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The RISFA Players and Boskone 15 present:

RIVETS REDUX

a science-fiction musical

Book and lyrics by Sue Anderson and Mark M. Keller

Inspiration by Gilbert & Sullivan among others

Illustrations by Stu Shiffman

- Scene 1. Casting Office for SF Characters
- Scene 2. Publisher's Office
- Scene 3. Writer's Lounge
- Scene 4. College Lecture Hall
- Scene 5. Writer's Lounge (next morning)

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19, 20, 22, 23, 24 (c) 1978 Sue Anderson

Illustrations (c) 1978 Stu Shiffman

Additional copies of "Rivets Redux" are available for ^{1.25}~~\$3.00~~ at con tables, or for \$1.25 by mail from Sue Anderson, 12 Summit St., East Providence, RI 02914 or Mark M. Keller, 101 South Angell St., Providence, RI 02906.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CHARLES DEXTER WARD

Scion of an old wealthy New England family, he could have lived the comfortable life of a propertied gentleman of leisure. Instead, he meddled in the occult forbidden lore of the eldritch Cthulhu Mythos and ended up a pitiful wreck in a Providence, Rhode Island lunatic asylum, babbling of indescribable horrors and unutterable monstrosities. He is still a bit quirky; one who sees the visage of the hideous Cthulhu never recovers his prior equanimity of temperament. /// From the novel by H.P. Lovecraft, The Case of Charles Dexter Ward.

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

After mighty Atlantis sank into the sea many successor kingdoms flourished on the mainland, enclaves in a barbaric Europe. Into the Hyborian kingdoms about 12,000 B.C. came one of the most barbaric barbarians of them all: Conan. He was big, he was strong, he had muscles like an ox, and nobody messed with him more than once. Bashing his way to glory, he was in turn a thief, a pirate, a mercenary soldier, and a king. Numerous modern comic book barbarians and musclemen get their basic inspiration from the tales of Conan, written by Robert E. Howard for Weird Tales in the 1930s.

KIM KINNISON

Special agent of the Galactic Patrol, the chief force for law and order in the inhabited worlds about 2500 A.D. Most of the bad guys - pirates, murderers, horsethieves, etc. - have united under the banner of the arch-villain Boskone, and the Patrol has to detect and smash the Boskonian Main Base. Kinnison is aided by various non-human buddies in the Patrol, like dragon Worsel and animate oil barrel Tregonsee. But his biggest help is his Lens: a semi-living jewel keyed to his mind alone. The Lens is a telepathic booster which lets the Lensman read and control any mind he detects. /// From a series of novels by E.E. "Doc" Smith that appeared in Astounding Stories during the 1930s and 1940s: Galactic Patrol, Gray Lensman, Second-stage Lensmen, Children of the Lens, etc.

CLARISSA MacDOUGALL KINNISON

The first woman to earn the status of Lens-wearer in the Galactic Patrol, she nursed Kim back to health after his run-in with a pack of space villains, and later married him! See above. She infiltrated the matriarchy of Lyrane II for the Patrol, and not only discovered the secret alliance between the Overlords (nasty villains) and the Eich (really nasty villains) but helped in the final destruction of the Thrale-Onlonian Empire (absolutely the worst villains). Then she and Kim had five super-telepathic kids who helped demolish Eddore - the top villains of all time, even nastier than Thrale-Orlo. /// Also from the "Doc" Smith novels. The Galactic Patrol stories were quintessential space opera: every time you knocked out one bunch of baddies, a newer and badder pack took their place.

ISABELLA FIGHOLLER

Wanderer through time and space in imitation of her more famous cousin Ferdinand Feghoot, Isabella has visited all eras and all peoples. She is universally competent in languages and sciences but has a weakness for atrocious puns. /// A communal product of the many minds that recount her adventures in various New England fanzines: Mythologies, Foudroyant, and others.

GUINEVERE THE GRAD STUDENT

A PhD candidate in literature who has found in science fiction the perfect topic for a symbolic and semiotic analysis. She doesn't exactly understand all that technical material about hyperdrive and parsecs, and wishes the SF writers would include more clear-cut ambivalent symbols like Moby Dick or Gravity's Rainbow: it's really quite difficult to do a character study of Cthulhu or Ferry Rhodan. Guinevere never reads an SF book for fun. It's all very serious and sober. /// Taken, alas, from life. At last count there are something like 100 books of SF criticism, not to mention over 30 bibliographies. Half of these are by academic types and the other half by sercon SF fans.

HELMINTH THE SPEAKER FOR BOSKONE

Originally the chief agent of the Boskonian Conspiracy against the Galactic Patrol, he found his Prime Base most annoyingly invaded by Kim Kinnison amid chaos, destruction, and exploding bombs. This double-dyed villain was in his office trying frantically to contact his superiors when Kinnison burst in the door and Helminth got blown away by a blast of machine-gun fire. Now he has changed his name and is still looking for work as a heavy in SF space opera. /// Again from "Doc" Smith, Galactic Patrol (serial 1937-8; book 1950).

CHESTER DETH-RAY

An editor and publisher of Science Fiction and Fantasy books. Aided by Lynn the Receptionist and his Editorial Assistant, he also runs a talent agency for SF characters who want to be included in stories by well-known writers. He is argumentative (and always right), compact in stature, a prolific writer himself, and has a sneaking fondness for the kind of SF written in the 1930s, when he first started in the field. /// Any resemblance to any real SF editor is of course wholly coincidental, and Chester's office staff is equally imaginary.

-MMK

ILLUSTRATIONS by Stu Shiffman

1. Cover - "Writing the Play"
2. Ferry Rhodent Leaving For Home
3. Charles Dexter Ward and Abdul Alhazred
4. "Hobbit Days"
5. Lensmen Three
6. Ward, Conan, and Isabella
7. Back cover - "The Huckster's Room"





SCENE I - The Casting Office

Curtain rises to reveal a large hall, with signs on the back wall:

CASTING OFFICE

HEROES

VILLAINS

Down L. is an office desk, armed with telephone, flowers, microphone for P.A. system. LYNN, the Receptionist, is seated at desk. At R. along back wall is a row of chairs, where CONAN, KIM KINNISON, CLARISSA KINNISON and CHARLES DEXTER WARD are seated. HELMINTH, villainous in black cloak and ski mask, lurks nearby.

A horde of costumed science fiction and fantasy types enter, and mill about. Confusion reigns. CHESTER DETH-RAY enters L., stops at the desk and confers with LYNN. Both then move forward through the mob. Music starts.

DETH-RAY & LYNN:

We run an office here (-fice here)
For writers and for editors;
With our help they don't fear (don't fear)
Collectors, banks or creditors.

You'll notice that our cli- (our cli-)
Ents have a certain oddity;
We specialize in sci- (in sci-)
Ence fiction, not in shoddity.

Out casting calls are not (are not)
Found listed in Variety,
But we think they have got (have got)
A certain notoreity.

The characters that they hire (they hire)
Help make their stories saleable,
And if you'll just inquire (inquire)
There may be parts available.

Music continues. DETH-RAY and LYNN direct costumed characters offstage in various directions.

DETH-RAY & LYNN:

We have all kinds in stock (in stock)
For stories science-fictional,
And fantasy's no block (no block):
Our staff is not restrictional.

But if you want a job (a job)
Well-paying and enjoyable,
You mustn't be a snob (a snob)
Or you'll be unemployable.

When authors need a type (a type)
Of alien or humanity,
Our clients here don't gripe (Don't gripe!)
Of staleness or inanity.

Each character plays a part (a part)
And plays that part convincingly,
With all his mind and heart (and heart)
Not vacantly or wincingly.

You can find any sort
Of mutation or sport:
A barbarian wild
Or a telepath child,
And no one has yet
Wanted one we can't get
For we've got it all planned:
We're the best in the land --
The best in the land!

Music finishes up as DETH-RAY and LYNN direct the rest of the characters off. DETH-RAY exits L., behind desk. KIM, CLARISSA, CONAN and WARD remain seated.

LYNN (*consulting the daily schedule; speaking into P.A. mike*): Perry Rhodent, please report to room seven. Herr Rhodent zu Zimmer Nummer Sieben, bitte. You are needed for Novel Tha-ree Ey-ut Five. Mister Rhodent to room seven, please.

PERRY RHODENT, *a gross fellow in semi-military outfit, dashes in from R., stops at desk, and is sent off L.*

CLARISSA *rises and crosses to desk to speak to LYNN.*

CLARISSA: Are there any messages for Kim Kinnison?

LYNN: No, I'm sorry. Nobody has called for him yet.

CLARISSA: How about Clarissa MacDougall? (*LYNN shakes her head "no".*) Maybe there's something under "Lensman"?

LYNN: Don't worry, Mrs. Kinnison. I'll let you know the minute anything comes in for either one of you. Honest I will.

CLARISSA *returns to her chair and sits down. KIM gently pats her hand.*

WARD (*to CLARISSA*): It seems we are all in the same situation, my dear. Between engagements. And it's been so long since I've been offered an acceptable rôle.

LYNN *picks up phone, listens a moment, hangs up and speaks into P.A. mike again.*

LYNN: Commander Spock to make-up, please. Your ears are ready. Mr. Spock to make-up.

SPOCK *enters R., gives Vulcan peace sign to the group. They scowl. CONAN makes a threatening gesture; SPOCK exits hurriedly, L.*

LYNN (*gets another phone call and speaks into mike*): Encounter Team, your UFO is waiting in the lobby. Encounter Team, please meet your UFO in the Main Lobby.

The ENCOUNTER TEAM -- three people in white-collar garb and one wearing a red jumpsuit -- enter left, carrying flashlight and kazoos. The stage light dims, leaving one spot on TEAM. They put on sunglasses and look up.)

TEAM LEADER: There it is! Hey, we're down here! (*The one in the jumpsuit waves flashlight back and forth, twice. Light dims and brightens twice.*) They see us! They see us! Quick, send the code signal!

The Team Musician plays that five-note theme on a kazoo. No response.)

TEAM LEADER: They're not answering! Try the code signal again!

Musician plays the theme again. Still no response from UFO.)

TEAM LEADER: Try the emergency alternate signal!

Musician plays opening of "Dueling Banjos". Or "Tubas". Pause. There is a thunderous response from UFO. Musician and UFO play a brief duet. Lights flash. The ENCOUNTER TEAM exits L., blissfully, still watching the sky.

The lights return to normal, revealing annoyed KIM and CLARISSA and the aghast WARD. CONAN is leafing through a comic book and looking perturbed.

WARD: And public taste has descended that low? Why, I remember when H. P. LOVECRAFT was at the height of his powers - brilliant, crystalline prose. (*sighs*) But that was forty years ago.

CLARISSA: They just aren't writing stories like they used to. Here we are, the Gray Lensman and the Red Lensman - Lenswoman - Lensperson? -- heroes of the Galactic Patrol. No stories for us. And you, Charles. A gentleman student of the occult, who could always discover a ghoul or some horrible monster in whatever old crypt you happened to stumble over... Nothing for you either.

LYNN (*on P.A. system*): Perry Rhodent, please report to the Conference Room to meet your authors' committee. They are presenting Novel four-six-six. Mr. Rhodent, authors' committee in the Conference Room.

RHODENT enters L., looking harried; he gets directions from LYNN and runs off R., holding his ears on with one hand. The unemployed glare after him.

LYNN (*on P.A.*): Mr. Hulk, please pick up Line Five. Mr. Hulk, Line Five.

KIM: "Line Five"? What's that?

CLARISSA: Probably "Hulk smash puny humans. Argh."

All sigh, get up and move forward to center stage. Music starts.

CONAN & WARD: See how the Fates their gifts allot:
For They are working, We are not,
Yet we have won ourselves, I say,
More loyal readership than they.

LYNN: Are readers loyal?

WARD & CLARISSA: I should say --
At least they were in Gernsback's day.

ALL: Days that were olden,
Plots so golden,
Heroes bold in
Stories told in
Series foldin', folded now --
So we're out of work to stay:
S-F's full of clowns like They!

KIM, CONAN
& LYNN: There but for Fortune go we both --
Blame it on Fortune, not on sloth,
And we can save our self-respect,
And then our egos won't be wrecked.

WARD: Are egos fragile?

CLARISSA: I suspect --
At least they were last time I checked.

ALL: We'd take their places
 In fans' graces:
 No more traces
 Of their cases
 Or their faces face us now --
 We'd be home again to stay,
 No more sign of clowns like They!

They all return to their seats and sit, dejected. ISABELLA FIGHOLLER, a breezy, self-assured young woman, enters R. and crosses to desk.

ISABELLA: I'm Isabella Figholler and I want to sign up with your talent agency. What openings do you have?

LYNN: That depends on what your specialty is.

ISABELLA: Oh, I'm a universal traveler and raconteur. I'm famous for puns and shaggy-dog stories.

LYNN: Shaggy-dog stories?

ISABELLA: The very worst kind. You must know my cousin, Ferdinand Feghoot. (*LYNN nods, warily.*) Well, the stories I use, he wouldn't have the nerve to tell.

LYNN: If you've had any experience in science fiction...?

ISABELLA: I had my own series for a while. But the writer signed a contract with Zap-Gun Books to do fifty gothic romances a year. So I came here to find a new writer for my stories.

LYNN: We handle science fiction and fantasy characters -- not stand-up comics.

ISABELLA: Oh, all my stories are science-fictional. (*She moves down center and strikes a lecturing pose.*) For example:

Once I got into a time machine and went to visit a tribe of Kwakiutl Indians in the thirteenth century, long before the white man arrived in America. They lived in British Columbia, by the shores of the mighty Pacific Ocean.

I arrived at sunset, with the red sun sinking into the ocean and the Indians waiting under the great, dark trees. The mighty river was rolling past. And all the people of the village stood on the river bank, singing a rhythmic song to lure the great fish up the river.

HELMINTH sneaks on L. and stands to R. rear of ISABELLA. He mimes catching and eating a fish. Raw.) (But tasty.)

ISABELLA (*continues without break*): Come up, come up, they sang. Come up so we can catch you and eat you. And as I listened to them, even though we were far to the north, I had the feeling that we were really in the South Pacific.

LYNN: All right, I'll bite--

ISABELLA: That's what the fish said!

LYNN (*sighs*): Why should Indians singing by a river in British Columbia remind you of the South Pacific?

ISABELLA: Beuase it was a (*sings*) Salmon Chanted Evening...

All onstage moan or cringe, except HELMINTH, who laughs loudly.

ISABELLA (to LYNN): And that's science fishin', isn't it?

LYNN: All right. I'll put your name down on the list. Now please, go away.

ISABELLA: I could tell another story--?

LYNN: No, no, please. That was quite enough. We'll call you if anything comes in.

ISABELLA shrugs and hands LYNN a business card. LYNN writes information in notebook, shows it to her. ISABELLA turns to leave, R. WARD rises and intercepts her.

WARD: Lost your series, did you? How sad.

ISABELLA: So it goes. (WARD cringes.) I'm Isabella Figholler, galactic traveler through time and space. (Extends her hand.)

WARD (kisses ISABELLA's hand; she is nonplussed): And I am Charles Dexter Ward, gentleman and scholar, from Providence, Rhode Island. Doubtless you know my friend Mr. Lovecraft.

ISABELLA: Howard? Sure I know him. I'm from Providence myself, originally. What have you been doing lately?

WARD looks mournful, steps forward to center. Music starts.

WARD: I am a worshipper of Cthulhu
And I lead a mad horde
Searching ev'rywhere for our vanished Overlord--
We hear him singing in the æther,
Oscillating through our minds,
Though his city of R'lyeh
Is buried in slime!

You see, I met this loony A-rab
And he showed me his book;
I thought it wouldn't hurt me just to take one little look--
Though I couldn't read the language
It did something to my mind--
Now I'm looking for something
I'd rather not find!

I am a worshipper of Cthulhu
And I lead a mad horde
Searching ev'ry where for our vanished Overlord--
And we need him more than want him,
But we'll have him for all time
When his city of R'lyeh
Ascends from the slime!

WARD takes his bows and returns to ISABELLA, beckoning the others forward.

WARD: May I present Clarissa and Kimball Kinnison, the Red and Gray, ah, Lenses?

ISABELLA, delighted, shakes hands with CLARISSA and KIM. All step forward. KIM strikes an heroic pose. Music starts.

KIM: The Lensmen are the heroes of the whole Galactic race
Pursuing thieves and villains all through interstellar space:
The pirates run, the Eichmil fly, they lead us quite a chase
As ships and plot go down the tubes at overwhelming pace.

ALL: Oh, Kinnison, Kim Kinnison, our tower of defense!
The Ploorans are your foes and the Arisians your friends!
The rockets roar and thunder and the plots don't make much sense,
But the villains better scatter when the Lensman aims his Lens!

KIM: The Lens that Mentor gave me is beyond my words of praise:
It's better far than guns, it even beats fifth-order rays,
It's a psychic power booster, helps me crush the villains' wills,
A universal credit card, and Mentor pays the bills!

ALL: Oh, Kinnison, Kim Kinnison, our tower of defense!
The Ploorans are your foes and the Arisians your friends!
The rockets roar and thunder and the plot don't make much sense,
But the zwilniks better scatter when the Lensman aims his Lens!

General merriment. KIM and CLARISSA step back; WARD beckons to CONAN.

WARD (to ISABELLA): Now, this gentleman here is none other than Conan the
Barbarian.

ISABELLA extends a hand; CONAN shakes it. CONAN winces.

CONAN (recovering): The original Conan, not one of them new fakes.

ISABELLA: But why are you here? The rest of us are looking for work.
But you -- why, you've never been more popular. There's a
new Conan book every week!

CONAN: They're fakes. All of them are fakes. I had to retire early
because I wouldn't say some of those lines Lin Carter wrote
for me. I oughta sue.

WARD: Now, Conan, we've been over this before. It was in your con-
tract. I'm afraid what they did to you was all quite legal.

ISABELLA: You mean nobody is getting any good jobs any more?

LYNN (on P.A. system): Commodore Grimes, please report to the Time Warp
room. Commodore Grimes, Time Warp room please.

*GRIMES, in a naval uniform, enters R., steps up to desk, snaps a salute
to LYNN, and exits L.*

CLARISSA (glaring after GRIMES): Well, none of the legitimate characters
are getting any decent roles. Even the villains are in the
same spot.

*HELMINTH re-enters R., despondent. He gives a feeble lunge at CONAN, who
ignores him.*

CLARISSA: Look at Helminth there. Once he was the wicked Overlord of the
Pirate Fleet of Boskone. Helminth, the Speaker for Boskone.
Evil beyond belief. (*HELMINTH perks up.*) But he's only had
one job in the last thirty years -- a bit part as Grima Worm-
tongue in "Lord of the Rings". (*HELMINTH droops.*) Since
then -- nothing. (*All sigh.*)

KIM: The stereotypes, of course, always have plenty of work. The Mad Scientist and the Helpless Blonde appear in twenty, thirty stories a month.

ISABELLA: Gee, I didn't know old Helpless was still around.

KIM: She's still around. She's taking night courses in Astrophysics -- to keep up with the Affirmative Action program. She still screams a lot -- but in between, she does physics.

WARD: Those of us with principles, and with a lot of reader identification, have a much harder time of it.

ISABELLA: Do you know, I've often thought... I've often thought that we S-F characters might be better off if we wrote our own material. We're smarter than our authors, better adjusted, more experienced -- just all-around more competent.

CLARISSA: You're absolutely right. It should be easy... shouldn't it?

CLARISSA steps forward. KIM and WARD grab notepads and pencils. Music starts.

CLARISSA: If I could write
Of interstellar flight
And heroes bright
Like fandom used to love--
If I could write!

In such a case
My rocketships would race
Through outer space
To all the stars above--
If I could write!

*(KIM and WARD
take notes)*

The Space Marines
Are called upon the scene
Where men are green
And sky is red and blue--
If I could write--

They land and find
The field is undermined
Where worms have dined
As worms so often do--
If I could write!

When three moons shine
Great snails drink silver wine
Which stews them fine
Each one inside its shell--
If I could write--

The colonists
Smell snail-stew in the mist
And can't resist
The urge to jump and yell--
If I could write!

The Skylark's thrill
Would seem a tiny pill
Next to the chill--
 Ing tales of good and sin
 That I would write--

(KIM and WARD
compare notes,
intershuffle
pages, and hand
to CLARISSA)

The stuff might sell;
The stories I could tell
Might do so well
 A Hugo I would win--
 And I can write!

WARD: I have already prepared a number of my own manuscripts. But the publisher next door sent them all back unopened.

KIM: No wonder! You write them in longhand with a quill pen!

ISABELLA: You say there's a publisher next door? I think we may be in business. Listen, all of you. Let me be your agent. I can get you a set of contracts with big advances. You can write without financial worries, and do the stories the way they should be done.

WARD: An excellent idea! Yes, we shall appoint you our agent.
(The others nod agreement.)

ISABELLA: Follow me! The Golden Age of Science Fiction may still return!

ISABELLA exits R., followed by CONAN and WARD, then KIM and CLARISSA.
HELMINTH tries to join the parade.

CLARISSA (turns to HELMINTH): Not you, Helminth! This is for heroes only. Go away and scare up your own job.

KIM and CLARISSA exit R. HELMINTH drifts to center. SPOCK enters L. from office. HELMINTH jumps at him. SPOCK ignores him and exits L. HELMINTH tries to scare LYNN. She looks up, waves him away. Dejectedly, HELMINTH wanders off L.

BLACKOUT



SHIFFMAN 570



SCENE II - The Publisher's Office

This is the editorial office of DETH*RAY BOOKS, the current big name in SF publishing. At L. is an imposing desk, piled high with manuscripts. At center rear is a large drum labeled "BALROG", from which occasional puffs of smoke issue.

CHESTER DETH-RAY is seated at the desk, reading a manuscript. He rises, steps to drum, and drops the manuscript in. There is a loud roar and large puff of smoke. He returns to the desk and picks up another manuscript.

His ASSISTANT enters R., followed by ISABELLA.

ASSISTANT: Mister Deth-Ray? This is an agent for some new Science Fiction writers.

ISABELLA (*crosses to desk and vigorously shakes DETH-RAY's hand*): Hi, I'm Isabella Figholler, and I have some people outside you really must see. They have years of experience in S-F.

DETH-RAY: Well, I'm overloaded with unsolicited manuscripts just now. (*Indicates desk*) I have to read all of this stuff first. (*Picks up a manuscript*) Terrible, just terrible. Listen to this:

"In a hole in the ground there lived a tribble. Not a nasty slimy hole full of wriggly worms, and not a dry dusty sandy hole that makes you sneeze, but a warm comfortable fur-lined tribble hole..."

I can't take any more. (*Examines manuscript.*) No return postage, either. (*to ASSISTANT*) Please -- get rid of this.

ASSISTANT takes manuscript and drops it in Balrog drum. Drum gives out roar and puff of smoke. ASSISTANT exits R.

ISABELLA: None of my people write like that. Remember the great days of 1930s pulp SF? We can bring it all back -- and you can publish it.

DETH-RAY: Hmmm...you know, that's when I got started in the field. Yes, those were wonderful days. But I don't see how you can possibly understand, if you weren't there.

ISABELLA grins and steps forward. Music starts.

ISABELLA: If you've never looked into S-F's ancient history
Back to the Thirties, the days of the pulps--
Just what the fans saw in it may be a mystery:
What made them take that old stuff in such gulps?

Well, some put it down to the thoughts sense-a-wonderly
Wakened in youth in the heart of each fan
By stories of action all bloody and thundery
Which nowadays it's the fashion to pan.
But others remember it as educational:
Concepts of science with which it began,
And characters noble and quite inspirational
Saving the world all according to plan.

Think rocketship, hyperspace, galaxy, nebula,
Ham and Pat Hammond and old Giles Habibula,
Letters of argument and camaraderie,
Staple Wars, comments, occasional cloddery,
Tucker and Warner and Evans and hey!
Morris Scott Dollens and Lester del Rey! ...

Ah - take of these elements all that is fusible,
Melt them all down in a pipkin or crucible,
Set them to simmer and skim off the dross --
You can soon cast a pulp with impeccable gloss!

And, remember the authors who made it all possible,
Think of them fondly whenever you can:
McClary and Gallun and Wandrei "Colossi"ble
Frank Belknap, Clyde, Arthur Leo and Stan;
Of Charles Willard Diffin and names that would shiftin' be:
Campbell and "Stuart", Nat Schachner and "Chan",
Of C. L. Moore, Lovecraft, and Kruse (shudder) Clifton B.,
John Russell Fearn, Binder, Neil Moran.

Their stories inventive or hackneyed and moldering,
Illos beWesso'd and Brownish and Doldering,
Authors well-known and unheard-of and mythical,
Authors Weinbaumian, authors DocSmithical,
Leinster and Williamson, Holloway Horn,
Anthony Gilmore and Warner Van Lorne!

Ah - take of these elements all that is feasible,
Please all the readers (if readers are pleasurable),
Put them together - and keep it all clean -
For a new Golden Age in one great magazine!

CHESTER (*carried away*): Yes! Yes! I'll call it..."Mind-Boggling Stories of Super-Science", or, no, "of..." - "of..." Wait a minute. This is a publishing house for books. Not pulp magazines.

ISABELLA: Oh, that's all right. My clients are really very versatile.

DETH-RAY: That's marvelous. I wouldn't have to read any more of these things. (*He points to a pile standing alone in one corner of the desk.*) Every day I get ten of them that start the same way: (*Picks off the top one and reads*)

"Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away, lived a sand farmer..."

(*to ISABELLA*) Would you...?

ISABELLA *nods*. DETH-RAY *hands her the manuscript*. She *bangs on side of Balrog drum, which snorts.*)

ISABELLA: Feeding time!

ISABELLA *drops manuscript into drum, which smokes, then belches.*

DETH-RAY: Okay, bring in your writers. I'll talk to them.

ISABELLA *signals*. ASSISTANT *enters, followed by WARD, KIM and CLARISSA, and CONAN*. All *detour warily around Balrog drum, except CONAN, who peers in and gets smoked*. The group *line up near DETH-RAY's desk*.

ISABELLA: Mr. Deth-Ray, May I present Mr. Ward, horror-stories. (*WARD bows.*) Mr. and Mrs. Smith, space-adventures. (*KIM and CLARISSA shake hands with DETH-RAY.*) And this (*indicating CONAN*) is Mr., ah, Barbarina, C. T. Barbarina, sword-and-sorcery.

CONAN *shakes hands with DETH-RAY, who nearly falls over.*

DETH-RAY: Glad to meet you all. Now, I understand you're professionals. (*All nod.*) Fine. Here's what I want. A return to the glories of the great days of pulp SF. Action. Adventure. Entertainment.

DETH-RAY steps forward and turns to WARD. ISABELLA turns to CONAN. Music starts.

DETH-RAY (to WARD): When you sit down to write
Please pick a foggy night
And think of the ghastly, but firstly and lastly
Your prose style must be tight.

You make the readers hop
And never let 'em stop,
You can't be too subtle or you will be uttehl-
Y lost and your book a flop.

A ghosts-in-halls young man,
A rats-in-walls young man:
The sound of their scrabbling sets him to babbling,
Gibbering mad young man.

ISABELLA (to CONAN): Conceive us if you can
An olden-day young man:
A muscular sort neither skinny nor short
With a sword in either hand.

Who thinks that bashing heads
Beats rumpling ladies' beds,
Who comes out a winner and then after dinner
Fights monsters and undeads.

A mighty-thewed young man,
A hairy an' crude young man,
Who'd rather fight sworders than take any orders,
An outa-my-way young man.

WARD: A "what'll we do?" young man,
A "say it's not true!" young man,
An easily-freakable by-the-unspeakable
Miskaton' U. young man.

CONAN: A muscle-bound young man,
A sword-for-hire young man,
A powerful, glorious, ever-victorious
Conquer-the-world young man!

WARD: A pallid and thin young man,
A haggard and lank young man,
A greenery-yallery, sort of "Night Gallery",
Voice-from-the-grave young man.

CONAN: A do-or-die young man!
A don't-ask-why young man!
A brutal but lovable, fierce and unshovable,
Spit-in-your-eye young man!

WARD and CONAN dance off, still singing. DETH-RAY turns to KIM and CLARISSA.

DETH-RAY: Now, you two do space adventures in the far galaxies, right?
I can always use good action stories. But don't sent me any
fan fiction.

KIM: Fan fiction?

DETH-RAV: Stuff written by enthusiastic fans. Like this one. (*Picks up paper from desk and reads*)

"Nurse Chapel looked at the wounded Romulan officer being carried into the Boobyprize sick bay, and she gasped. It wasn't a Romulan at all! It was--"

ISABELLA, KIM,
CLARISSA &

DETHRAY (*in unison*): "--the missing First Officer, Mr. Spock, disguised as a Romulan, on a spy mission. He was hurt. How terrible."

DETH-RAV: That's fan fiction.

ISABELLA: Oh, no, we'd never write anything like that.

DETH-RAV *hands manuscript to ISABELLA, who hands it to KIM, who drops it in Balrog drum. Roar, smoke, and a puff of confetti. Gaggling sounds.*

DETH-RAV: You come up with good stories and Deth-Ray Books can arrange all kinds of tie-ins. We're very generous to our authors. Lectures, talk shows, T-shirts, posters, record albums. Maybe a TV sitcom or quiz show.

CLARISSA: You have writers on television?

DETH-RAV: We have two shows in the works now. First, a comedy series, "Hobbit Days", about 1950s teen-agers in Middle-Earth. Here's the theme song. (*He takes folded papers from jacket pocket and hands one to CLARISSA, one to ISABELLA.*)

CLARISSA (*reads*): "Hey, Galadriel, is that Sauron's ring you're wearing?"

ISABELLA (*reads*): "Uh-huh."

Piano plays opening chords for "Leader of the Pack".

BOTH (*sing*): "The elves were always putting him down (down! down!)
Because he lived so far underground (ground! ground!)
They said that he was mean
But he loved his Elvish queen
That's why I fell for
The Leader of the Orcs!"

General disgust. Balrog retches. DETH-RAV retrieves and pockets scripts.

DETH-RAV: All right, if you don't like that one, we also have a quiz show. You have impostors pretending to be well-known S-F characters, and the panel has to decide which are the fakes and which are the real ones. Just watch this. (*Yells off L.*) Okay, roll the quiz show!

The stage lights dim. A cloth is thrown over the balrog drum. The Balrog is too ill to care. Three chairs are set up behind the desk; the manuscripts are removed. As all this is going on, ISABELLA, KIM and CLARISSA sneak off R.

Spotlight comes on. DETH-RAV moves down right and takes out a kazoo. Three PANELISTS enter L. and sit in chairs. DETH-RAV plays bouncy music on kazoo.

A tall figure in a black cloak enters R., switches on light-saber, and moves into spotlight. He speaks:

NUMBER ONE: I have been waiting for you, Obi-Wan Kenobi.

NUMBER ONE moves to L. A second identical figure, cloaked and helmeted, enters and stands in spotlight. He speaks:

NUMBER TWO: I have been waiting for you, Obi-Wan Kenobi.

NUMBER TWO moves to left. A third figure, shorter, grubbier, moves into spotlight, waving a cardboard tube coated with aluminum foil. He speaks:

NUMBER THREE: I have been waiting for you, Okee-Wan Fenokee -- oh, shit!

NUMBER THREE stands beside NUMBER TWO, nervously. DETH-RAY hands them signs: "#1", "#2", "#3", then turns to panel.

DETH-RAY: All right, panel, there you have it. These three all claim to be Darth Fader. But only one is the real Dark Lord - the other two are impostors. Please listen carefully while I read this statement:

"I, Darth Fader, am the Dark Lord of the Stiff and Master of The Torque, the twisted side of The Force. I am evil, vicious, mean and nasty. I want to kill. I want to eat dead burnt bodies and feel veins in my teeth. When I catch that little punk Skywalker I will take his head off with my light-saber. Signed, Darth Fader."

Well, panel, now it's your turn to decide. Is the real Darth Fader Number One? -- Number Two? -- or Number Three?

We'll start the questioning with you, Kitty.

FIRST PANELIST: Ah, Fader Number One, will you breathe for us, please? (NUMBER ONE wheezes.) Fader Number Two, will you breathe for us? (NUMBER TWO wheezes, only more so.) And Fader Number Three, please? (NUMBER THREE gasps and coughs. NUMBER TWO pats him on the back; he falls down.) Hm. Mr. Fader, Number One, will you sing your theme song for us?

NUMBER ONE (sings): "Star Wars, we're gonna see Star Wars, then when we've seen it, we'll see it again (and again and again)---"

FIRST PANELIST: Number Two, will you sing your theme song, please?

NUMBER TWO breathes some more.

FIRST PANELIST: Thank you. Number Three, your theme song?

NUMBER THREE (getting up): "Light sabers -- a part of liv-ing."

A bell rings.

DETH-RAY: Time's up, Kitty. Orson, it's your turn.

SECOND PANELIST: Number Two, do you see much hope for the Patriots in the NFL playoffs this year?

NUMBER TWO: I don't see much hope for anybody, when I return with the full powers of The Torque.

SECOND PANELIST: Number Two, you mentioned The Torque again. How long will you continue to bore us with that old worn-out religion?

NUMBER TWO: I find your lack of faith disturbing.

FADER NUMBER TWO drops his "#2" sign and extends one arm toward the panel. SECOND PANELIST chokes, collapses. The other panelists exit L. The bell rings several times.

DETH-RAY (*hastily*): Well, that's it, Panel. (*FADER NUMBER TWO lowers his arm; SECOND PANELIST recovers and crawls off L.*) Time's up for questioning, so please mark your ballots. Which one is the real Darth Fader?

DETH-RAY *plays a little thinking-music on the kazoo.* "Faders" NUMBER ONE and NUMBER THREE exit, R. DETH-RAY suddenly realizes the PANELISTS have left and goes after them.

HELMINTH enters, R. FADER NUMBER TWO turns to face him. *Lights flicker.*

FADER: Aha! I have been waiting for you, Obi-Wan Kenobi. The circle has come full turn.

HELMINTH: Watch your mouth, kid. I'm Helminth of Boskonian. Let's have some respect.

FADER: The circle has come full turn. Once I was the student. Now I am the master.

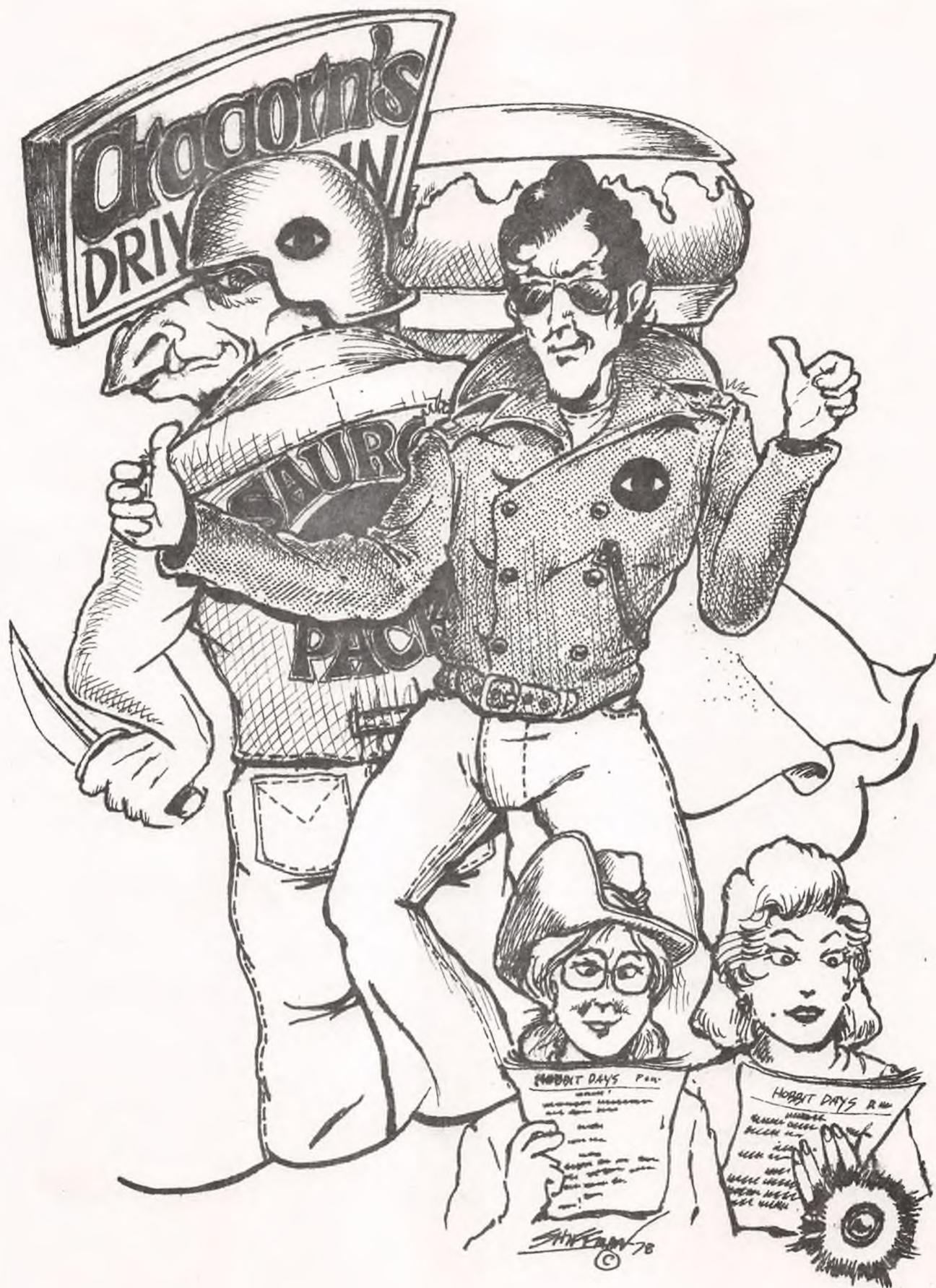
HELMINTH: I don't like your attitude, kid. I taught you the rackets, and you turn out to be a cheap punk.

FADER: Now I am the master. You shall be nothing. (*FADER raises his light-saber and assumes attack stance.*)

HELMINTH pulls a ray-gun and fires. FADER spins and falls.

HELMINTH: Stupid punk, always showing off that dumb sword. Hey, Deth-Ray, you looking for a real villain? (*Looks around deserted stage.*) Deth-Ray, you still here? Where are you? Deth-Ray? Hey, Deth-Ray?

BLACKOUT





SCENE III - The Writers' Lounge

On the back curtain are ads for the Famous S F Writers School and a hand-lettered sign: SLAN SHACK -- WE DELIVER. There are several chairs scattered about, a coffee table, and a desk with a battered typewriter.

WARD is seen sitting down center, writing with a quill pen. KIM and CLARISSA are seated further back, looking at a scrapbook and talking quietly. CONAN sits to one side munching cheese tid-bits.

ISABELLA bounces in R., carrying a sheaf of papers.

ISABELLA: Well, people, I got the contracts from Deth-Ray Books, and we finally managed to get Helminth out of the office. But, listen, Deth-Ray needs some kind of manuscript by tomorrow -- anything will do, an outline, a first chapter -- just to prove you're working.

WARD: My efforts are all here, as you see. (*Hands her a pile of manuscripts.*)

ISABELLA (*flipping through the first few pages*): What is this? What is this? "Unnameable phantasms"... "ichorous fluids"... "loathesome cyclopean architecture"... "indescribable effluvia"... No wonder you can't sell this stuff, Charles. Your style is hopelessly out of date.

WARD: Good taste is never subject to the vagaries of popular whim.

ISABELLA (*still reading*): Hm. This is a twist. You put the sunken city of Cthulhu at the bottom of the Irish Sea.

WARD (*puzzled -- he doesn't remember that part*): Oh? R'lyeh?

ISABELLA: No, O'Rell'lyeh. ... But seriously, Charles, you should check out some of the new horror stories. Find out what's selling these days. All your stuff is forty years old.

WARD: I suppose you're right.

ISABELLA: Here, take this card. (*She hands him a card.*) This man has the biggest collection of horrible SF in the world, books and films too.

WARD (*reads card*): "Forrest J. Ackerman -- Famous Monsters of Filmland -- Hollywood, California."

ISABELLA: He'll give you the highlights of recent horror. Just tell him I sent you.

WARD: Very well. If you truly think this man can help me, I shall accept your suggestion and call on him. (*WARD exits R.*)

ISABELLA (*calls after him*): Tell him to show you "Night of the Living Dead"! (*She turns to KIM and CLARISSA.*) What about you two?

KIM: We have ideas -- but they've all been used before. We can't seem to think of anything new.

CLARISSA: We need the rest of the Lensman team to inspire us.

KIM and CLARISSA come forward. The lights go dim, blue. Music starts. WORSEL (*assisted by LYNN*) and TREGONSEE enter, L.

KIM, CLARISSA
(for TREGONSEE)
& LYNN (for
WORSEL):

Three little Lensmen once were we,
Clever and brave as we could be
Kinnison, Worsel, Tregonsee--
Three little Lensmen cool!

One of us was an Earthman bold,
One was all scaly with bloodstream cold,
One was a barrel with heart of gold,
Pride of the Lensman school!

Three little Lensmen smart and daring,
Out facing danger, never caring,
Thanks to the Lenses we were wearing:
Powerful Lensman jewel!

Though we have bested the zwilnik scum,
Down in the universe we have come,
Out of the pulps to a reprint slum:
Paperback house's tool!

Though Kinnison's stubborn still, I guess,
Worsel's retired, living in Loch Ness,
Treggy's on thionite, he's a mess--
Sometimes the Fates are cruel!

Three little Lensmen, once so famous,
Now only one remains, his aim is
Keeping his image just the same as
Ever, old Kim's no fool--
Three little Lensmen cool!

WORSEL and TREGONSEE exit, L. Lights return to normal. KIM blows his nose.

ISABELLA: Well, I think you should see what the new stuff looks like.
Here are two passes to "Star Wars Encounters Flash Gordon".
That's this year's S-F epic.

CLARISSA: You think seeing it could help us write?

ISABELLA: Sure. At least you'll know what the audience likes.

ISABELLA hands tickets to KIM and CLARISSA, who exit R.)

ISABELLA: Well, Conan, that leaves only you. How's the writing going?

CONAN (*coming over to ISABELLA*): I'm sorry, Isabella. I just can't write anything.

ISABELLA: This is a bad time for writer's block, Conan.

CONAN: No, I mean I can't write. I never learned how. I can't read too good either.

ISABELLA: Yeah, somehow I keep forgetting you're a barbarian. But you became a king. Didn't you have to sign documents or treaties or whatever?

CONAN: Nah. I got a good discount on a slightly used scribe.

Music starts. CONAN hastily finishes the cheese tidbits, tosses bag away.

CONAN: When I was a boy in a northern land
I served apprentice to a robber band
But drills were dull and I soon got bored
Of bashing silly dummies with a wooden sword.

ISABELLA: Of bashing silly dummies with a wooden sword!

CONAN: They taught me to steal and they taught me to fight
But they never thought of teaching me to read and write--

CHORUS (*appearing out of wings, curtains, woodwork*):
They taught him to steal and they taught him to fight
But they never thought of teaching him to read and write!

CONAN: There's not much loot where the ice-winds sing,
So I went down South to be a pirate king.
I wenched and robbed in a warmer clime,
But I woulda been a scholar if I'd had the time.

CHORUS: He woulda been a scholar if he'd had the time!

CONAN: I stripped the jewels from the Kushite coast,
But illuminated manuscripts I loved the most--

CHORUS: He stripped the jewels from the Kushite coast
But illuminated manuscripts he loved the most!

CONAN: I fought the Picts in the forest gloom,
I fought gray mummies in a wizard's tomb,
I choked a king and I claimed his throne
But I never had a library to call my own.

CHORUS: He never had a library to call his own!

CONAN: I ruled from the steppes to the Stygian Nile,
A pirate and a bandit and a bibliophile--

CHORUS: He ruled from the steppes to the Stygian Nile,
A pirate and a bandit and a bibliophile!

CHORUS *vanishes*. ISABELLA *shakes her head in disbelief*.

ISABELLA: This isn't getting us a manuscript. Look, Conan, why don't
you dictate some of your stories into a tape recorder, and
I'll have them transcribed?

CONAN (*dubiously*): Okay...but you people tell stories different from
the way I did in the taverns back in Aquilonia.

ISABELLA (*pulls pamphlet from her pocket*): They're holding a seminar on
writing science fiction at the Junior College tonight. Open
to the public. Go sit in on it and listen to what they say
about plot and conflict. That should give you a few ideas
on how to write.

NORMAN *enters R.: the archetypal dirty old man, in trench coat, hat,
and little else, carrying a ragged piece of paper.*

NORMAN: Is this the audition? I came for the audition.

ISABELLA (*startled*): What? Who are you?

NORMAN: An audition for parts in the new Gor book. Isn't this it?

ISABELLA (*takes paper from him and reads*): "'Chickenhawks of Gor' -- new spicy novel. Call for experienced flashers and heavy breathers." Sorry, this is the wrong room.

NORMAN: I'm really a pro. (*Opens trenchcoat.*) Look!

ISABELLA: Look, this is the wrong room! See here? (*Pointing to paper*) Suite 1879, the bit-parts-in-sleazy-stories office. That's two floors up. Not here.

NORMAN (*his best material, wasted*): Oh, sorry. Heh heh, hehee.

NORMAN *wraps up in coat, grabs paper, scuttles off R.*

CONAN: Can I punch his face in, can I, huh?

ISABELLA: No. Now let's both of us go over to the Junior College before any more weirdos show up.

ISABELLA and CONAN *exit, R. HELMINTH wanders in, L.*

HELMINTH: Deth-Ray, are you in here? I'm still available! Deth-Ray?

HELMINTH *scans the deserted stage, and, sniffing, exits L.*

BLACKOUT





SCENE 4 - Junior College Lecture Room

A speaker's rostrum is set up at L.; there are several rows of chairs.
Signs on the rear wall read:

MLA CONFERENCE

SEMIDIOTICS WORKSHOP

SCI-FI WRITING

CONAN and ISABELLA enter R., engaged in conversation.

CONAN: ...and we didn't have anything like paperbacks, either.
Just leather scrolls.

ISABELLA (looks around): Uh-oh. This isn't what I thought it was going
to be. These aren't writers, they're critics. You won't
learn anything here.

CONAN: Are critics that bad?

ISABELLA: They don't even like puns. Let's get out of here.

ISABELLA and CONAN turn to leave just as a crowd of scholarly types
enters R., shoving them back onstage. A young woman, severely dressed,
glasses, briefcase, goes to the rostrum; this is GUINEVERE, the MLA
spokeslady. The others take seats.

CONAN (to ISABELLA): Ah...you go ahead. I'll stay and watch for a while.

ISABELLA shrugs and exits R. CONAN takes a seat.

GUINEVERE: Fellow students of speculative fiction, or perhaps I can be
informal and call it "sci-fi"... Fellow students, we know
that S F is the literature of unlimited possibilities. It
breaks all bounds of realism and mundane detail. With S F
you can think the unthinkable, say the unsayable, eff the
ineffable. But S F is not yet perfect. You know what's
preventing us from making S F the true art form it could be.
Those dull, dreary plots, left over from the pulp magazines.
All that nonsense about science, left over from the nine-
teenth century. If we could get rid of all that science --
if we could remove the creaky old plots -- we'd have no
science -- and no fiction -- but we'd have pure S F!

Applause. LYNN, the casting office receptionist, a night-school English
major in her off hours, joins GUINEVERE. Music starts.

GUINEVERE & LYNN: Towards the literary heights
Of science-fiction lore
We've taken several rocket flights
And mean to take some more.
We mean to bring to all this mess
Some measure of respect,
And any trace of pulpishness
We ruthlessly dissect.

LYNN: Pray, what authors should we preach
If we sci-fi want to teach?

GUINEVERE: If you'd get an early start
Ruthven Todd will win the heart,
Heinlein's tales of space-age joys,
Norton's tales of teen-age boys.

And the Winston juveniles --
These will last you quite a while.
Then, with pupils old enough,
You can start on Harlan's stuff!

LYNN: Ah! We will start with Harlan's stuff!

Pray you, tell us if you can:
What's a science fiction fan?

GUINEVERE: Fan will write and Fan will shout--
Fan knows What It's All About--
Fan will give and take abuse,
Fan's abrasive, Fan's obtuse,
Fan has staples on the brain,
Fan is more or less insane,
Fannishness means endless strife--
Fan is lowest form of life!

LYNN: Fan is always causing strife,
Fan is lowest form of life!

BOTH: And so to unimagined heights
Of science fiction lore
Past squabbles, arguments and fights,
Our criticisms soar.
In striving for sci-fi success,
What's "in" and "out" is strict,
And all opinions we possess,
We mutually inflict.

The lecture being over, the SCHOLARS mill around to talk, to drink cold tea from little cups and eat little wet cakes; they gradually drift off, R. GUINEVERE is busily stuffing notes back into her briefcase. CONAN approaches her.

CONAN: You know a lot about science fiction, don't you? Ever heard of my pal, Kim Kimmison? He's famous in science fiction.

GUINEVERE: No, I don't recognize the name.

CONAN: He's one of the Lensmen. And I'm Conan the Barbarian, the real barbarian. (*Puts his arm around her.*)

GUINEVERE (*evading him*): That explains your crude approach.

CONAN: You talked about those snivelling twerp anti-heroes. They wouldn't last a day in barbarian country.

GUINEVERE: Well, you certainly are different from most of the men I meet at Language Association meetings. Do you like literature, Mr. Barbarian? Or should I call you Conan?

CONAN: Call me anything you want, lady. Did you ever hear how I got to be king of Aquilonia? I was a royal patron of literature, too.

GUINEVERE: My goodness. Yes, tell me all about it.

CONAN and GUINEVERE exit together, L.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 5 - The Writers' Lounge

HELMINTH enters L., calls for DETH-RAY. There is no answer. HELMINTH despondently paces back and forth. KIM and CLARISSA enter R., in new costumes: KIM as "Luke Skywalker" and CLARISSA as "Princess Laya", in a long white dress and carrying a pair of brown earmuffs.

CLARISSA (casually): Beat it, Helminth. (HELMINTH retreats.) Well, Kim, isn't this great? Imagine meeting Luke Gorgeous, the big film-maker. And he was impressed enough with our resumé's from the Galactic Patrol to give us jobs right away.

KIM: So he gave us jobs. Big deal. Wearing costumes at shopping mall openings.

CLARISSA: And supermarkets. But this could lead to real movie parts for us. If we do well as stand-ins, we could make the big time.

KIM: But, Clarissa, these promotions we have to do are so bad. Look at this! (Waves a script.) I stand in the dairy aisle of the Death Store and play Governor Tark Muffin.

CLARISSA (giggling): I'd think they'd at least let you stand in the bakery department. That's where the dough is. (She puts on the earmuffs and reads from script)

"You have destroyed my home planet, Tark Muffin! You promised you wouldn't attack it! Your Imperial Promise is worthless!"

KIM (gives a villainous leer): "Imperial Promise, Princess? We always keep an Imperial Promise. Your home planet now has zero percent cholesterol."

(HELMINTH flinches. Balrog howls in the distance.)

CLARISSA: Well, if Jim Kirk can do it, you can do it.

KIM: Yeah, but even he doesn't do lines like this. (A guitar begins the "Alice's Restaurant" theme. KIM reads:)

"Ah cannot tell a lie, Officer Obi-Wan. I put that octopus at the bottom of that gar-bage."

CLARISSA: Cheer up. Would you rather do "Hobbit Days" for Deth-Ray?

KIM shudders; he and CLARISSA exit, L. After a moment, WARD enters R., staggering; then CONAN enters R., looking smug and carrying a stack of books.

WARD (soliloquizing): How frightful! How terrible! What has happened to style? Subtle imagination? All gone. Those movies are so graphic and bloody!

CONAN (dropping the books onto a chair): Didn't like the horror movies, eh, Charlie?

WARD: Blood all over the place. Hacking off real live arms and legs. Vomiting green pea soup. Conan, they had a film about cannibals! Real cannibals! "Night of the Living Dead". (He turns on CONAN.) "They're coming to GET you, Barbarian!"

WARD collapses into a chair, quivering.

CONAN: I was attacked by cannibals once. Split three skulls with my axe and the rest ran away. Cannibals are no problem, Chuck.

WARD: Perhaps I should get an axe and become a barbarian. There's no future for me in literature, that's a certainty. Nobody reads carefully crafted horror stories any more -- it's all blood, and gore, and teeth.

CONAN: Aw, you can't be serious, Chucko. Literature is fun stuff. I met a critic last night who says I could do real well in the literary business.

WARD: The printed word is finished, Conan. Nobody wants to read what I want to write. I shall leave the field to the illiterates with their horror picture shows, and lose myself in some savage kingdom, fighting lions and tigers and bears.

HELMINTH: Oh, my! (*HELMINTH runs off L.*)

CONAN: Now, you don't have to do that. This critic I met, she says you don't have to read and write to be a critic. The lectures are all on tape, anyway. I told her about all the dragons and swords and tunnels back home. Her critic friends love that stuff -- it's all full of cymbals or something. Drums? No, cymbals. Anyway, I can tell stories about Aquilonia, dirty words and all. She's got me signed up for five lectures already. Being a critic is a lot better than being a barbarian. I'll just drink beer and eat skittles all day -- and get paid for it!

WARD: No! Barbarian life is better than that! It's more...thrilling!

Music starts.

WARD: There is beauty in the bellow of the beast,
There is grandeur in the growling of the Gaul,
Don't it set your heart a-racing
When you're out in armor facing
Foes whose shoulders are as broad as you are tall?

CONAN: No, it sets my feet a-racing
For I never did like facing
Anybody fierce or violent at all.

WARD: Though dragons' teeth are sharp their brains are dim,
And orcs and trolls are known as utter dolts,
Anybody halfway brainy
Can send zombies simply zany
With some dynamite or powder thunderbolts.

CONAN: Though your enemies are fools
It is quite against the rules
So I wouldn't count too much on thunderbolts--

BOTH: If that is so sing derry down derry,
It's evident very
Your tastes are mine:
Away ^{you'll}
I'll go and be a barbari-
An, hurry don't tarry
An, ^{you'll}
I'll be fine!

CONAN: There is beauty in the printed page--
Now I know that I can never learn enough--
After learning I'll be questing
Everything is interesting
I would rather far be literate than tough!

WARD: For a mercenary minion
That's a very strange opinion:
He would rather far be literate than tough.

CONAN: There are stores and shops for books all over town--
Did you know some places give you books for free?
In that literary garden
I signed up and got a card an'
Then I asked them and they gave a bunch to me!

WARD: Yes, the price of books is plaguery
So let's hear it for Carnegie:
Even villains have their uses, I can see--

BOTH: If that is so sing derry down derry,
It's evident very
Your tastes are mine:
Away I'll
you'll go and be a librari-
An, hurry don't tarry
An' I'll
you'll be fine!

CONAN and WARD dance off, L., still singing. ISABELLA and DETH-RAY enter L., followed by KIM and CLARISSA.)

DETH-RAY (to KIM and CLARISSA): So you two are doing -- supermarket openings?

CLARISSA: Right now, yes. But soon we'll be in space adventure movies. All the plots are from 1937, so we have a head start.

KIM: And we're going to have a screenwriter ghostwrite our autobiography.

CLARISSA: Autobiographies, dear.

DETH-RAY: Well, when they're finished, send the manuscripts over to Deth-Ray Books. You still have a contract with us. (*Looks around.*) Where are the others?

CONAN and WARD enter L.: CONAN in suit, wearing eyeglasses; WARD wearing a leopardskin cloak and so on. GUINEVERE enters R. with box of papers, looks around and joins CONAN.

CLARISSA: Hey, Charles, you look like a real barbarian now.

WARD: Thank you, my dear. I join a caravan to Lankhmar tomorrow morning, as a security guard.

ISABELLA: Conan, what's this about your becoming a literary scholar?

CONAN: It's a dream come true. The critics all love the way I use instinct instead of logic. They're gonna make me the basis of a whole new school of semiotics.

DETH-RAY: What about the novels you promised me?

GUINEVERE (*stepping forward*): Mr. Deth-Ray, this (*hoists box*) is a million-word fantasy epic I've been working on since I was in the fifth grade. Conan is helping me rewrite it so it's more... (*blushes*) true to life. We'll submit it as a collaboration.

DETH-RAY (*sighs*): All right, give it to me when it's finished, and I'll look at it.

HELMINTH *enters, L., skipping and prancing with glee, followed by LYNN.*

HELMINTH: They found me a job! They found me the perfect job!

ISABELLA: Congratulations. What kind of job?

HELMINTH: Power! Unlimited power! Hundreds of terrified underlings scurrying to obey my every whim! Everything under my absolute control!

DETH-RAY: It sounds great, but what is it?

HELMINTH: I'm going to be chairthing of a World Science Fiction Convention!

HELMINTH *frolics out, R.*

CLARISSA: But, Isabella, what about you? We didn't find anything for you.

ISABELLA: Don't worry about me, kid! I'm your agent. I get ten percent of the whole show!

ISABELLA *steps forward; everybody else lines up. Music starts.*

ISABELLA: When you've got a steady income

CHORUS: *In-coma!*

ISABELLA: A job doesn't matter,
Production or chatter
Both strike me as utterly dumb--

CHORUS: Dumb, dumb!

ISABELLA: It's time and space travel for me!
Each ten dollars you make I get one

CHORUS: One, one!

ISABELLA: Your world won't unravel,
I might as well travel,
Each stop brings its own ghastly pun

CHORUS: Aargh!

ISABELLA: And just think of the sights I will see!

CHORUS: On the subject we pray you don't stun, stun-stun,
Our brains with a multiple pun, pun-pun,
You'll find you get many
Light-years for a penny,
Light years for a penny,
And just think of the sights you will see
And just think of the sights you will see!

CURTAIN





NOTES and COMMENTS on "Rivets Redux"

Comments are by Sue Anderson (SA) and Mark M. Keller (MK). Most notes on the musical numbers are by Sue. Annotation on the dialogue is mostly by Mark.

p. 1 (SA) Our opening song is from that little-known Gilbert and Sullivan epic, Utopia Limited the story of an idyllic island kingdom in the South Seas brought to total perfection by the adoption of Great Britain's glorious ways. No kidding. I think what set me off was the line in the original: 'We're wasted on 'utility' / 'We're 'cast' to play a part (a part) / Of great responsibility. One school of thought holds that this in turn set off the whole plot of the play. Well, could be...

Another school of thought holds that the fact that both authors were seriously underemployed in 1977 has something to do with this farrago. Then again, it could be that we fear S F fandom is on the verge of degenerating totally -- the Trekkies couldn't quite do it, since they luckily developed separate organizations, but Star Wars and Close Encounters fanda... Maybe I'm just paranoid, but I have these visions of hordes of seven-year-olds with light sabers...

(MK) As I recall it, we at RISFA Players were asked if we had any more crazy ideas for a play for 1978 Boskone. I had this idea about a tour thru the many worlds of heroic fantasy: Conan's Hyborea, Smith's Lens Universe, Lovecraft's Arkham, etc. And I also thought that since last year's play showed desperate writers trying to reach an aloof editor, this year we might show a poor hard-working editor deluged with rotten manuscripts from insistent writers. The one key idea that clicked it all into place was a "where are they now?" story about movie stars of the Thirties. If movie stars, why not SF super-heroes. And Rivets Redux was off and running.

p. 2 (MK) Perry Rhodent was a big success in Germany, 750 novels and more every week. He didn't do as well in the U.S. -- they cancelled his contract after 150 volumes. He's going back home to where they appreciate his manly frame and Nordic good looks.

p. 3 (MK) We resisted the temptation to include suggestive lists of 'close encounters of the 5th kind' or '17th kind' or '34th kind'. Don't we deserve some credit for our forbearance and restraint?

(SA) See How the Fates... is from The Mikado. There the subject was beheading, and the general unfairness of the universe.

p. 4 (SA) Isabella Figholler tells worse puns than her cousin Ferdinand Feghoot, all right. For example, she once visited an alternate universe in which little Shirley Temple, age 3½, had suffered an attack of mange. As a result, the unfortunate tyke's movie career faced an ignominious end (or faced never having started -- how do you phrase these things?). Isabella donned her Glinda the Good outfit

and visited the child's home. Little Shirley was a sorry sight: thin, ill-dressed, and woebegone. Isabella knew what was needed. She gestured magically with her patented Alternate Universe Cosmetic Transfer Wand, and instantly a wealth of golden curls graced the child's head. "OH!" cried the girl, enraptured by her reflection in a nearby window. 'Now I can be rich and famous after all! But, but -- who're you?' "Oh." said Isabella, beginning to fade away and return to her own world, "I'm just a poor-waif-hairing stranger."

(MK) Could Isabella's writer, Paul Allan Sheffield, really produce fifty Gothic Romances a year? Over at Zap-Gun Books they have developed the formula to do just that. It's called the 'Barbara Cartland machine'. Choose any year from 1803 to 1889, choose any exotic locale (Yorkshire, India, Scotland), choose the color of the impoverished heroine's shabby dress (blue or grey) -- and the machine will churn out 5000 words of gooey prose a day. One week equals one novel.

p. 5 (SA) 'I am a Worshipper of Cthulhu' is an early effort, even before I encountered G & S, to the tune of 'Wichita Lineman'. The 'loony Arab' is Abdul al-Hazred, who translated the forbidden Necronomicon into Arabic under the title of 'Al-Azif'. The spirits were angry at this, and poor Abdul was consumed alive, in broad daylight, by an invisible monster, in the middle of a Cairo street, before hundreds of terrified onlookers. You can read about him in Lovecraft's stories of the Cthulhu Mythos.

p. 6 (SA) This version of the Lensman Academy Fight Song is to the tune of 'Dunderbeck', about the inventor of the sausage-meat machine. It also bears a strong resemblance to 'Ramblin' Wreck from Georgia Tech'. This is coincidence, surely.

(MK) Yes, it is coincidence. I was thinking only of 'Dunderbeck' when I wrote it. As to the named individuals, they all come from Doc Smith's Lensman universe. Eichmil and Ploorans are alien races of nasty cold-blooded (literally) villains. Mentor is the Arisian super-race's contact with mere mortal humans: he guides and instructs them. Zwiiniks are drug addicts and dope dealers of the worst kind. They peddle a nightmare version of happy dust called 'thionite'. // Patrol ships can zip along hyperspatial tubes and bypass ordinary time and space. Fifth order rays are super-devices from another series by Doc Smith, about the 'Skylark' universe.

p. 7 (SA) 'If I Could Write' is from 'Were I Thy Bride' in Yeomen of the Guard. The key line here is 'The skylark's trill / Were but discordance shrill...'. It seemed a natural for Clarissa Kinnison, since she and Kim have had to fight their Skylarkian predecessors for every foot of reputation among Doc Smith's many fans...

(MK) SF characters better adjusted than their writers? Sure. Look at Herovit's World by Barry Malzberg. A sad sack SF hack writer named Jonathan Herovit adopts the rough, tough pseudonym 'Kirk Poland' to write a series about an even rougher and tougher galactic hero named 'Mack Miller'. When Herovit falls apart, Poland appears

from a recessed corner of his brain to take over. And when that doesn't work, Mack Miller himself possesses Herovit's scrawny body and works over New York as only a seasoned member of the Survey Teams can work over a corrupt alien city. An inspiration to us all.

p. 9 (SA) Chester Deth-Ray (he changed his name from De Thray when he went into SF publishing) started out as an editorial assistant to Richard Deadwood at Zap-Gun Books. See how it all hangs together?

(MK) The demise of Richard Deadwood is told in full detail with many thrilling musical interludes in Mik Ado About Nothing, which was premiered at Boskone 1977. Scripts are still available for those unfortunate enough to miss last year's performance.

Why is the Balrog working as a paper-shredder for Deth-Ray Books? He is after all a fire demon from Tolkien's Lord of the Rings and Silmarillion, in power only slightly below the Maiar (archangels). Ah, it's a long sad story. Hard times and all that... Notice that Chester only destroys manuscripts sent to him with no return postage. If you send him any Star Trek stories, Star Wars stories, Space 1999 stories, Logan stories, Ape stories, etc. please include postage. He will send your manuscript back as fast as humanly possible.

p. 10 (SA) This song is based on the 'Heavy Dragoon' number from Patience.

Okay. The Hammonds are from a Stanley G. Weinbaum series. Giles Habibula is from Williamson's 'Legion of Space'; 'Staple Wars' refers to a well-known fan feud instigated by Bob Tucker. Morris Scott Dollens grew up to become a painter of ubiquitous e-t rockscapes, but in the February 1936 issue of Astounding Stories appeared a letter from Morris Dollens of North St. Paul, Minnesota, with a new idea: "Some one said that the magazine won't last them for a whole month, but I'll tell you what I did. I got a ten-cent box of water colors, some blotters, and painted the pictures in some of my magazines. The colors have to be blotted right away to keep the pages from wrinkling..." --Does this make him the original Fandom Blot? /// Lester del Rey -- oh, surely you've heard of him.

To continue: The named authors all appeared in ASF in the so-called "little silver age" (1930-1937), before John W. Campbell, Jr., took over as editor. They include Thomas Calvert McClary, Raymond Z. Gallun, Donald Wandrei (author of "Colossus"), Frank Belknap Long, Clyde Crane Campbell (ps. of H. L. Gold), Arthur Leo Zagat (former Minneapolis cult object), and Stanley Weinbaum. John W. Campbell appeared as "Don A. Stuart" and Nat Schachner as "Chan Corbett", frequently using both names in the same issue, and Clifton B. Kruse was...awful.

Neil Moran (for the rhyme) and Holloway Horn are 'unheard-of', and Anthony Gilmore and Warner Van Lorne, rumored pss. of ASF editors Harry Bates and F. Orlin Tremaine, are 'mythical.'

p. 11 (SA) "When You Sit Down to Write" -- this pep talk for aspiring fantasy writers is to the tune of "When I Go Out of Door", from Patience. 'Conceive me if you can / A commonplace young man' versus 'A greenery, yallery, Grosvenor Gallery / Foot-in-the-grave young man' sing the rival poets as they finally settle their aesthetic differences.

(MK) 'Rats in walls' alludes to an H. P. Lovecraft story about a young man driven mad by chittering rodents he alone can hear. And "undeads" is a general term from fantasy wargaming for all manner of creatures - zombies, skeletons, ghouls, vampires, specters, etc. "Miskatonic University" has a library filled with obscure and demonic manuscripts containing secrets better left unpublished. //and this is one of them?--sa// Lovecraft describes the frightening consequences incurred by meddling faculty, students, and visitors to this center of learning.

p. 12 (MK) There really is lots of Star Trek fanfiction around, and insipid romances between Nurse Chapel and Mr. Spock are prominent. Are the stories as bad as the one that Deth Ray burns in the Balrog Box? No, they are worse. Check the published collections.

(SA) 'Sauron's Song' is by Mike Blake out of "Leader of the Pack", or vice versa. Credit where credit is due, and all that.

p. 13 (SA) And 'Light Sabers...' is, ah, borrowed from Doug Hoylman. His own? Could be.

p. 15 (MK) Forrest J. Ackerman really does have a house full of SF out in Los Angeles. He lives in an apartment down the block. (I mean the house is full of SF.)

(SA) Our Conan, Tophier Cooper, reminds us that "Night of the Living Dead" was produced in Pittsburgh, and asks us to put in a plug for that fine city. So, before Pittsburgh goes any further down the drain, here's a plug.

p. 16 (SA) Source for this one is 'Three Little Maids from School', The Mikado. We had a lot of fun looking for a baritone who was nursing a life-long ambition to do this song. We never did find one... I could, I suppose, go into a long routine about the breakdown of the barrier between fantasy and reality and how wonderfully mind-expanding it is to see fictional characters talking about other fictional characters as if they were all alive even after the end of the book. But no, let's leave that to the MLA (see p. 19)

p. 17 (SA) Source: "When I Was a Lad", H.M.S. Pinafore. This one is Keller's. I haven't read the books in question, and it would take a lot to make me do anything from Pinafore. Too many amateurs...

(MK) When I pick G & S songs to parody, I pick easy ones. The song follows Conan's biography more or less as Robert E. Howard wrote it: youth in the cold barbarian north, then a southern journey to the civilized kingdoms of the old Mediterranean Sea bed before it was flooded. The pirates roamed the coast of West Africa; the Picts were savages of the northwest European forests, something like the Mohawks in Last of the Mohicans. The steppes are Persia, Stygia is Egypt, and Conan really did gain the throne of Aquilonia by strangling the incumbent king.

p. 18 (SA) We wanted to have Helminth poke his head out from behind something and holler "Dins-dale". But the last Monty Python routine the RISFA Players tried didn't go over too well (and from inside that blancmange I couldn't see the rest of the show), so as of this point, no hedgehog will appear. Alas.

- p. 19 (MK) The MLA is the Modern Languages Association, a professional group for teachers and students of modern (post-medieval) languages and literatures. They discovered science fiction about 1967, and just in time, since they were running out of other topics on which to deliver papers at their annual meetings. You know things are desperate when the program for a conference includes a seminar on The Role of the Button in Western Literature. (Authentic title.)
- Anyway, MLA began to look at mythic elements in SF, do word counts in Dhalgren, and subsidize Tom Claerson's fanzine, now retitled Extrapolation: a journal of science fiction studies. SF became respectable as a topic for term papers. There were Cliff Notes on SF. The lecture in our play is based loosely on several real comments by real critics.
- As to semiotics...well, that is more difficult to explain in words. It is the study of signs, non-verbal signs in many cases, definitely symbolic signs if symbols can be attributed. Semioticians don't describe; they point. Some study SF; others study bumper stickers or labels on beer cans. /// Thanks to Faye Ringel for basic information. Interpretations are those of the author.
- p. 20 (SA) Source of song: 'Toward the Emyrean Heights', in Princess Ida. The denizens of a women's university taking lessons from a typical Gilbertian caricature -- "Man is of no kind of use / Man's a donkey, Man's a goose..." This version started from 'And the works of Juvenal'. I like Winston juveniles, in memory at least; they got me through a couple of mediocre summers (age 9, 10). Ruthven Todd is author of Space Cat.
- p. 21 (SA) The "Committee to Prevent the Taking of the Name(s) of Star Wars in Vain" is not going to like this. /// "They're coming to get you, Barbara!" - famous line from "Night of the Living Dead", brother kidding sister in a cemetery just before the zombies appear. They come and get him instead; later he come and get her.
- p. 22 (SA) Source: "Beauty in the Bellow of the Blast", from Mikado. Ko-Ko (the Lord High Executioner) and Katisha (the Gilbertian Ugly Lady) decide that since they are both so fierce, they're made for each other.
- p. 23 (SA) 1937, first appearance of Galactic Patrol in Astounding. This is called "research."
- (MK) If you think Conan is kidding about the rule of instinct over logic, you aren't conversant with major contemporary literary criticism. (And Conan gets very angry if he isn't taken seriously.)
- p. 24 (SA) Helminth, formerly Speaker for Boskone, now Chairthing of an unnamed World Science Fiction Convention (Lynn, the receptionist, has friends in low places), bears no resemblance to any real-life Chairperson. He's far too evil and nasty to represent the average Worldcon Chair; he's far too sweet, nice, smart, and considerate to be the Chair of S*nC*n. Right? Right. Source of finale: "For He's Gone and Married Yum-Yum", part of the finale of The Mikado.

Whoop. Typos by Sue Anderson, typewriters courtesy of Rhode Island Junior College and Philip A. Hunt Chemical Corporation, Organic Chemical Division. Mimeography by and in spite of M. M. Keller and with the gracious help of Sheila D'Amassa at the last minute. Offset work: Jo-Art Copy or whoever we can get in Boston the day of the performance. It's been a hell of a winter.

Rivets Redux was first performed in the Republic Room of the Sheraton Boston Hotel on 18 February, 1978, as the Saturday night play for Boskone 15. The cast was as follows:

Mark M. Keller Chester Deth-Ray
Abby Kurnit Lynn the Receptionist, student, voice of Worsel
Nancy Hussar Clarissa MacDougall
Chip Hitchcock Charles Dexter Ward
Jeff Kurnit Kimball Kinnison
Topher Cooper Conan the Barbarian
Sheila G. D'Ammassa ... Isabella Figholler
Faye Ringel Guinevere the MLA lecturer
Anthony R. Lewis Helminth the former speaker for Boskone

and

David D'Ammassa Little golden robot
Ann McCutchen wood nymph
Rick Katze Ferry Rhodent, Quiz show panelist, student
Mike Saler Mr Spock, Darth Fader #3, UFO signalman
Richard Harter UFO team leader, Darth Fader #2
Mike Blake UFO team, Darth Fader #1, Norman the Weirdo
George Flynn Commodore Grimes, UFO team
Gayle Kaplan Editorial assistant, Tregonsee
Frank Sobolewski Voice of Balrog

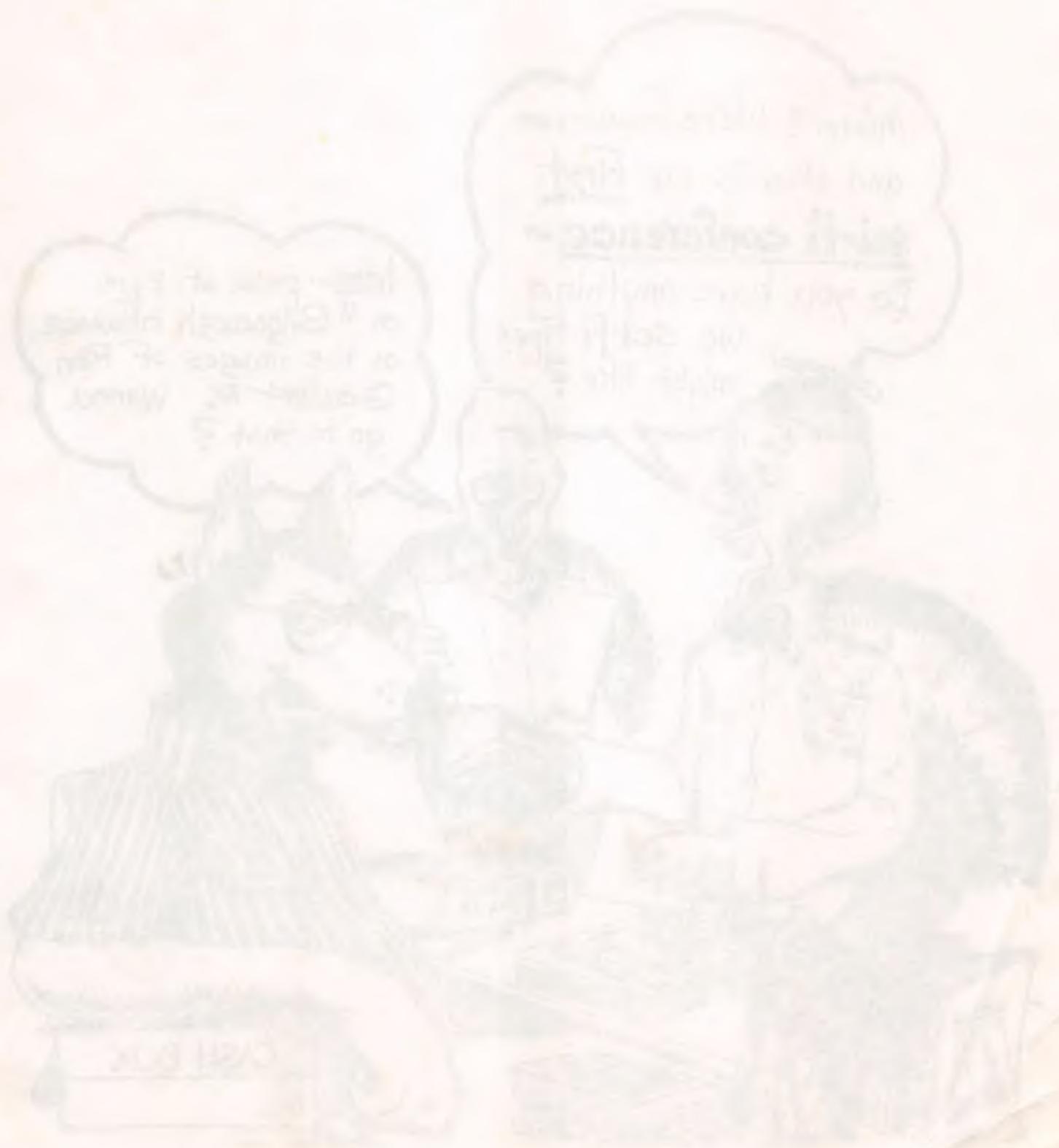
The technical and support people included:

Bob Spence Sound supervisor
Guy Harris Microphone operator
Lori Meltzer Props, lights
Faye Ringel Lights
Bob Benson Lights
Bill Desmond Videotaping

Accompanist ---- Lynne Brodsky

Directors ----- Mark M. Keller and Sue Anderson

Producer, musical director, technical director ---- Chip Hitchcock



Thought bubble 1: I am not a
man, I am a woman.
I am not a man, I am a woman.
I am not a man, I am a woman.

Thought bubble 2: I am not a
man, I am a woman.
I am not a man, I am a woman.
I am not a man, I am a woman.

CASH BOX

Talbot
Tolkein

Mister? We're faaans—
and this is our first
sci-fi conference—
Do you have anything
we sci-fi types
might like?

hmmmm—panel at 2pm.
on "Gilgamesh influence
on the images of Ron
Goulort". Wanna
go to that?

