tive who catches her marries her.

I was appalled.

If I remember correctly from Sunday School, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" means that no more than an eye for an eye should be exacted as a penalty. And even if that isn't what it was originally supposed to me, that's what it means to me. There is also the matter of repayment with interest, I suppose, but in this case the interest failed to interest me.

Do I sit alone in my outrage? Ann enjoyed the second half. Did any of you see it and remain amused? Am I overreacting?



RECORDS OF THE YEAR

In popular culture everyone is supposed to make lists of the ten best books, movies, plays, records, etc., of the year. I spent a large part of the year reading recent-but-not-current mysteries, probably didn't see ten movies, I'm not a playgoer (probably because of bad eyesight; I like to see things on the Big Screen)--and while I'm not going to attempt to come up with the ten "best" records of the year I would like to mention the ten 1973 records that added the most to my collection.

But it's hard to develop a list of nominees, first off. I bought or otherwise acquired (no, I gave up shoplifting years ago) at least 40 albums last year, but only 20 or so were 1973 releases. A listing of the ten best records I got in 1973 would be half oldies --The Beatles' ABBEY ROAD (well, reacquired; I'd been without it quite a while), David Bowie's SPACE ODDITY (the title cut is the best sf song yet) and three by Traffic: TRAFFIC, JOHN BARLEYCORN MUST DIE and WELCOME TO THE CANTEEN. (I completed my Traffic collection last year.)

9/2

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION/September 1973 -- This is the special Frederik Pohl Issue. His story, "In the Problem Pit," was somewhat disappointing, not the equal of "The Gold at the Starbow's End." It was interesting enough to read, with some fascinating speculations and theories, but the Happy Ending Syndrome brings it down. The other long story is the beginning of F.M. Busby's novel CAGE A MAN. The first paragraph is exquisite, but its tone is not quite kept throughout. A little tightening--say a thousand words, taken from here and there--would have improved the story immensely. The Happy Ending Syndrome fits logically here. The only short story worth reading

JEFF SMITH
BOOK

JEFF SMITH
REPORTS

is the reprint, Ward Moore's "Dominions Beyond." It's a joke, a bit overlong, but the last four pages are great. A disappointing issue--even the Pohl bibliography by Mark Owings seems woefully incomplete.

9/6

THE SYNDIC/C.M. Kornbluth/Berkley (but an old 1965 edition I just got around to reading) -- This is one strange book. For a while I thought maybe it was a literary satire. Then I realized that all these odd things demonstrated not satire, but a total lack of stereotyping. Kornbluth wrote with one eye toward the reader and one toward the rest of the sf field; he took the elements of the sf adventure novel and did new and very interesting things with them. ## THE SYNDIC concerns a Mafia-run country--the Eastern US--and it is a utopia, not a dystopia. Most of the story takes place in the dystopias of the displaced US Government and the Chicago-Mob-run part of America. The plot involves espionage and love. The love part is the only part of the entire book that lacks imagination. Every other aspect shows why most sf writers consider Kornbluth one of the best.

9/7

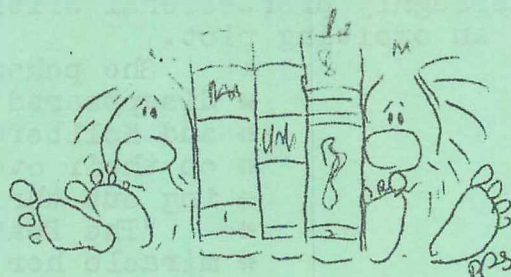
THE THIRTY-FIRST FLOOR/Peter Wahlöö/Knopf -- My big grouse is that the detective in this futuristic mystery is virtually indistinguishable from undistinguished Martin Beck. I know from an earlier novel (A NECESSARY ACTION) that Wahlöö is capable of decent characterization. Otherwise this is a quite interesting book, not wholly successful, showing a society halfway to FAHRENHEIT 451--the printed word has not yet disappeared, but is totally subordinate to the printed picture. Also, the novel contains what may be the strangest mercy killing yet recorded. Weird.

9/10

ISLE OF THE DEAD/Roger Zelazny/Ace -- This is the only Zelazny book so far published in paperback that is currently out of print. Zelazny is one of the big best-selling sf writers, and it's odd this book should be ignored. From a commercial standpoint, not mine. The truth is, when it was published in January 1969, I put it down halfway through, bored stiff. A couple years later I tried it again, and again got to the halfway

point. This time I forced myself to the end. I liked a section here, a page there, a paragraph in between. I can give no reasons; the book just didn't appeal to me. For what it's worth...

TO DIE IN ITALBAR/Roger Zelazny/Doubleday -- A pretty dull book. 9/16
It's written in short sections; the longer of them can be interesting, but the one-pagers don't advance the plot too much. (The plot concerns a one-man plague being searched for by various people for various reasons.) Toward the end it becomes a more continuous narrative and much more interesting, but the final confrontation, between two Pe'ian gods (from ISLE OF THE



DEAD, though this is not a sequel) takes place off-stage--we get a play-by-play description from a telepath. There are some interesting concepts and individual scenes, but the book as a whole is too disjointed.

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE/September 1973 -- I never was one much for detective short stories. They're so often esoteric that I have trouble suspending my disbelief. (In reading science fiction you're supposed to; in reading mysteries it's a surprise when you have to.) For instance: "A Warning to Miss Earth" by Isaac Asimov. A note delivered to the contestants of the Miss Earth Pageant reads, "Woe unto you, Jezebels. Death unto you, Rahab." The solution, determined solely on the basis of that note, is that someone was out to kill Miss Wales, because in the Bible "Rahab is a monster representing the sea, and...the monster is also called leviathan, and ...leviathan is sometimes used as a name for an actual seamonster...the largest that lives." This type of thing doesn't interest me too much at all. Even worse is "Mr. Strang Follows Through" by William Brittain. "T. OMHAF EIL", a dying message, is finally translated as "Tuesday. Old MacDonald Had a Farm" and an incomplete "EIEIO"--thus Timothy MacDonald was the murderer. Fah! But I like the crime stories, so I buy a copy occasionally. This issue Ron Goulart, Robert L. Fish, Ruth Rendell and Edward D. Hoch had decent ones. James Powell had a minor story, but even minor Powell stories are good. (This is a crazy-person type of man whose stories seldom appear outside EQMM. He'd suit well in F&SF. (A good Powell story was in PLAYBOY recently, "The Bee on the Finger." Not the best Powell, but good.)

10/4

TRANSFER TO YESTERDAY/Isidore Haiblum/Ballantine -- The advance publicity Ballantine sent out on this made it sound like a highly interesting time/dimension travel novel, plot-wise. I was looking forward to it. However, it is written atrociously. Ann got to page 21, where an absurd sex scene made her give up. ("Yes, Jimmy. Oh God." "Darling." "Oh, that's so good." "It always is. Always. Because of you." "It's got to be." "Yes." Etc.) I made it to page fifty or so before I gave up

10/6

out of sheer boredom.

10/8 THE FIRE ENGINE THAT DISAPPEARED/Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö/
Pantheon -- Last time I mentioned the first four Martin Beck
mysteries and how much I enjoyed them. This one (1969) is
much better, more fleshed out, richer. The characters are
more completely drawn, the plot-line even more detailed than
before. Although it's still the same drab police procedural
as the earlier books, this novel is a pure joy to read--if
thoroughly professional writing can give you as much pleasure
as an exciting plot.

* She poked her father in the midriff and
* disappeared into her room. When Martin Beck
* and Kollberg came out into the hall to put
* on their overcoats, loud pop-music was pour-
* ing out through her closed door.
* "The Beatles," said Martin Beck. "It's a
* miracle her ears don't drop off."
* "The Rolling Stones," said Kollberg.
* Martin Beck looked at him in surprise.
* "How can you tell the difference?"
* "Oh, there's a great difference," said
* Kollberg, starting down the stairs.
* * * * *

10/17 DYING INSIDE/Robert Silverberg/Ballantine -- This came in the
mail today. I didn't reread it, but I will someday. I've
mentioned it before, but I will again: This is one fine no-
vel. I have two quibbles. One is that it should not have
been set a couple years in the future. The other concerns
tuckerization (the practice of using real people's names on
fictional characters, vis. Wilson Tucker)--in a serious novel
it is mood-shattering to find other people's addresses (in
this case) used in this way. ("35 Pierrepont Street. I've
heard that before...oh, yeah, Terry Carr used to live there.
Probably the "T" in the dedication...." off on a tangent.)
But I loved the book. It concerns a man who can read minds.
He's an obscure person, one whose ability to see other men's
secrets drives him far into himself, shunning unnecessary
contact with people. And then he realizes his power is going,
and he will no longer have the advantage in interpersonal
dealings he always had, he will be on equal footing--except
that for him the footing will be far less steady, far less
sure. And bad as having the power was, not having it will
be worse.

10/19 EXCALIBUR/Sanders Anne Laubenthal/Ballantine -- Not really my
cup of tea. I was hoping that this novel, an Arthurian tale
set in modern times, would involve our twentieth-century cul-
ture. No such luck. It takes place in fantasylands and in
a mansion well isolated from the hustle-bustle of Mobile,
Alabama. However, it is not a bad novel just because it is-
n't what I was looking for. ~~It's a bad novel~~ The
characters are interesting (though not--to me--especially
likeable); the gothic flavor is not unpleasant. But the plot
is too entrenched in legendary for my tastes. Mary Stewart,
in THE CRYSTAL CAVE and THE HOLLOW HILLS, wrote modern narra-
tives based on Arthurian legends. Ms. Laubenthal wrote a

story about the legends. I would recommend the book if you like to go that deeply into such things; EXCALIBUR is not really "light" reading.

HAIL TO THE CHIEF/Ed McBain/Random House -- An 87th Precinct 10/20 mystery, but not at all conforming to the formula I mentioned last time. This is in a way a return to "McBain's" first novel, THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE by Evan Hunter. The kid gangs of the seventies are more "sophisticated" (in the words of the president of the Rebel Yankees) than those of the fifties. Zip guns and car aerials have been replaced by revolvers and hand grenades. This novel is split into two running narratives of the same events, told from the police's point of view and, first person, from the president's. There are still occasional touches of humor, but for the most part the story is pretty grim.

One of the kids on the council, a dope named * Hardy, said he didn't understand why we were * fighting this war to begin with, and I told him * the war wasn't our doing, but that as the most * powerful clique in the neighborhood, if not the * entire city, it was our duty and our responsi- * bility to bring peace, even though we hadn't * started the shooting....I told Hardy the reason * the war hadn't been ended till now was because * I hadn't been president. *

So Hardy, the dope, tells me in front of * everybody that this is my second term as presi- * dent, and if I had all these ideas about ending * the war, why didn't I do it in my first term, * end the war right then and there, without more * bloodshed and killing?...I just reminded him * that the enemy was intransigent, which was why * I had finally decided to take drastic measures. * ...He started to say something else, and Chingo * rapped him right in the mouth, and that was the * end of Hardy's little private protest. * * * * *

TO RIDE PEGASUS/Anne McCaffrey/Ballantine -- "Anne McCaf- 10/25 frey's first novel in two years" is far from the equal of her last two-- RING OF FEAR and DRAGONQUEST. She is not a good writer from a literary standpoint. She can tell a good story, as she showed in her last two, but this time she was not at her best. Like THE SHIP WHO SANG it is a series of novelettes. McCaffrey lacks the discipline to write good short stories, and as individual pieces these were flat and undistinguished. Reading them together improves them considerably. McCaffrey needs a lot of room. ## This one is about those with Talent: teleportation, precognition, telepathy, empathy; their efforts to organize; their efforts to Do Good. The organization attempts fascinated me; the Doing Good less so. ESP-oriented fiction has never been my favorite (I only like mutant fiction less), but I thoroughly enjoyed the sections on precognition. (As precognition and organization were in the early half, particularly the first quarter, I gre progressively less enchanted.)

MURDER AT THE SAVOY/Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö/Pantheon -- 10/26 Yes, indeed. THE FIRE ENGINE THAT DISAPPEARED was not a

fluke. Sjöwall and Wahloo^{***} definitely decided to flesh out their bone-spare stories. MURDER AT THE SAVOY is rich in dry humor and, of course, frustration. Not quite as good as FIRE ENGINE, but still a truly superior work. Try some of these books!

- 10/27 FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION/October 1973 -- Another disappointing issue; the All-Stars struck out. Randall Garrett's "Color Me Deadly" is a bad Heinlein imitation. Andre Norton's "London Bridge" is ancient, not 1973 at all. Geo. Alec Effinger's "Lights Out" is quite good, as is Kate Wilhelm's "Whatever Happened to the Olmecs?" The others are readable but quite unexceptional. Not a bad issue; a disappointing one.
- 11/2 DUTCH UNCLE/Marilyn Durham/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich -- At the 1972 American Booksellers Association (I think that's what ABA stands for) convention the Harcourt people were ecstatic over a new book they had by a woman who had one day decided to write a novel. The woman was Marilyn Durham and the book was THE MAN WHO LOVED CAT DANCING. I do not generally look up books about the Old West, and HBJ was giving away a few copies of the first edition hardback instead of what most publishers were doing (giving away tons of hardback-sized paperbacks). However, I picked up a copy and read the first page (a prologue). I loved it. So I took a copy. The whole book was enjoyable--a mild word. It was, in fact, the single most enjoyable I had read in ages, and I haven't read anything since to match it. It is not a literary book; it was written for readers rather than critics. Nonetheless the critics couldn't complain--it was too well done. I find it totally incredible that CAT DANCING was this woman's first novel. The language, the insight, the characters were all so fine--her talent was immediately mature. ## DUTCH UNCLE is her second novel. It is about a retired gunslinger, now a gambler, who "inherits" two small Mexican children. He doesn't want them, but all his efforts to get rid of them backfire. He ends up in a small mining town, where he "inherits" the job of sheriff. Then things just happen. It's not as good as CAT DANCING, but it's damned good; I was tired, but I read this till 1:15 this morning.
- 11/7 MISTER DA V./Kit Reed/Berkley -- Actually, I think I bought this because Vicent diFate's painting is one of the greatest paperback covers I've ever seen. I'm glad, too, because this is one fine collection. I was pleasantly surprised. These stories could almost be called fables; most of them have simple plots and strong morals (not of "the world is coming to an end" kind; the Golden Rule kind). "To Be Taken in a Strange Country" is a very unusual story about a very unusual town. "Devotion" is a marvelous story about the relationship between (you won't believe this) an old man, his female shuffleboard partner, his teeth and his new dentures. "The Reign of Tarquin the Tall": Power Corrupts. "Ordeal": the sacrifices men will make to obtain their freedom and the freedom of others. "Judas Bomb" I can't describe, except to say it is one of the most satisfying stories in the collection. "Piggy" (this is another one you won't believe) is a magnificent plotless narrative about a strange creature; when you sit on it you spout poetry. In "Mister da V." da Vinci is brought into the present a beautiful story. "The New You": poetic justice. "Automatic

Tiger": poetic justice again (but a totally different story). "I Am Through with Bus Trips" is the only story here that fell outside my sphere of interest. "Golden Acres" is a moving tale of old age. "At Central": The Big Lie. "Janell Harmon's Testament" is an odd piece about a woman who attempted to keep a castle clean by herself. As you can see, there is a wide variety of themes; the stories vary from straight sf to fantasy to mainstream. The best 75¢ book to come out in a long time; highly recommended.

WEEKEND WITH THE RABBI/Harry Kemelman/Nelson Doubleday -- This 11/14
is an omnibus volume, specially prepared for the Mystery Guild, of FRIDAY THE RABBI SLEPT LATE, SATURDAY THE RABBI WENT HUNGRY, and SUNDAY THE RABBI STAYED HOME. The Rabbi books are a very high-acclaimed mystery series, with good reason. Each is three books rolled into one: The mysteries are not classical in the Ellery Queen "Challenge to the Reader" sense, but they are fairly honest and logical; each book is partially an introduction to Judaism, and since we are given mostly Comparative Religion in the form of discussions between Rabbi Small and the Irish Catholic chief-of-police, these are lively rather than dull; and the characters--all of them--are finely and sympathetically drawn. These are all enjoyable as novels, and I would imagine that for readers who don't generally like mysteries these would nonetheless be readable. There are occasional awkward sentences and other signs that Kemelman has a little trouble getting things down on paper exactly as he'd like them, but these are few and for the most part the books are thoroughly professional. (M*A*S*H by "Richard Hecker" is atrociously written. I can understand publishing a good story by a non-writer, but did the manuscript go straight to the printer without stopping at an editor's desk?)

VERTEX/October 1973 -- VERTEX is a gorgeous magazine, slightly 11/17
overdone in terms of layout but very attractive nonetheless. However, I buy it only in hopes that someday soon it will turn into a magazine worth reading. The editorial this issue is devoted to putting down the New Wave. Still? Despite that, the only story really worth reading is Geo. Alec Effinger's "World War II," a very odd sort of story about a bunch of people stranded on an island doing meaningless tasks for an alien psychology machine. There is no explanation given, so if there had been no "new wave" the story would not have been publishable. ## I enjoy the speculative articles in VERTEX, which are less technical than those in ANALOG, and hence more approachable for me. This issue I really enjoyed Jerry Pournelle's Atlantis theory, and Greg and Jim Benford's twin articles on "Life in Space." The one on the history of radio astronomy felt out of place in a speculative magazine, but it was interesting. But they have to get better fiction.

DELIVER US TO EVIL/Joe L. Hensley/Doubleday -- A mystery that 11/17
doesn't fall too neatly into any category. A lawyer has five days to find evidence that a condemned-to-death murderer is innocent. The murder mystery is thoroughly honest, but subservient to the discoveries of political corruption. For a time-is-of-the-essence story it seems quite lazy--I think if the characters talked to each other more instead of talking at each other it might have moved faster. But it's very intelligent and would make a good tv-movie, even without any action.

11/22 NEW DIMENSIONS 1/edited by Robert Silverberg/Doubleday/Avon -- Damon Knight began his ORBIT series with this goal: "to try to put together a collection of unpublished stories good enough to stand beside an anthology of classic science fiction." Obviously, Knight abandoned this policy before too long. But Bob Silverberg picked it up. Ignoring Harlan Ellison's DANGEROUS VISIONS series as an entity unto itself, ND 1 is the best original anthology I've encountered so far. Five of the fourteen stories struck me as superior science fiction: "A Special Kind of Morning," my favorite Gardner Dozois story so far; "The Power of Time," a superb Josephine Saxton story; Ellison's "At the Mouse Circus," which the front of my mind is confused by but which the back of my mind tells me it understands completely; "Conquest," a chiller by Barry Malzberg; and "Emancipation," a chapter of Thomas Disch's novel 334. (I'm really looking forward to 334; the future world he presents is not appealing to me, but to his characters it is the world and they live in it as we do in ours, matter-of-factly. Disch presents it in a manner both objective and sympathetic.) I also liked Ursula LeGuin's "Vaster than Empires and More Slow," Leonard Tushnet's "A Plague of Cars" and Phil Farmer's "The Sliced-Crosswise Only-on-Tuesday World." Which is not the slight the stories by Alex & Phyllis Eisenstein, Doris Pitkin Buck, Robert Malstrom, R.A. Lafferty or Harry Harrison, all of which are better than average stories well worth reading. I only disliked Ed Bryant's "Love Song of Herself," which is typical; I am not a Bryant fan. All told, an excellent book.

11/23 WANDOR'S RIDE/Roland Green/Avon -- A sword-&-sorcery novel; not too many of these are surfacing anymore. Not as many as there were a couple years ago, at any rate. This one...well, I've read better (Howard's Conan) and I've read worse (deCamp and Carter's Conan). I do believe that Green (a pseudonym? the book is copyrighted by Avon) made an honest effort to write a good book. He had his troubles, but he tried. I found that it became very enjoyable when I read it as itself on one level and adapted it as a CONAN comic book on another. That gave me a chance to rework the rough spots and also do up a totally different version, casting Conan not as the hero Wandor but the secondary character Berok. My imagination got in a lot of exercise beefing up his very minor role, and this concentration enabled me to enjoy the novel more than I perhaps would have otherwise.

11/27 THE STEEL SPRING/Peter Wahloo/Delacorte -- This is supposed to be a sequel to THE THIRTY-FIRST FLOOR, but it would have been better with a new character; aside from the fact that it is a somewhat different type of story, the setting didn't really strike me as the same. Anyway, this is an odd thing that sf people might find interesting: a disaster novel told from a quite unusual viewpoint. A police inspector leaves his country for a serious operation. When he returns he finds it ravaged by disease, almost everyone dead, and the remainder either hiding from people looking for them, or looking for people hiding from them. Jensen just methodically follows established police procedure trying to discover what happened. Very unusual--disaster-novel heroes generally set up new rules to survive by. You might dislike this novel intensely, you might be bored by it, or you might enjoy it as something truly different. I did all three. The ending is chilling--and I mean that sincerely.

