

KYBEN

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edited by Jeff & Ann Smith/1339 Weldon Avenue/Baltimore MD 21211/301-889-1440. 35¢, 3/\$1.00 or the usual. Copyright © 1975 by Jeffrey D. Smith. This is the September 1975 issue and is Phantasmicom Press Publication # 40. Artwork this issue is by Grant Canfield (9,14), Philip Foglio (1), Paula Marmor (21) and Bob Smith (4,23).

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The combined KHATRU 3 & 4 (with the 151-ms.-page symposium on Women in Science Fiction) will run \$2.50. Until I publish it, though, in November, I will accept \$4 for 1, 2 and 3&4. KHATRU is available only for money and contributions, not for trade. I'm sorry, but I really can't afford it otherwise. (Hell, I can't afford it this way, but I try, I try.)

The material in this issue is pretty old, I'm afraid. But I'm starting on the next issue immediately and we're catching up, slowly.

--jds



This morning I had a clever opening line about the lateness of this issue (something concerning "shaking off the lethargy"), but as I've since forgotten it we'll just dig right in. The ground rules for this issue are simple: The columns will pop up as they pop up, and everything else is by Jeff Smith. My loc file is...let me measure...three quarters of an inch thick, and range back to June 23, 1974--so I'll have to print some of these. A lot of these. First, though, a different letter.

You may recall that some issues back (KYBEN 6) I printed a column taken from the Catonsville Community College student newspaper, THE RED & BLACK--as an example of total bad. Well, here we go again. It's not that I like to make the same point twice; this is a film review, and a letter-to-the-editor I wrote upon reading it. Ready? (I fixed some of the typesetting this time; I couldn't subject you to it.)

FOUR MUSKETEERS

If by some miracle from the heavens you happened to read my last review, you'll remember that I made the boastful statement that 1975 was the year for the sequel films. Unfortunately, this statement was issued before I had the misfortune of seeing Twentieth Century Fox, The Four Musketeers. I will remind you, however, that whenever there is a rule, there is also an exception to that rule. It is on this shaky ground that I excuse my premature blunder.

The Four Musketeers is the bomb of the year. It is so bad that the near (S(might as well leave some of it in)S) sound of the words might trigger an atomic war. After the first half hour or so of the movie, I thought to myself that perhaps I was expecting too much from this new version. But after watching the whole thing, I decided that this movie would turn over in his grave.

The Three Musketeers was not a bad movie. In fact, quite a few times I caught myself laughing at the antics of the nutty trio. With all its big stars, the movie turned out to be one of the most comical of recent years. It ended giving the viewer the notion that another movie would follow. The movie should not have ended giving that notion.

The two movies should have been made into one big, good movie. Instead they were split like the middle of an Oriole (S(that is at least a logical error in Baltimore)S) cookie; leaving the cream in the middle to spoil. If ever there was a movie that could not yield the impact of its predecessor, The Four Musketeers could not.

The movie is a logical conclusion of the first movie. It had the same basic stars: Michael York, Oliver Reed, Richard Chamberlain, Frank Finlay, Charlton Heston, Raquel Welch and Faye Dunaway, and all gave the same kind of performance. But in the second Musketeers film, Heston should have realized his blunders in the first film and dropped the part. He is still trying to make a modern day Moses out of his part of the Cardinal Richelieu. Also, everybody's favorite Raquel had such a small part in the latest film that you would think the director had realized that she just could not act. If this was the case, it was the only

right decision he made about the movie.

The story revolves around the adventures and mostly misadventures of the famous three musketeers and a newcomer to the group Michael York. With the luck of the Irish somehow infested in them (S(I love it!)S) the heroes always manage to come out of even the toughest of situations. The one crises that they do not come out of alive is the making of the movie itself.

The Four Musketeers may or may not be seen at the Westview Cinema IV. I would not recommend seeing it unless you need to find a way to sleep, and the much less expensive no-doz tablets do not work.

Check out that last sentence again, and now let's move on to my reply:

23 April 1975

To the Editor:

I guess it's unreasonable to expect someone who uses No-Doz as sleeping pills to be able to appreciate a well-made movie. I do rather regret that Michael Brown is given space to possibly influence the less weird movie-goers among us.

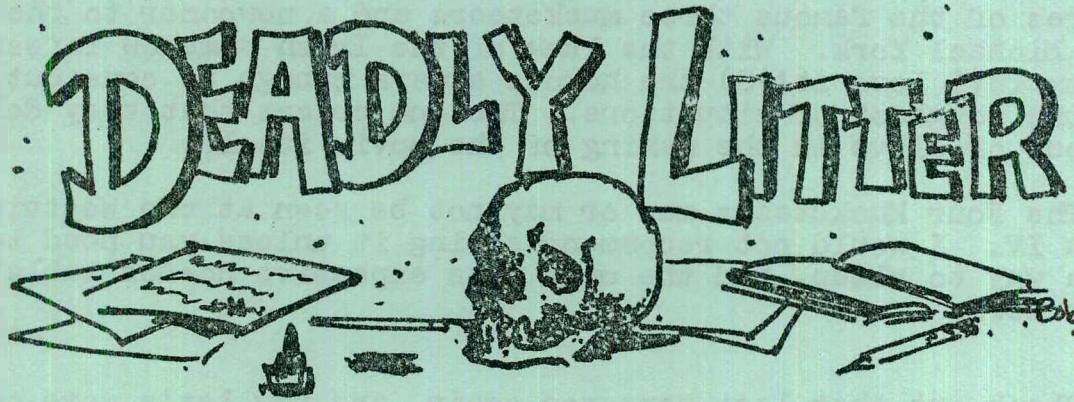
I would like to counter-recommend that people who saw and enjoyed THE THREE MUSKETEERS do go and see the second half of the film, which is not quite the barrel-of-laughs of its prologue but which is still a fascinating and wildly-enjoyable movie. (Faye Dunaway in particular is superb this time around, with Oliver Reed close behind.)

Those who have not seen THE THREE MUSKETEERS might be well advised to wait a while--due to the success of the films director Richard Lester has a good chance of convincing the distributors to release the two halves of the film as a "double feature" later this year. That's something to look forward to--it's the most solidly enjoyable movie I've seen in years, and I want to see it all the way through in one sitting.

But then, I don't take Somnex to stay awake, either.

Jeff Smith
Clerk
Biology Department

The letter was never printed. What a shame. I could go on and on about the MUSKETEERS film(s), but I don't think I will. I am glad, though, that Lester has returned to filmmaking. I don't expect him to turn the world on its ear with superb, innovative pieces, but I think it's safe to expect vastly entertaining movies from him. MUSKETEERS is fabulous, and JUGGERNAUT, a film he took over at the last moment, and which was hampered by a terrible ad campaign, was also extremely well done. And what a pair to look forward to: ROYAL FLASH (author George Macdonald Fraser also did the screenplay for MUSKETEERS) and THE LAST DAYS OF ROBIN HOOD. Great.



letters of comment on PHANTASMOCOM 11

RAY NELSON

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Darrell Schweitzer's "Was Hugo Gernsback Really the Father of Science Fiction" was far and away the most important critical article on SF I have read since the days of Damon Knight's *IN SEARCH OF WONDER*. I had noticed the same thing in my studies of Victorian literature: that SF and fantasy, before Gernsback, was a perfectly respectable part of the 'mainstream,' and that the work of the Victorians remains readable today, unlike the work of the Gernsback Era. I had been meaning to do an article on it, but the amount of research involved caused me to put it off again and again. I can't be jealous of Schweitzer for beating me to it, because he has done it so well. This article, if fans have any critical sense at all, will be a milestone in the field.

It's one of those cases of a child seeing that the emperor has no clothes. Now that it's done, nobody can ever again look at Gernsback in quite the same starry-eyed way.

What is there left to say, now that Schweitzer has said it all? One can only speculate on why it happened. Why did a funky exploiter manage to establish himself as "The Father of Science Fiction"?

I think he rode in on a curious side-effect of the ever-present generation gap. Children can't usually understand literature intended for adults. They can't understand characterization, style, complex plotting, atmosphere...all the things that go to make up mature writing. They demand something cruder and simpler, something featuring action for action's sake, exaggeration, vast but easy-to-grasp concepts. So, at any given moment of literary history, they can't understand a thing written for their parents, and not understanding it, they reject it. They look instead for something more suitable to their own age level.

And there is always some Hugo Gernsback or Tom Swift around to supply it. This Gernsback becomes their hero: they cling to him as their champion against the rejected adult literature.

But they, little by little, grow up, and their hero has to grow with them or be replaced, as Gernsback was by Campbell. (Gernsback made an abortive attempt at a comeback during the Campbell era, but his followers had outgrown him.)

Now the hard core of science fiction fans is over forty. Science Fiction as we know it has reached its peak and has no place left to go but gradually to decline into senility. (The "Vertex" era.)

Cheer up. There is another science fiction coming to replace it, and another fandom to repeat the cycle of youth, maturity and old age. This new fandom has the curious idea that science fiction was not fathered by Hugo Gernsback.

No! It was Gene Roddenberry. Of course.

JERRY KAUFMAN 6/23/74
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Darrell Schweitzer never ceases to amaze me. This time he's actually written something well enough to convince me. He seems to have chosen a thesis, explained it, supported it and written it well enough to chop another large hole in the sanctity of a man whose firm place in the sf heavens was given to him by those who were the first fans. (Well, that is something Uncle Hugo gave us. Fandom. And, working from Darrell's ideas, if sf in the first magazines of Gernsback was crap, then sf fans had to unite in self-protection. It's usually assumed the fans then couldn't find anyone else to talk science to. Apparently the First Fans couldn't find anyone to talk science to who were as semi-literate as themselves.)

MICHAEL CARLSON
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Darrell's piece has shown up in a variety of places and forms lately, as a result of sf's growing visibility on the literary (hardcover\$\$\$???) scene. After all the abuse so-called "mainstream" fiction has taken in the past, a good deal of which always seemed jealous, although another good deal was justified, I wonder if the fact of sf sharing the hardcover racks and the bestseller lists and the movie screens will change fans' attitudes. Because what Darrell (and the others) have said about the ghettoization of the writing applies just as easily to the readers as well. I recall at this year's Boskone, I flew up from Harrisburg with just a briefcase for the weekend, and had a Bodelsen suspense novel, an sf mag, and a book of Joyce Carol Oates' short stories to read. One fan saw me reading the Oates and made a comment about my admitted unreadness in sf to the extent of "if you didn't waste your time with crap like that you could have read all of Poul Anderson," or something like that. While I realize that a good number of fans are very well read, and most are far better read than the majority of Americans, there is a large number whose tastes and critical judgments could be much improved by some exposure to A) classic lit and B) modern "mainstream." Everytime I see a novel breaking down the barriers between sf and mainstream I jump for

joy: a Barth Writing GILES GOAT BOY, or Hjortsberg's GREY MATTERS for example, or from the other side Disch's 334, Dick in a major hardcover (o I wish Doubleday would push his stuff, get him a cinemascopically wide audience), so many others. Perhaps once the labels were gone...

Of course the bestseller list is no indication of anything, since by and large the mainstream fiction on it isn't the best, and often isn't good, so that the sf that hits it shouldn't be expected to be any better (THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN).

HARRY WARNER, JR. 8/13/74
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Darrell Schweitzer cheated a little in his article, by leaving out all the essentials that would have weakened his argument. For instance, the dime novels with science fiction themes and the series of boys' books like the Tom Swift novels, which caused science fiction to become the object of scorn in the estimation of the general public which he blames Gernsback for creating. He also fails to cite the main reason Gernsback's prozines contained a great deal of fiction which wasn't very good story-telling: the general market situation of the time. The individual with the ability and knowhow to sell pulp fiction in the late 1920's and early 1930's had dozens of magazines, some appearing as frequently as every week, as potential markets if he wrote westerns, mysteries, love stories or adventure fiction. While Gernsback was publishing science fiction magazines (not counting the brief and unhappy life of SCIENCE FICTION PLUS) there were never more than three markets for science fiction on the magazine racks. It didn't make sense to write a science fiction story which had only two or three chances to see print when mundane fiction had so many possible purchasers. So Gernsback got manuscripts mostly from people who had more love for science fiction than writing experience. It's more than coincidence that so many important new science fiction writers entered the field in the late 1930's and early 1940's when the science fiction field began to expand. I doubt if Darrell could document his contention that book publishers began shunning science fiction after Gernsback began publishing AMAZING STORIES (if the number of titles declined, so did the total number of new books because of what happened in October, 1929) and as I remember it, we all threw confetti and cheered in the streets when Heinlein sold to the SATURDAY EVENING POST because it was a breakthrough by a pulp magazine writer of science fiction, not because it was a breakthrough for science fiction itself.

ARTHUR D. HLAVATY 9/26/74
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Darrell Schweitzer's article on How Hugo Gernsback Nearly Killed Science Fiction is good, but I can't help wondering if Saint Hugo really was that important. To be sure, he did invent Trashy Pulp SF; but as Charles Fort said, when it's steam engine time, someone will invent the steam engine. There was an awful lot of trashy pulp writing around in those days, as there always is (have you ever read the Fu Manchu books?), and I can't help suspecting that sooner or later someone would have

realized that if you set your stories in outer space, you can have even more adventure and thus presumably even less need for characterization, good writing, and such.

MICHAEL K. SMITH 6/27/74
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Schweitzer makes a persuasive case against Grandfather Hugo, but I wonder: Does he think sf would have developed in an ever-rising straight line if Gernsback had not intervened? That the field would now be 25 years more "advanced" than it is (wherever that would put us)? I conjecture that science fiction might have continued as only a minor strand in mainstream literature, had it not been drawn apart and tempered in the fire of Philistine adversity. It would not be a "genre," apart from the main body and capable of supporting a body of special interest like our fandom. Perhaps Judaism is the model here: science fiction, without its tribulations at the hands of the semi-literate, would have been fully assimilated, with no uniqueness. I know that's like thanking Hitler for enabling the establishment of Israel, but I think it's at least a partly valid comparison. What say you? (S(It would be a different world, surely--particularly for us in fandom. Most of us, when young, really appreciated the escapist qualities of sf. If sf, though, were a part of everyone's everyday culture, would we have been able to escape to sf? Would we instead have had to adapt to the Real World? And how about the Real World? Would it be a better place, less susceptible to future shock, if everyone had always accepted the sf viewpoint along with the standard, more narrow one? You're into parallel worlds, Mike--see what you can work out with this. --Opinions are also solicited from everyone else.)S)

JEFF MAY 7/25/74
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Schweitzer's essay was somewhat entertaining, but that's all. I am inclined to feel that the ghettoization of sf wasn't a bad thing, myself. It set up a situation which gave sf a choice to become a truly separate literary form, and its fans a truly separate and unique group. If Uncle Hugo hadn't done what he did --i.e., got us ghettoized--sf could very well have been absorbed by mainstream literature. I think I prefer being a devotee of a separate genre. It makes me feel just as smug and superior as I can be.

JEFF CLARK 7/23/74
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While Darrell Schweitzer's anti-Gernsback piece appears to be generally well thought out and constructed in its progress, I can't help objecting that a section of the picture of sf's misfortunes is somehow missing--somehow not attributable, at least directly and exclusively, to Gernsback's exercise of talentless editorship and monumentally improper purpose and motivation from the position of clout that literary history (in this country, anyway) bestowed upon him. Yes, sf is still not completely out of the woods. But one of my pet peeves, one of the things I'd like

to forget about, that came in with the market for sf--and which this country and culture (here we go again) was and is especially fertile ground for--is the attitude toward sf writing. The attitude divorced from the "sf" in writing--the attitude simply toward "writing," as it becomes in the end. Simply: the attitude toward sf writing as a "career." And yes, I know this is a loaded subject. But let's face it: career writing does not produce the very best results in art. And there are at least subtle differences between this attitude and "writing for money" in a more general sense. I believe Norman Mailer said recently he takes especial care when doing a book for money, and brought up this attitude as something associated with Victorian writers...many of whom, of course, are Darrell's early sf practitioners. It's still an admirable stance--but one usually practiced by men who don't have to make a living at writing... But, hell, don't get me wrong. This field may have and will have good writers who view things that way. It does have good writers anyway. Hell, I tend to think now that Malzberg (and you know how much I admire him) writes too much--but better that than nothing. Better Zelazny writing for a living than writing nothing. Same for anyone else. Yet it would be nice to see the very best from a talented writer that comes, in some cases, not all I'm sure, with that slight difference in attitude... Listen: no matter what anyone says, sf is still not academically or otherwise accepted in the highest literary circles. I remember Harlan Ellison writing or saying a few years ago something to the effect that anyone who still evidenced ostentatious ghetto-twitches over their poor little maligned literature were simply behind the times and a bunch of nervous nellys to boot. But judging from the most stringent standards, he was wrong--he is still wrong, period. It is still safe for the real, heavyweight literary cogniscenti to either a) ignore the field completely (if especially unknowledgeable), or b) to garnish the attention they pay it with an undisguised modicum of condescension. This--whether or not it sprang full-blown from the brow of Gernsback; and I think not--this is yet with us. (S(I think you're right--in the eyes of the Literary Establishment we have been advanced from an unaccepted minor genre to an accepted minor genre. What is important, though, is not how far the Establishment has advanced us, but how far we have advanced ourselves. And I think we're winning.)S)

DOUGLAS BARBOUR 5/21/75
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I enjoyed the reminiscences by the foolhardy four. Some interesting insights into who you are. Never having heard of this James Taylor before, I found his piece especially interesting, more specifically because his poem is one of the few I've seen in fanzines that even interested me. Really. Most fanzine poetry is (to my responding eye) shit. His poem is tough, good, interesting. I find his comments on academic commentary annoying but somewhat hard to turn off. As a commenting type on sf I like commentary. As a poet myself, I don't really get off on it. Depends on where you're sitting at the time, I guess.

Having just read Gardner Dozois' "Strangers" I was happy to read his interview. It was good for more than the usual reasons. Don Keller, whom I have often found a bit pretentious in his review writing, as well as somewhat longwinded in no good cause I

felt, is a damned good interviewer if only because he stays out of the way so much, letting the subject of the interview say his say. Dozois had things to say, and I was glad to read them. I haven't read as much of his stuff as I'd like to, but thanks to your handy bibliography I can trace some of it down. (Query: I know of a number of first rate writers who don't yet have a short story collection, while many other lesser writers have them, and a lot of shitty novels get published. Why, I wonder, why? Dozois should have a collection. Russ, for chrissakes! Le Guin! Just a few examples of what I mean.) The Effinger interview is also good, but, as Don admits, too short. It's like giving us a taste of the whipped cream, and then telling us we can't have the shortcake--or any more cream. By the way, I really liked WHAT ENTROPY MEANS TO ME, and, as I remember, so did Sturgeon. So that's not a bad beginning. If Lester del Rey panned it, he's really a winner. Look at the way those two saw off these days. Sturgeon loves DHALGREN: del Rey doesn't even realize what's happening, but he hates it. Ah yes. Back to the point. Where was I?

One of the niftier things about this ish is the way you've set things up, the editing pattern: Darrell Schweitzer says what he thinks was wrong about Hugo Gernsback (and he's right, oh ghod, how he's right!) and then you slip us Zelazny's little history of the field, which, surprise, surprise, takes the official view more seriously than does our intrepid fan writer. Interesting. Yet they both tend to agree, deep down. We may have to dig deeper to find out why there was so much academic dislike for even earlier sf. The magazines Schweitzer mentions are all popular ones, and old Wells was, for a long time, ignored by the profs. Now I'm a prof, and don't want to put them all down, but there has been a lot of intellectual-literary snobbery in the groves of academe, and most of the earlier, accepted writers Darrell mentions would not have garnered any critical comment either. On the other hand they did publish in widely read popular journals that were thought to be 'good.' Which is his point, and an important one. From everything I've heard--including Aldiss's pointed comments on how England was never affected in the period between the wars the way the US was (perhaps I mean 'infected'). So that Huxley, Stapledon, etc. wrote their books, published in hardcover, and were reviewed in respectable places--Darrell is absolutely correct in his estimation of what Gernsback did to sf. Yet, we have to remember the kinds of things people like Asimov (in BEFORE THE GOLDEN AGE) and some others say. As kids they really got off on the stuff AMAZING



published. Hmmnn. But then, they are not the writers we turn to when we want to talk about 'style,' 'depth,' 'profundity of vision' or anything else pretentious--but righteously defended as important--like that. Sturgeon is. And he recalls reading Wells. Well, well. And Effinger recalls Kafka and his ilk. More and more to the point; so well made by Darrell and needing no more comment from me.

So many good things, and I enjoyed them. But, mighod, Jeff, how do you do it? The Tiptree piece is magnificent, magnificent. Sharon, who almost never dips into fanzines, listened and laughed and responded just like I was, as I read it aloud to her. So damned good in its precision of insight. Well, for it alone you should win some sort of award for this fanzine. It brings a very good reading experience of the fanzine kind to a brilliantly explosive end. Tells us a lot about Tiptree in its roundabout way, too, as Silverberg realized when he quoted it in his intro. (S(This is the introduction to Tiptree's second collection, WARM WORLDS AND OTHERWISE from Ballantine--which quotes extensively from PHANTASMICOMs 6, 9 & 11. Egoboo, egoboo, how sweet it is.)S) Who is this Tiptree fellow who can get inside the youthful minds of so many of his characters so well, and yet is growing old inwardly as other characterizations show, and as this piece explores with such sensitivity? We can only read his words. And, like that Zelazny fellow once upon a time not so long ago he dazzles us, but draws us into the dazzle. Fine writer that man. Don't let him get away.

SHERYL SMITH 10/22/74
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Don Keller's interview with Gardner Dozois is very fascinating for its glimpse into the workings of creativity--and perhaps it is the "conscious" artists like Mr. Dozois who are best able to explain this, insofar as it can be explained at all. I was also intrigued to note that Mr. Dozois holds the common philosophic view of 20th century artists, i.e., that man's alienation from others of his kind, and from the world in general, constitutes the natural and true state of things. This bits-&-pieces mechanism has gained great currency these last 60-odd years and, though it is wearing thin these days from constant usage, has often been the basis for valid art. But this view still remains one among many, and I think Mr. Dozois is rather too subjective in implying that his is a more real and factual outlook than others.

But the weirdest thing about the interview is the length to which Mr. Dozois feels compelled to go in order to defend the "optimism" of his stories. I suppose that is partly a concession to the "typical" sf fan and his craving for simplistic heroism. But Mr. Dozois ends up making such a detailed and serious case for his "optimism" that one tends to conclude that he himself believes in it--which is really freaky! I mean, if the only possible "optimism" these days among the waning 20th century classicists is that though we are helplessly crushed in the jaws of the monster, we can still struggle a little--well, that's got to be the most pessimistic "optimism" I can conceive of! In fact, though this was not Mr. Dozois' intention, it seems rather misleading to call this futile thrashing "optimism" at all. Doubtless I overestimate Mr. Dozois' audience, but I think it should suffice for some readers

that many of the gentleman's stories are quite good, without their needing to be touted as optimistic;" and the folk who insist on optimism aren't likely to care for Mr. Dozois' work, whatever he calls it.

How old is Paula Marmor? If she is somewhere near adolescence her poem "The Corn King" gives promise of much excellence to come: the form she chose is not a common one, but it is apt and skillfully used, and there is a pleasing, elegiac sound to the piece. But there is not much depth to her treatment--as if death and mutability were no more than literary truths to her, with no passional relation to her life-experience--and some of her imagery is not yet very original, a common adolescent failing. But on the whole Ms. Marmor has done a respectable job with a subject whose faery qualities could so easily have turned to treacle in lesser hands ...And wow, is it heartening to know that not every poet has succumbed to RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY commonplace!

*(S(And from a later letter, 11/23/74)S): If I've insulted *Paula Marmor by underestimating her age, please publish my *apologies, as I had no business dragging in that irrelevancy. *I tend to associate the faery/nature/nostalgia themes with *adolescence, because that's when I wrote about them--even *though Ms. Marmor's poem is lots better than anything I ever *did in high school (from such a combination of formal rigidity and sentimental crapshit as my adolescence spewed forth, *may Braggi preserve you--they are the stomach-turners that *precede nightmare.

Darrell Schweitzer's article on the ghettoization of sf is quite fun, and probably more than half-right--the irreverence of the man's conversation does find its way into his writing, I see, where it is used for more sensible purposes than assertion of his own divinity! But although Mr. Schweitzer makes some apt and telling points, perhaps there was some advantage to ghettoization too. The relegation of sf to the pulps did preserve within the genre the idea of fiction as entertainment, which, though a damnable limitation in the old days, perhaps did something toward curbing the genre's tendencies toward insular inaccessibility--a primary dead-end for the mainstream this century--when sf finally did regain good literary standards. Also, generic isolation tended to preserve many 19th century values--idealism, strong feeling, the fantastic--from the arid naturalism, as well as the healthier realism, of this century; and while these Romantic holdovers were merely schlocky in their unsullied, inherited decadence, they have become vital elements in the fusion with realism effected by the New Wave writers. Even the mainstream, which had long since rejected Romantic values, is rediscovering their charm in the New Wave synthesis--and sf, in turn, is coming fresh to the mainstream's old existentialism/absurdism.

In short, there is one inevitable benefit to ghettoization: the rest of the culture is so exciting to those who get out. Think about it...

All I can say about Barry Gillam's overview of '73 sf films is that I greatly admire his cinematic fortitude, and his transitions. (I thought THEATER OF BLOOD rather amusing myself, although a continually rising gorge does, indeed, make laughter difficult. But in the end it is difficult to resist such an A-1

cast of British pros having themselves a hammy good time....) But Mr. Gillam did miss the prize fantasy/satire film of '73--unless I err in the year of its release, which might have been this one--which was, of all unlikely things, SCHLOCK. Horror parodies so rarely come off, as they find it so difficult to get more ridiculous than what they are parodying, and SCHLOCK is the only wholly successful one I recall seeing. Except FLESH GORDON, and the model for that was only "horror" in the aesthetic sense....)

Donald Keller's exposition of fantasy reprints was for me the most impressive piece of writing in the issue--though indeed, the rhetorical standards of PhCOM are generally so high that only my personal preference gives Keller the edge. I have nothing like that gentleman's capacity for Victorian fantasy--I seem to buy more of Lin Carter's exhumations than I ever read, somehow--but an ability to communicate with perspicacious enthusiasm, as Keller does so gracefully, is not a mundane talent; and when it is found, plaudits are called for. And boy, that scrawny kid sure has some incredible vocabulary! He even sent me to the dictionary once, which for fanzine rhetoricians is a historic first!

letters of comment on KYBEN 9

HARRY WARNER, JR. 10/17/74

You impressed me with the ability you demonstrated to enjoy Burroughs, even with the reservations you pointed out. I tried again recently, reading THE BEASTS OF TARZAN. My reaction was the same as it has been each of the previous times I'd tried to acquire the knack so many other fans have of getting pleasure out of ERB fiction. Briefly, an incredulous ugh. It must result from my failure to experience Burroughs' fiction in boyhood. The first time I read any of his stories was in my teens, I believe, when one of the late Venus novels was serialized in ARGOSY, and I couldn't enjoy it much, so my tastes had presumably coagulated already.

But I have been experiencing for the first time some of the pleasure so many fans get from mystery and detective fiction. Except for a few abbreviated spurts of interest a long time ago, I'd never paid much attention to this kind of fiction until just the past year or two. So I've been watching at garage sales and flea markets for good prices on large batches of books by one author and buying them up, reading a half-dozen or so consecutively, and then concluding that I either like or dislike that particular individual's fiction. Tey and Carr, who get little fanzine attention, are rising most rapidly in my estimation just now.

I can think of two other possibilities for that course on bem communications, but one is obsoleted by the course of events and I can't remember the title of the other. The former is Budrys' ROGUE MOON, which does the best job I know of capturing in fiction the fact that there could be things alien beyond all hope of human comprehension somewhere out there. I keep wishing he would cheat and produce a new edition located on Mars or a Jovian moon, so the theme won't seem outdated. The other is a story by, I think, Simak, in which common ground is found between humans and bems on another planet by a simple act of common courtesy, when one of the humans steps to one side to allow the aliens to pass more easily.

Michael Carlson's contribution was inadvertently spoiled for me to some extent. An old, dear friend of the family died this year in Carlisle after a long and painful fight for life and I can't think of that city impartially any more. But I can admire Michael's perception about the southern element in that part of Pennsylvania. One free-association-type reaction was the way his descriptions of colleges brought to mind the way the college setting is ruining THE WALTONS' new season. I don't know where they found that set of buildings for John-Boy to attend college in, but they scream aloud in their out-of-placeness for a series supposed to be set in Virginia. Besides, it's always warm and the grass is always green in the college episodes and Virginia isn't that all-fired Dixiefied.

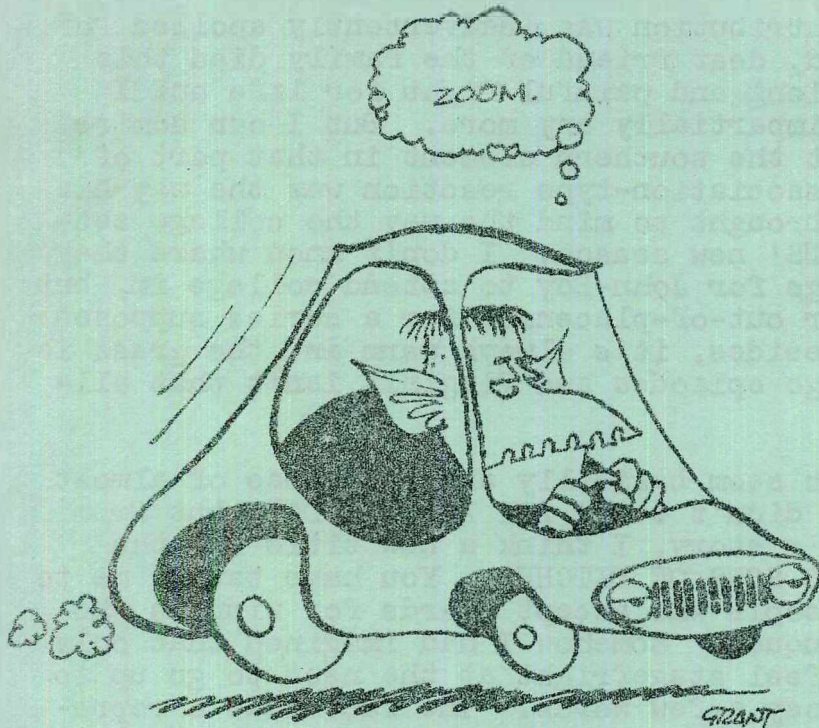
Your Discon reactions seem basically akin to those of almost everyone who attended. I didn't see A BOY AND HIS DOG, but from what I remember of Harlan's story, I think a new title for the movie version could be TWO SONS OF BITCHES. You have taught me to have compassion for the people who accept awards for winners who don't show at the Hugo banquet. Somehow I had imagined that only the actual winners could feel stagefright at the need to go up to the microphone and maybe say a few words. The fact that a representative of the winner is just as nervous should have been obvious but wasn't to me, somewhat in the way that the craters on Mars should have been foreseen by anyone who speculated about the planet's surface before the first Mariners got close.

James Tiptree's communication is as fascinating as everything else by him you've published. The only individual I can think of who might have written in this manner is Travis McGee. But I've never heard of him giving any services without charge, not even to fanzines, so it must be someone else. You'll feel awfully silly if it turns out to be Spiro Agnew.

The artwork is fine but I somehow kept looking most often at the sketch on the wrapper. I wonder what people who have fanzines bound do about the illustrated envelopes and wrappers that some of them arrive in? Will some future fanzine index compiler count such things when the page count for each fanzine is tabulated? Is there copyright protection for an illustration of this sort when the fanzine itself is copyrighted? Will worldcon auctions a quarter-century from now contain spirited bidding for the envelopes and wrappers with these pictures that bear the addresses of the most famous fans and pros? I can't think of any equivalent situation in mundania that is so pregnant with legal questions and so likely to go to the Supreme Court for final ruling on such questions as whether the purchaser of an old fanzine was entitled to receive the illustrated envelope in which it reached the original recipient.

ROBERT CRAIS 10/20/74
455 Croydon Avenue/Baton Rouge LA 70806

A long time ago, I used to tell everyone, "Shit, man, I'm no letterhack"--EVERYONE! People on the street. Small children. Old ladies. Winos and cops alike; no discrimination. Even got busted for it once in Flour, Georgia. Big, burly, gold-ole-boy-off-the-farm thought it was a homosexual advance. Got my ass good--two days inside and get-outta-town-you-bum.



Lord knows I've tried explaining it, but, you see, whenever I get a little magazine--one that arouses at least some interest--I ...I...Iwritealetter. JESUS! PANT-PANT. I'm glad that's out.

Excuse my vagueries. I've been in Baton Rouge close to five continuous months. Baton Rouge--the place where I was raised, the place from which I subsequently ran only

to return and repeat the process again and again--at best causes severe brain damage to those inhabiting it. Slowness of thought strikes first, then acute dullness resulting in a deadening of creativity, cell damage follows and continues to advance until one is a vegetable. Yeah, BR. It really brings me down.

My issue of KYBEN just fell apart.

Literally, it just destapled. Damn you, Smith, build 'em better next time.

Where was I?

Chewing, huh?.....

Michael Carlson's "Travels with No One" seemed strangely out of place. That title, though, evokes nostalgic remembrances and, at least, emotional identification for my weary mind.

"Datcon," he says, shaking his head. More entertaining and informative than Brown's description in LOCUS, but--how come nobody mentions actors and directors when reporting of A BOY AND HIS DOG? I assume Ellison wrote the screenplay. (S(Actually, no. He started it, but only got like five or six pages into it. Somebody else finished it. Unfortunately, I don't have the credits at hand.)S)

Cons for me were out last summer due to the fact I'm poor. No-money doesn't stop me from going wherever I want. I've been around; some by driving, mostly by hitching, but for some reason I just will not vag into a con. I never ceased to be amazed by people who turn up at cons after hitching whatever absurdly long distance with no money in their kick, relying on someone's good will for a place to sleep. A strange quirk in my nature, I know, for, at the drop of a load, I'll take off for parts unknown just to end up sleeping under a bridge on the cement embankment of a canal.

That about wraps it up on this end for now; I feel myself beginning to sink back into the sludge and poisonous mire of this locale. Soon, too very soon, my flesh will bloat blue with disease; I will be open to attack from the hollow-hearted demons surely lurking outside my doors. See you around.

JEFF HECHT 11/3/74
54 Newell Road/Auburndale MA 02166

Whilst it probably is a bit late for such comments to matter, I'd recommend Olaf Stapledon's STAR MAKER for the hard science/fiction course. As a work of fiction it may lack something --some people find Stapledon unreadable--but his work is mainly speculative philosophy based (in part) upon the hard sciences, and that's what this course is about. The details of the astrophysics may be somewhat dated, and he didn't know about such neat things as black holes and pulsars when he was writing in the 1930's, but it's still fascinating. (LAST AND FIRST MEN approaches similar topics, but that book is limited in scope to man and the solar system.)

Mike Carlson has my sympathy. Once upon a time, I tried to get into college administration, too, only all I got was a master's from UMass/Amherst and a large postage bill for sending out resumes. (And, oh yes, I got into one of those strange endeavors that produces an education textbook. But that's a rather long episode to be dealt with when I feel like shaggy publisher stories.) (S(Any time you're ready, I am.)S) College administrators and faculty have roughly as much compunctions about backstabbing and other political games as industrial management (despite delusions to the contrary on both sides).

JODIE OFFUTT 10/23/74
Funny Farm/Haldeman KY 40329

Michael Carlson's travels were hard to follow. All that criss-crossing from one town to another. One phrase he used caught my eye: "...minority group and other disadvantaged students." The implication is that a minority group is automatically disadvantaged. I guess that's why our country is in such a "do-good" mood now and has been for about the last ten years. So why is everybody so upset about Rocky?

If bad US rock groups are better than bad British groups, I think the opposite is also true: that good British groups are better than good US groups.

Is he sure that doctor wasn't a taxidermist? Can you imagine taking a small child into that office for, say, an immunization? Or anybody who is really sick, and feeling bad? It would be sadistic.

DON D'AMASSA 10/23/74
19 Angell Drive/E. Providence RI 02914

Michael Carlson's travels might be interesting to read about, but they are fascinating to watch. On the way back from

Discon, we stopped at a little restaurant in Delaware for a late breakfast. Michael had been up the entire previous evening, and spent the first leg of the trip home dozing off in the back seat, jumping awake, and muttering, "Is this Connecticut yet?" So we didn't expect him to be entirely coherent in the restaurant. It was a do-it-yourself joint, and we had to write our own checks. Michael grasped a pencil firmly in hand, squared his shoulders, fastened his eyelids to the tips of his eyelashes, and calmly ordered, for breakfast, one glass of milk and one glass of Coke and one dish of ice cream.

FREFF 11/9/74
2035 Park Road NW/Washington DC 20010

Glad to see you reading Dick Francis. I've only managed to read one, so far, a later one: BONECRACK. From all I hear all of Francis' heroes undergo a fair amount of nasty and completely realistic pain in the passage of events. He manages an incredibly tense storytelling in a clean, sparse style. I liked BONECRACK a hell of a lot. (S(His later books are not the equal of his early ones, but they are still extremely good. It's only the unparalleled excellence of the early books that makes the later ones seem slightly disappointing.)S)

Only one negative reaction to an otherwise nice Carlson column. I staunchly defend the Strawbs, mellotron or no. (Dammit, the mellotron is capable of more than umpteen billion violins and usages like Wakeman's or Moraz's prove it.) (S(And even when it is used as a gimmick it can be extremely effective--years after he did it, I still get a tremendous kick out of the voices programmed into one of Wakeman's mellotrons. It works great!))S) Now, I haven't seen Strawbs in concert, but their last albums have been excellent, to my bizarre tastes. Try out "By the Sea" from BURSTING AT THE SEAMS, Michael, and tell me more about their lousy mellotron. Hah! (And somebody tell him that the Strawbs didn't "recently" discover the mellotron, please, but have been using it since FROM THE WITCHWOODS, 4 or 5 years ago.) I have a creative dander up, as you can tell.

You tell Discon anecdotes--particularly the banquet and Hugo acceptance--delightfully. You mean you aren't Tip? I guess he's Kissinger after all.

PAUL ANDERSON 1/31/75
21 Mulga Road/Hawthorndene SA 5051/Australia

I do not know whether the book was better than the filmed version of ENDLESS NIGHT by Christie or not, but I saw the movie some time ago and was most unimpressed. The film started OK but the director forgot to lay the groundwork for the famous Christie twist at the end--the one they said only one in a thousand would guess. The reason the twist was so hard to pick was that it went against all that had been given in the film before--including times and dates.

I got the impression that Michael Carlson did not like the Strawbs all that much. I have not heard them to date but as I recall they did supply one very good keyboards player. Even if

he is not quite up to either Edgar Froese or Klaus Schulze. The mellotron can be used as a positive instrument rather than just a negative thing to cover up deficiencies; a good keyboard man will be able to get quite a lot from it. The best efforts that I have heard to date have mainly been in sections where the band or group did not sing (even if PFM manage that quite nicely). By the way, how did you like RELAYER? (S(Most impressive. Yes continues to improve dramatically with each album. RELAYER is quite advanced over TALES FROM TOPOGRAPHIC OCEANS--though I sincerely doubt that I will ever in my life find an album I will like as much as TOPOGRAPHIC. I am currently waiting (very impatiently) for Yes guitarist Steve Howe's solo album, BEGINNINGS. Howe is so incredibly good....)S)

DON KELLER

3920 Laurel Canyon Blvd #3/Studio City CA 91604

Got the new Yes album, RELAYER, yesterday. The album's on now; I've only played it half a dozen times (sounds like a lot for the time, but the music's complexity makes it stand up), so I'm not really into it yet. I think it's very good, but it's hard to compare it to their others: a new album by a group you're thoroughly familiar with always sounds flat (literally: one- or two-dimensional) at first. Most importantly, it does not sound much like TALES FROM TOPOGRAPHIC OCEANS. More like CLOSE TO THE EDGE than anything, but I think it's a genuinely new sound. Moraz seems to be good for them, and really sets Howe off even better than Wakeman did. There are some really pretty moments (and one bad a capella bit), and on the whole I think I'm going to like the album a lot eventually.

"The Gates of Delerium" really fell in place this (seventh?) time through. They're playing with time signatures, especially in the long central instrumental section. Most of their stuff to date has been based on the standard 4/4 and 3/4 rhythms, but this album they are not so much. Genesis, particularly on SELLING ENGLAND BY THE POUND, has been using unusual rhythms, so it's not too new to me. Emerson, Lake & Palmer is largely 4/4 also, except for "Toccatta," which is weird (and is very like "Sound Chaser" on RELAYER, which really floors me). They are much tighter on this album; before, they often gave the impression of five outstanding people synchronizing; here, it's more of one sound. Squire is practically invisible this time. Moraz is concentrating hard on shaping the sound (I knew Yes discipline would eliminate his Refugee self-indulgence) and not showing off, so Howe stands out. (So does White--he's very different from Bruford, but is excellent in his own way.) Howe scares me--he seems to be improving in quantum jumps. Doesn't "Sound Chaser" remind you of Mahavishnu? That one place near the beginning, where the movement of the song stops, though everybody keeps playing, is reminiscent of Zappa, particularly the unbelievable "Penguin in Bondage." RELAYER is a great album; it is worthy of Yes' talents at this point in their development--what more can you say?

I'm not that fond of Mike Carlson's stuff; he writes well, but I don't find him congenial, and my attention wanders. But, much as the paragraph about the Strawbs rankled me (they aren't that great in concert, true, but I love HERO AND HEROINE), I'll remember his "1,005 violins" line forever. Beautiful!

ANGUS TAYLOR 10/28/74

I enjoyed Tiptree's letter, especially the line about women being the real aliens we (men) have been looking for. I've thought that myself. And since Tiptree is so good at aliens, I really hope he'll use that idea for his story in AURORA. (Re that idea: Has Tiptree or anyone else wondered at the psychic strains that might crop up in a usually-neuter-sexed race such as portrayed in THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS? Where would be the Other --the Alien--to relate to in a meaningful way? Did Le Guin ask herself this? Read THE EMBEDDING by Ian Watson. AND PLEASE SUGGEST TO TIPTREE that he read Watson's book: he just may really get off on parts of it.)

SETH McEVOY
BOX 268/E. Lansing MI 48823

Strange to see Tiptree being fascinated by Women's Liberation. I find myself so: I think it's probably the real issue to be faced this century; if we men don't start using our brains instead of a more private portion of the anatomy (S("the anatomy?" It's not the anatomy)S), we're going to be left behind. After I finish my fourth novel (tentatively titled THE MAN IN THE PLASTIC SUIT), I plan to tackle the theme of Women's liberation. I'm even hoping that I can finish it by next year's Clarion, since I heard a rumor that Joanna Russ may be teaching at Clarion East, and maybe I could get her opinion.

Speaking J. Russ, I was very elevated to (elated to?) see that letter from Philip K. Dick to Joanna Russ re Poul Anderson. Phil's answer was so good, it made me think that there might be a trace of hope for us dumb men. Also, I read FLOW MY TEARS. The review in LOCUS made it sound so rotten that I had put it off. FLOW MY TEARS was good, though maybe not as much of the wacky detail. (It was there, all right, but it was almost like PKD knew that we know how his mind works by now, so he could concentrate on the story and the characters.)

DOUGLAS BARBOUR 11/10/75

I think people should be warned about FANTASTIC PLANET, the French-made animated sfilm. Some of the animated sequences are brilliant, some are not that good at all. But, especially in a dubbed version, the story is a bomb. Indeed, many of the best sequences have nothing to do with the story but are thrown in to fill up time. Talk about bad sf! It's 30s superhero stuff at its worst, with the humans--a la Heinlein--conquering because that's good old homo sapiens for you--they're tough! But nothing is explained in any believable way. When they need a "disintegrator ray" (I kid you not, that's what they call it) they have one, after only three years of hauling themselves up from barbarism--but they did have a teaching device of the ruling giants race. Well, I enjoyed it, because a friend had told me not to expect much, but even so I was finally disappointed. There was an Australian short with it about the great barrier reef. Terrible voice-over commentary, but some of the various fishes they actually photographed in that documentary were more beautiful, odd, what have you than any of the strange beasts thrown in for

local color in the feature. Which says--what?

The only complaint I have about the Tiptree letter is that I dearly missed not having read earlier installments. It's fun to read and full of little bits to titillate the mind and imagination. I liked his comments on sf; he's thinking. One of the few sf writers I know who can see the value of Aldiss's games in PROBABILITY A, and not run screaming from it accusing it of everything from being crashingly (crushingly?) boring (only true if the only thing you can get excited about in a book is the number of lays or slays), and anti-sf (which it is, but only in a very formalistic way). Of course anyone who can like and appreciate Tolkien and Malzberg both--which I do--is high on my list of insightful minds, anyway. And he's one of the few men in sf who has really tried to come to grips with what the liberationists are talking about, and with the problems Joanna Russ has so clearly articulated as desperately central to what sf should be doing in her article "The Image of Women in Sf." Good to see that, too. He's one of the few really important writers in sf right now.

ROBERT J. WHITAKER 10/30/74
4612 Haverford Place A-7/Wilmington DE 19808

If you were to take all of the material written about H.P. Lovecraft, and were to pile it up, it would probably fall over.

MEDICAL NEMESIS by IVAN ILLICH

reviewed by Eric Lindsay

"The medical establishment has become a major threat to health" is the opening sentence of MEDICAL NEMESIS, the fifth book by radical educational theorist Ivan Illich. In it he challenges one of the most respected and well-established groups in our society, the medical establishment. In a country that spends, according to him, a staggering 17% of its gross national product on health, he claims that the results are unsatisfactory, and are so considered by the majority of the US public.

It is surprising that in a country with such a favorable doctor/population ratio, over 50% of all patients are known to be suffering from problems of psychosomatic origin. It is even more surprising that despite the enormous panoply of the health structure, most of these patients are not cured--in fact, little attempt is made to cure them--rather treatment is aimed at alleviating the symptoms via psychotropic and mood-altering drugs. The result is one of the highest rates of tranquilizer usage--up 290% since 1962--and barbituate addiction of any country in the world.

Part of this stems from the unconscious dislike many people have for their jobs, and their lack of interest in their passive leisure "activities." Religious ideas of the meaning of life and the reason for existence are generally held in discredit. The closed belief systems that attempt to replace religion--psychoanalysis, communism and so on--are likewise unable to provide for a meaningful life. Marx was right to consider religion "the opium of the people;" what he appears not to have expressed was

that you need to supply a replacement. His followers have attempted that. One common characteristic of those systems I have mentioned is that they contain within themselves an explanation for their rejection--Catholic confessional discipline, the self-criticism of Chinese communism, and the psychological concept of "resistance" are examples of systems in which the doubter can explain away doubts in terms of the beliefs required by the system. However well they work for adherents, in general terms these systems of belief are a failure for the majority of people. The result is a naive existentialism, mostly undirected, that expresses itself in absenteeism, in "sickies," and in the demand that medicine assure the sufferers that they are "ill." Thus we have the medical certificate required when a worker takes a day off, when the unconscious desire was for a rest from work. We no longer believe in our hearts in the "work ethic" written of by Max Weber when he coined the phrase "the Protestant Ethic."

Illich claims there has been a change in our attitude towards, and belief in, medicine. Medical care once implied a holding action to allow "the wisdom of the body" to effect a cure. Now medical care is a commodity, a part of the passive consumerism of modern life. It is a status symbol to have as many check-ups as the next person, thus becoming a patient without passing through the intermediate stage of being sick. That this consumerism has not worked, even on its own terms, is shown by the expectation of life in the US, which is now lower than it was ten years ago. Statistics from recent historical times are suspect, for who wants to admit to mistakes, but historical figures, such as Presidents, authors and creative workers seemed to live longer in the past. The last seven US Presidents (excluding those assassinated or still alive) had an average life span of 72.7 years, while the first ten US Presidents had a life span of 77 years. (I admit to a group exception to the long life span--composers seem to have struck out.) Generally the modern population faces an avalanche of stress and environment-linked diseases almost unknown until this century.

The medical profession is "sickening," in Illich's term, and he argues against "iatrogenesis," a term referring to disease produced as a result of medical intervention. He finds three main reasons for this iatrogenesis. These are:

1. Clinical. In which health risks exceed cures, as in the examples he gives of the adverse side effects of drugs, unneeded surgery and the attendant risks, accidental deaths of children occurring more often in hospitals than in any other area, one in five of all patients in research hospitals is ill due to the treatment, and one in thirty of these dies. He does not deny the effectiveness of many aspects of medical treatment, but says we must reconsider its failures and deficiencies.

2. Social. Society itself is unhealthy, and has surmised that the cure lies in the new near-religion of medicine. The doctors preside where once stood a priest; at birth, through life, and at the deathbed, now likely to be an oxygen tent complete with EEG equipment.

3. Self Healing. Illich argues that we must accept pain, death and suffering as part of life, rather than a deviation from normality. In accepting them as unnatural we lose our capacity

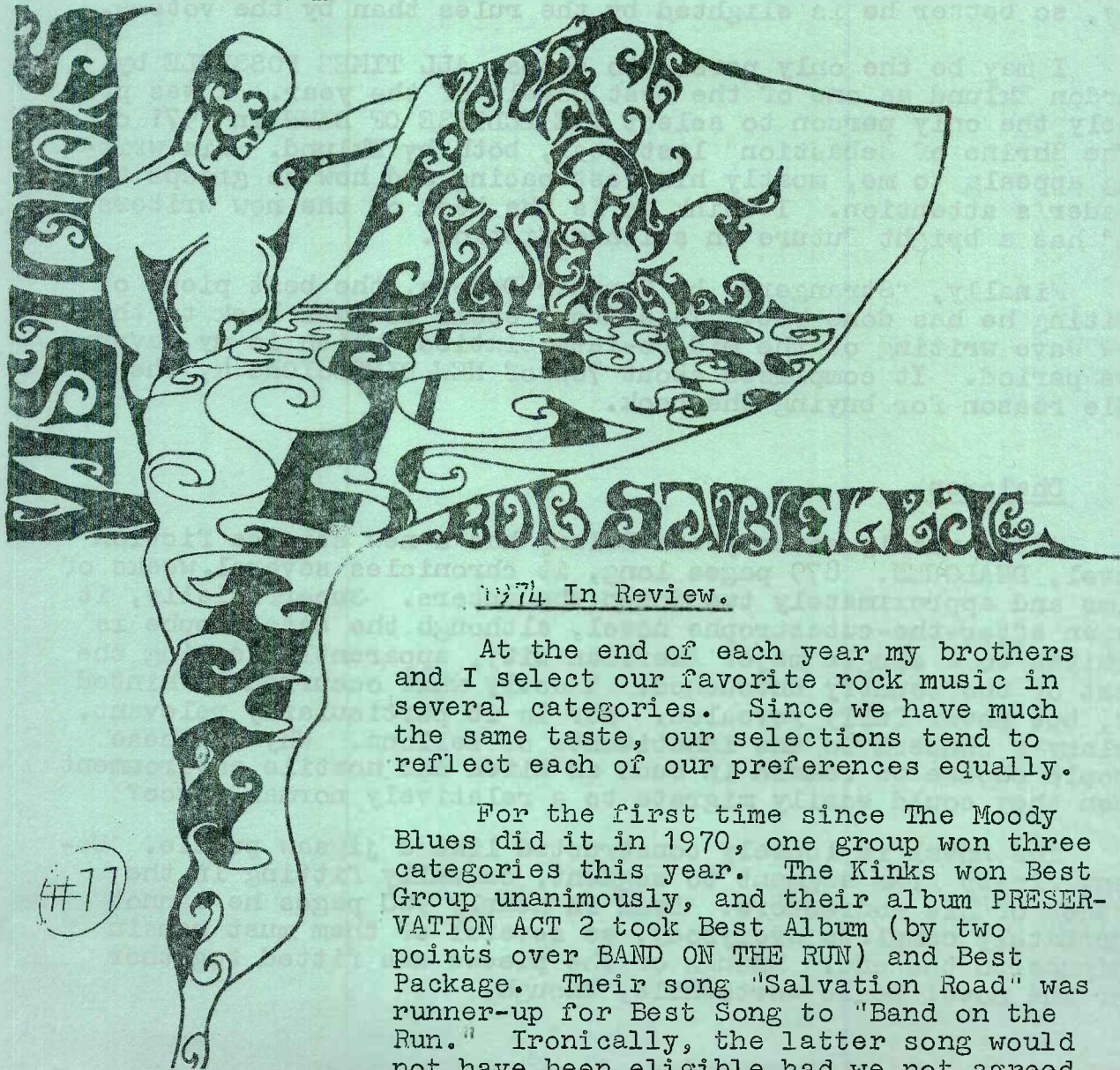
to deal with them, leading to a lower threshold of self-confidence, placebo treatments, and vast expenditures.

Illich concludes his work "the true miracle of modern medicine is diabolical. It consists not only of making individuals but whole populations survive on inhumanly low levels of personal health."

I have to disagree with much of what Illich says; at times it seems to me he is, in his old age, preparing himself for death.

It seems unlikely that the modern medicine man has answers to the riddle of meaning, any more than their religious predecessors did, but no other group in society has a cure for the malaise of civilization. But perhaps I am reading into this work material that does not exist. As it stands Illich's work is an important and interesting and damning radical reassessment of modern medicine and its place in society.

OF PARADISE



1974 In Review.

At the end of each year my brothers and I select our favorite rock music in several categories. Since we have much the same taste, our selections tend to reflect each of our preferences equally.

For the first time since The Moody Blues did it in 1970, one group won three categories this year. The Kinks won Best Group unanimously, and their album PRESERVATION ACT 2 took Best Album (by two points over BAND ON THE RUN) and Best Package. Their song "Salvation Road" was runner-up for Best Song to "Band on the Run." Ironically, the latter song would not have been eligible had we not agreed

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in a change in the structure of the voting this year. Instead of covering the period January-to-December, we moved it back one month so it covers December-to-November. We did this since albums released in December traditionally receive few votes because of the nearness of their release dates to our voting. Under the new system we figured all albums will have a fairer chance in the voting.

Elton John beat out Paul McCartney for Best Performer for the second year in a row.

I also selected my favorite science fiction of the year. I've been picking these since 1970, but the four stories this year is the smallest amount I've ever chosen.

My top selection was Ursula Le Guin's THE DISPOSSESSED. While it was not a perfect novel, it was the most impressive one I've read since DYING INSIDE in '72. Nearly as strong was 334, by Thomas Disch. This was a much weightier novel, hence will probably appeal to a smaller audience. Due to a technicality, it is not eligible for this year's awards. This is actually fortunate since past experience has shown Disch could not win anyway, so better he is slighted by the rules than by the voters.

I may be the only person to choose ALL TIMES POSSIBLE by Gordon Eklund as one of the best novels of the year. I was probably the only person to select THE ECLIPSE OF DAWN in 1971 or "The Shrine of Sebastian" last year, both by Eklund. His writing appeals to me, mostly his fast pacing and how he grasps the reader's attention. I think he is the best of the new writers and has a bright future in science fiction.

Finally, "Strangers" by Gardner Dozois, the best piece of writing he has done yet. This story seems to hark back to the New Wave writing of the mid-to-late Sixties, which is my favorite period. It comprises about 70% of NEW DIMENSIONS 4, the sole reason for buying the book.

Dhalgren.

After nearly seven years Delany has a new science fiction novel, DHALGREN. 879 pages long, it chronicles several weeks of time and approximately two dozen characters. Superficially, it is an after-the-catastrophe novel, although the catastrophe is limited to a single major American city, apparently leaving the rest of the country untouched. Exactly what occurred is hinted at, but never fully revealed. Nor is it particularly relevant. Delany's concern is the inhabitants of Bellona. Why do these people choose to remain in such an alien and hostile environment when they could easily migrate to a relatively normal place?

The novel is loosely constructed like a jigsaw puzzle. Delany floats from segment to segment, casually fitting in the pieces of his characters. Even in nearly 900 pages he cannot adequately complete everybody, so several of them must remain enigmas to the end. Enough of the pieces are fitted together for the novel to be worthwhile, though.

The protagonist is called The Kid. He is in his late twenties and does not recall his name. He enters Bellona at the start of the novel, unaware of what he will find there. Through his travels we meet the other characters and, along with him, we learn about them. Like many Delany heroes (and The Kid is probably more Delany than any of them) he is a poet, highly intelligent, yet lingering on the borderline between sanity and insanity. He is bisexual, eventually forms a liason with Lanya, a harmonica-playing girl who alternates between seeming alien to Bellona and perfectly suited to the city, and Denny, a boy who is young enough so his entire personality has been shaped by the city.

The important people in DHALGREN loosely fall into several groups: The Scorpions are a local Hell's Angels, living together for mutual comfort and aid. Since The Kid eventually finds them the most appealing group they appear that way to the reader. Roger Calkins is the self-proclaimed government of Bellona. Along with his entourage he lives in a well-guarded mansion near the outskirts of the city and remains a mystery through most of the book. A small group of people live together communal style in the city's park. Unlike the Scorpions they are neither arrogant nor occasionally violent, but attempt to improve their lives peacefully. They appear to The Kid as essentially dull and he avoids them whenever possible. There are several loners in Bellona, of which The Kid is one for the first part of the book. These people avoid the other groups most of the time, yet they manage to show up occasionally in The Kid's travels. The most interesting in this group is The Richards Family. They are four apparently-typical Americans trying to lead their lives oblivious to the havoc which Bellona has become around them. Yet they practice their normalcy to such an extent that it surpasses even eccentricity and becomes fantasy. A very interesting touch. The final group is centered around a local legend names George. He is the sex symbol of many people in Bellona. His pornographic posters appear through the city and strongly influence at least one character's actions. George lives in the Black section of the city. There are undercurrents of racial tension throughout the novel, but they never actually surface.

DHALGREN is highly picturesque, Delany's finest trait. It reads easily, with the possible exception of the final segment where he plays with format and style, somewhat unsuccessfully. It is not an easy novel to understand. Parts of it are quite strange and, possibly, intentionally deceiving. For example, the significance of the title is never explained. I was certain it would eventually be the real name of The Kid, but I was wrong. I should not have expected Delany to be so obvious. I assume I'll have to read DHALGREN a second time to un-



derstand it more fully, although at 879 pages I will not be up to that reading for some time.

One feature of DHALGREN struck me repeatedly. I can strongly visualize it as a short television series. Not the mindless pap we are accustomed to, but, under somewhat utopian conditions I can picture a program similar to BBC series such as THE SIX WIVES OF HENRY VIII or ELIZABETH R. As a movie, I doubt it could be done. Even if somebody had the patience and dedication to attempt it, I do not see how DHALGREN could be condensed into two or three hours. Fifteen or twenty would be reasonable for it. Also, the large number of identifiable characters is custom made for television. (After all, isn't one of the major reasons STAR TREK remains so popular is that, unlike most television shows, it had at least a half dozen characters with which the viewer could identify?)

One last thing: DHALGREN is very sexual and very explicit, possibly a holdover from Delany's porno novel THE TIDES OF LUST. It will offend many people, perhaps excite others, although I suspect the latter will become bored with the seemingly endless preoccupation with sex at one point in the novel. It could have been edited by the author somewhat.

jds here: Perhaps if DHALGREN were to be filmed, the best way to do it would be to follow the example of Robert Altman and NASHVILLE--keep only the basics of the plot, turn the characters loose, get maybe ten hours of film, and edit it down. NASHVILLE is a brilliant, brilliant movie--and a man of genius could perhaps do the same for DHALGREN.



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