

NIFLHEIM

NUMBER 10
JANUARY 1965
SAPS 70



NIFLHEIM #10 is edited and published for the 70th mailing of the Spectator Amateur Press Society by Dave Hulan, 19018 Bryant St., #5, Northridge, California, 91325. It is also Jötun Publication #50.

EDITORIAL

This page is being stencilled in haste (a minor suburb of LA) in order that it can be JP #50. Tomorrow I have to stencil Katya's Apa-L zine, which will get a JP number, and I have a strong desire to make my 50th publication something more than a one-sheet zine written by my wife. Since I number Jötun Pubs in the order in which I stencil the colophons, getting this stencil done will seal NIFLHEIM 10 as JP 50 even if I don't get it finished until a month from now. And I can keep on doing Apa-L zines without getting one of those small one-sheeters in as JP50.

Since this is the fiftieth Jötun Publication, and the 10th issue of NIFLHEIM, and marks the second anniversary of my membership in SAPS, I figured something a little special in the way of an issue would be appropriate. So this issue will have an ATom cover, illos throughout, and an article or so as well as the

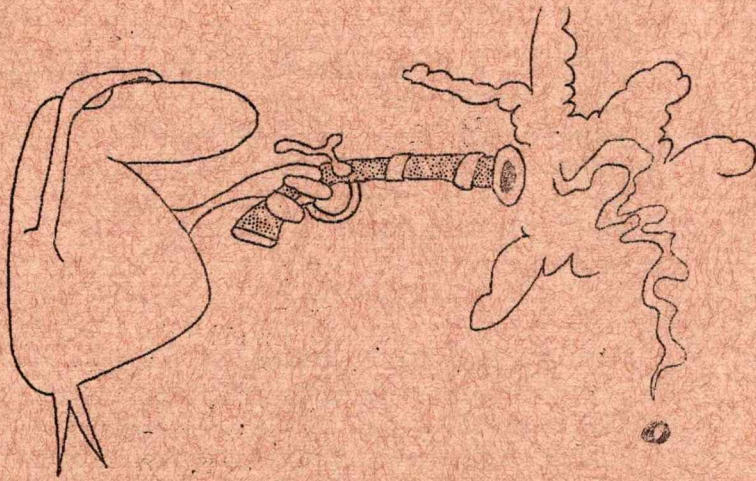


usual mailing comments. The article or so will also be used in PELF 4, since I don't have the sort of time it takes to write lots and lots of articles, but it is written for SAPS first. I hope you enjoy it, as well as the issue of LOXI that has already been put into the mailing.

Since I haven't stencilled the rest of the zine yet, I don't know what illos will be on which pages. So I will credit artwork in the upper left, opposite the date-time group, on pages where it occurs.

My apologies to those of you who may have gotten pages stapled in backwards in the last issue of NIFLHEIM. I had collated a dozen or so copies before I realized that I hadn't turned two of the stacks over after running the back sides, and since it was getting extremely late at the time and I was in a hurry I just left them like they were. Pulling the staple and putting the pages in right is no great problem, but it's a nuisance and I'm sorry I caused it. I'll try not to do it again.

Maybe what SAPS needs to revive it is a good pagecount battle, a la the 50th-51st mailings. I should have 60 or thereabouts in this mailing, which will be the most anyone's had in quite a while - I think since WARHOON dropped out. Now if everyone matched that, the mailing would run over 2000 pages - and nobody would ever read it and the next mailing would probably run under 200. However, everyone isn't nuts. But anyone who wants to have a pagecount war I'll take on, on condition that you run off your own zine - no professional mimeo services are considered fair play.



with
unerring
aim...

Comments on the 69th SAPS Mailing

Spectator 69 - OElephant: As you lower the membership are you going to lower the copy requirement along with it? You didn't this time, but six extra copies is already quite a few and seven extras or even twelve if you go all the way back to 30 members is going to make the treasury pretty fat.

Por Que? 23 - Doreen Webbert: After associating with your husband and his stogies during the Pacificon I know why you'd like to go to a no-smoking party...

Glad to see you with a long zine again (tho you've been doing short ones ever since I've been in SAPS or even reading the mailings); I don't know why I didn't find more comment hooks, but this was thoroughly enjoyed.

Dinky Bird 12 - Ruth Berman: True what you say about the Oz books, which does make the series run down, but the whole idea was that a series in which there was no definite goal is worse than one in which there is, even if the one with goals uses the same sort of goal over and over. That was very badly put and I don't mean it that way at all - forget the whole business; it wasn't important.

Resin 18 - Norm Metcalf: If it isn't too late I'd like to see the continuation of the article on Asimov's future history series - I'm very curious as to how he gets from THE NAKED SUN to THE STARS, LIKE DUST, which is a rather long gap at best. It was long enough for the positronic robots to disappear and, as I recall, for it to be forgotten that Earth was the original home of mankind. And the Earth became radioactive. As far as I know there was never any connection made between these two rather widely separated eras, which would lead me to consider the whole thing to be two future histories - the first beginning with I, Robot and The Rest of the Robots (which interweave) and also including "Mother Earth", although its location in the series is uncertain because while it seems to precede THE CAVES OF STEEL and THE NAKED SUN in some ways, its theme if valid would preclude the situation shown in the two Bailey-Olivaw books from developing. Anyhow, if you have extras of IDLE HANDS issues with the article in it I'd like a copy.

Yarst on your collection of mailboxes.

If I'd been Bruce I'd have disallowed credit.

Have you read JC&the Giant of Mars

or are you speaking from hearsay as you so often do?

Your Own Personal Gold Mine - Richard Mann: I don't complain about JVC Jr. trying to turn ANALOG into a scientific journal. I do wish he'd print better science articles, because I haven't cared for most of those he's run lately, but I'm for the idea.

Typing people's names is the worst kind of typo. Remember that next time you type mine...

The Wild Colonial Boy 10 - John Foyster: Contrariwise, I would say that rather than going to video tape at 60 ips. a more likely trend would be to end up with something approaching wire at a very low velocity - but with all the capabilities of video tape at 60 ips. Miniaturization of everything is the trend, and what would take so much tape now shouldn't take nearly as much with cryogenic amplifiers etc. to reduce noise levels to extremely low levels.

Ignatz 36 - Nancy Rapp: Speaking of treating criminals with kid gloves reminds me of one of my pet peeves with the old classic B Westerns of the Saturday Matinee variety - namely that Roy Rogers or Gene Autry or whoever, after being shot at from ambush and whatnot all through the picture, in the final Big Scene ride madly along on their trusty horses, catch up with the fleeing villain, and leap across to knock them off the horse and finish up with a big fist fight, instead of simply shooting the blokes. And anyone who thinks that the pronouns in the preceding sentence could have been improved if I weren't composing in the stick is absolutely right.

Excelsior 1 - Arnie Katz: Have you waked up yet to find that you were Seth Johnson?

New York may be the home of the most united, most active group of fanzine fans, bar none, although I think you'll find that Los Angeles might have some question at least as far as the active part is concerned, but then you might remember that they are somewhat less than universally liked by the rest of fandom. My support goes to Syracuse in '66 and LA in '67, but if it comes to a choice between New York in '67 and anywhere else - from St. John to Baltimore - I'm for wherever else. More on this later in comments to Van Arnam.

DYDCOMZ!!!

Goliard 834 - Karen Anderson: Hmm - and I probably have used that very map many times; when I was in ROTC most of our map problems were either on one of Gettysburg or one of Ft. Benning. Of course, it may have been a different part of Benning; it's a big post. A single 1:25,000 map doesn't begin to cover it.

Pot Pourri 35 - John Berry: Greatly appreciated, eagerly absorbed, and no comment except to ask for more.

Nandu 28 - Nan Gerding: Welcome back to SAPS (welcome to you, too, Arnie - I forgot that a while back when commenting to you).

It shouldn't take much longer for you to become acquainted with me; I have enough material in this mailing, and I had some-what in the last, too.

"De garren haa det gut" seems to be some sort of trademark of yours, though I've never seen it before, and I wonder what it means and what language it is. I would guess most likely Flemish or Dutch, possibly one of the other Low German dialects like Plattsdeutsch, Frisian, or Afrikaans. Enlightenment?

Collector - Howard Devore: Amen to the comments on the "Boycott".

Armageddon 3 BM - John Kusske: Breasts are not incompatible with oviparosity - the platypus and echidna are egg-laying mammals. Maybe the harpy is a highly evolved monotreme.

Maineiac 26 - Edmund Mitchem Cox: It's too late at night right now for me to think of anything to say, even though I know there must be something, so I guess I'll knock off right now and come back in the future to this zine.

Looking at the time and the deadline, and in view of the fact that I still have to stencil and run off LeeJ's Queebconrep, I think that I'll do what I can toward MJs between now and the next couple of hours, and then quit and run this and Katya's zine off. So it won't be the gigantic Niflheim I had hoped to produce, but at least it should be a respectable 13-15 pages. The Brag article is reprinted from GARM 1, for LAAPA; the article on worms and unicorns will be reprinted in PELT. Back to MJs.

I've read the three Doc Savage reprints Bantam brought out, though I haven't seen any more. If your sense of wonder needs stimulating, you ought to try these. There's something absolutely fascinating about tri-motored airplanes that fly a whole 200 mph!

I really think the OElephant should have credited Lee with the page he had in your zine; it's at least as relevant to SAPS as the stuff Wally pubbed for TOSK to keep him in. And with the five pages in MRAOC it would have meant he wouldn't need any activity this mailing to stay in. If anything had happened to make it difficult for him to get his activity in this time (it didn't, but it might have), I think he'd have had a legitimate gripe - although Sec. 2, last sentence, would of course apply.

Ibex I: 4 - Jack Chalker: If the Midwest is set aside at London in favor of the Syracuse bid, the next con would then, according to the rotation plan, be due in the West, not the Midwest. If an area is set aside, it loses its turn - it doesn't revert back there next year. I suggest that if you're so hot for a con, bid against Syracuse for the '66 con. I probably would support you against Syracuse, but if Syracuse gets it LA will be bidding in '67, and guess who I'm for then? I doubt if even an Eastern convention could get a 3/4 majority to hold a second straight con in the East, if there was a well-organized Western convention bidding. And there will definitely be that, in '67 or '68, whichever year we're eligible.

Revolting Development (Die Wis 13) - Dick Schultz: See my wife's comments...

Retro 34 - FM Busby: Edco wasn't at Pacificon; I don't think Baker was, but can't be sure. He was probably too busy campaigning for Barry.

Good con report; one of my regrets from the con was that I never got a chance to more than say hello to you.

Pleasure Units 8 - Gordon Eklund: This is a hell of a funny zine - are you really the same Gordon Eklund who was active back about the time I got into fandom? I recall you as a sort of Arnie Katz type at the time. Will Arnie Katz also become one of fandom's best wits? I doubt it somehow...

Outsiders 57 - Wrai Ballard: Well, you get my convention report in LOKI in this mailing. October is too soon after the con to have much of a report written, for me at least. I too would like to see more reports; so far I don't think I've seen any long reports and very few short ones. The one of Buz's in this mailing is the longest I've seen besides mine, I think. Of course Walter Breen wasn't there, and his is usually the long one...

Pillar of Fire 10 - Rich Vettel Brown: Well, did you turn Bruce and Dian in to the Post Office? If you did, they haven't heard anything - and if you didn't you're a liar among your other faults. Presumably you have virtues, although they are sort of hard for me to discover. If you were to gaffiate tomorrow, would anybody miss you? Except maybe your Fawning Acolyte, Arnie? And I really don't think Arnie was serious when he was going on about what a great guy you are; maybe I'll have to revise my opinion of him, which has been going up, if he really was serious. Nobody who put out something like this issue of PoF could be anything decent.

There Are Advantages... - Dian Pelz: Not through the Iron Duchess! Congratulations.

Illo by Arthur Thomson

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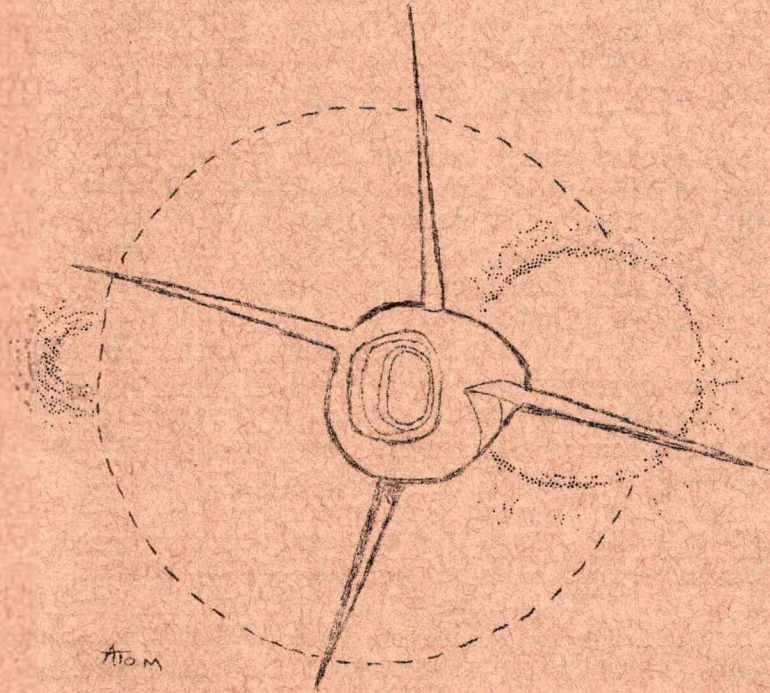
Sapterranean 11 - Walter Breen:

Yes, Katya's two essays in the last mailing were school papers. So **is** the one in this mailing. They're better than Metcalf's mailboxes, anyhow.

When the Gods Would Sup 10 -

Alan J. Lewis: LA fandom has started its own apa. In fact, in order not to be outdone by the Fanoclasts, it has started **two** apas - Apa-L (weekly) and LAAPA (quarterly). The former is pretty good and the latter is pretty bad, as viewed from this point of the time stream.

I know now what Loran is better than I did at the time I explained it incorrectly to whoever it was who asked - Buz or Tosk, I think. It's hyperbolic rather than trigonometric. But the principle is similar to triangulation - you locate yourself along one branch of a hyperbola and then a branch of another one, and the intersection is your position. But I'd be interested in a detailed writeup any time you want to do one - though from the response my article on trackers got you'd find all of two others interested.



Mistily Meandering 10 - Fred Patten: It's **Adara** our relatives live in, not Modesto - but all those little towns up 99 are so much alike that I don't blame you for misremembering.

Speaking of foreign-language comics reminds me of an amusing one I saw once - a German edition of Mickey Mouse. This particular edition was of one of his Southwest adventures, and there were several Mexican characters in the story. Seeing what a Mexican accent becomes in German is sort of sense-of-wonderish...

SAPrise! 1 - Dave Van Arnam: As for the Fanoclasts - Lupoff I know and like. You I don't know well enough to be sure about, but I've nothing against you and you seem like a decent sort. Steve Stiles I know as a good cartoonist, but not otherwise. Andy Porter I don't know at all, although I've heard some uncomplimentary stories about him. Arnie Katz is OK, but hardly the type I'd want to see on a concommittee. Ted White I trust not at all, since he has on a number of occasions proved that he can't be trusted - at least not with money. Brown and McInerney I condemn. Boardman is probably honest enough - I've heard no complaints about him on that score - but even his friends agree that he is one of the most irritating personalities in fandom. He's the only person I know who can say something I agree with and make me mad doing it. Now - the active concommittee as enumerated in KNOWABLE (my source - I'm sure it's elsewhere too) includes only you of the people I'm even neutral about. The rest I have a violent dis-

like for; my reasons are various, but sufficient in all cases. I'll admit that Baltimore isn't much of a city; the difference is that I don't think New York is much of a city either. I'm for LA in '67...

However, if I implied that you were all under the mental domination of TEW, I'm sorry - I was going on the basis that all I had heard indicated that he was spark-plugging the bid, and that he was claiming that this faction of NY fandom wasn't going to factionalize - so I assumed that in view of that fact the rest of the group that was with him must be pretty much of the same mind as he - not necessarily under his influence. Maybe you're all like that from birth. Or, Maybe Not.

My memory may be playing tricks on me, but as I recall the Lincoln-Douglas debates took place in 1856 or 1858 in the course of a campaign for the Senate seat from Illinois, not during the Presidential campaign. Douglas was one of Lincoln's opponents, but the debates were earlier. Someone correct me if I'm wrong...

Niflheim 9 - Me: There was no cover by Harness, because I didn't get around to asking him for one. He missed the LASFS meeting I was going to ask him.

MRAOC 4 - Lee Jacobs: I don't know if Bruce would have allowed me credit for "A Fanzine for BRT #3" or not if I'd needed credit. However, since I had more than enough other material in the mailing to make up the requiredac, he didn't need to bother about credit for this one.

Stumping 10 - Jim Webbert: Very interesting conclusion to your article. This sort of thing is especially good when SAPS has gotten so hung up on some subject (like WB) that the MCs are repetitive ad nauseam.

Slug 9 - Wally Weber: Funny, as usual, but with no long anecdotes about Huntsville for me to agree or disagree with, no comments.

Speleobem 25 - Bruce Pelz: I rather like that cover, somehow. It reminds me of something, but I can't place what.

I have yet to see in fandom any place where careful, polished writing is adequately appreciated. I'm not talking about my own stuff - the number of items I've done that I consider carefully done and polished can be counted on a finger of one hand -(I worked fairly hard on "The Sounding of the Horn" for MEGALOSCOPE back when I was first getting active in genfandom) - but things by other people that were really well done have gone almost unmentioned-on. I think this is inherent to some extent in fandom - most of us are writers, not critics, so beyond saying we like something there isn't much else to do. And it seldom seems worth the trouble to say no more than that.

Flabbergasting 32 At Least - Toskey via Weber: No one enjoys Tosk's stuff more than I, but if he wants to quit why not let him? Let some interested W'lers get in.

Sauvignon Blanc - Don Fitch: Thanks for the kind words on AFFBRT - this is not, of course, a highly technical paper, being designed to inform other engineers who are not specialists in trackers how in general a tracker works; it got a good reception from the intended audience, although few SAPS seemed to care for it.

West 17 - Ted Johnstone: I wish I had developed the tracker in question myself - if I had, I'd be making more than 164 a week by about double. But thanks to you too for enjoying the paper - or rather for saying so.

The last few zines got skipped unless they had comments to me that I wanted to answer. Sorry, but Edco's waiting.

OF WORMS AND UNICORNS

Several issues back in LOKI (another fanzine I publish and which most of you reading this also get), I said that I would be interested in an article comparing Eddison's THE WORM OUROBOROS and Pratt's THE WELL OF THE UNICORN, two books which I felt, from several readings of the latter and a couple of false starts on the former, to have certain similarities. The only comment that I got was from Buck Coulson, who after titling and by-lining an "article" wrote: "There is no comparison between THE WELL OF THE UNICORN and THE WORM OUROBOROS. They are completely different in theme, style, and treatment."

Recently I finally, in the course of being sick and therefore having the time to read something that can't be read in snatches, ploughed my way through THE WORM OUROBOROS. Now I feel that I am qualified to write such an article myself, and since no one else has volunteered, I will.

There is no comparison between THE WELL OF THE UNICORN and THE WORM OUROBOROS. They are completely different in style, theme, and treatment.

However, mere lack of similarity between two books isn't going to stop me from writing an article I said I wanted to do, especially since every time I read THE WELL OF THE UNICORN I like it better, and it moves further up the list of my very favorite books. In fact, right now I can't think of one I'd rate above it, although I might change my mind later. And contrast with THE WORM is a convenient hook for an article about it, if nothing else.

Here are two books which at a very superficial glance bear a certain similarity. Both are set in pure-fantasy worlds (the "Mercury" of WORM has nothing whatever to do with the planet; it is, like the world of WELL, an alternate Earth as regards its flora, fauna, length of day, etc.). Both have wars and other military adventures as leading topics. Both admit of magic, but neither depends on it for the achievement of constructive ends; to both, magic is a destructive force which can affect the real world but which is not so powerful that a brave and determined man cannot overcome it - they are not of the sword-and-sorcery genre in any but the vaguest sense.

Further superficial resemblances could be found, no doubt, but the differences loom much larger and are much more important. Eddison was a lover of high style in his writing, and delights in the most flamboyant prose and extravagant descriptions, weaving the reader about with a web of words which while pleasant tends to obscure what is happening. It is perhaps the most pronounced feature of the book, and is why it cannot be read in snatches - deep purple prose of this sort takes time to get immersed in, and until you have read a chapter or so you (or I, at any rate) have difficulty in thinking in the author's vocabulary (which seems 18th century Irish). WELL, on the other hand, is written in a clear, straightforward style after the manner of most well-done modern popular fiction; slight archaism is permitted in such incidents as the tales of the well, where the speech is that which would come naturally to the narrator, but never does the prose become an apparent end in itself as it is in so much of WORM.

Once you have gotten past the florid writing, there is really not very much to THE WORM OUROBOROS. It is an adventure story, pure and simple; its only message is the one that Heinlein had in "Glory Road" - that after heroes have done their job, if they have done it thoroughly, they are no longer necessary. Heinlein, in his usual manner, lets the action continue on and trail off in a realistic way; Eddison, in what appears from experience with this one book to be his usual style, pulls a rabbit out of the hat and puts the Worm's tail in its mouth. Neither is very satis-

factory to the reader, and I didn't care greatly for either book.

Pure adventure stories in themselves are fine - I am a great lover of pure adventure, as anyone who knows my tastes could tell you - but it is possible for a story to be great adventure and yet much more besides, and *THE WELL OF THE UNICORN* is a premier example of this.



The most obvious message in the book is simply that it is necessary to achieve anything worthwhile by one's own efforts; any attempts at short cuts only result in the gain turning into something other than what was desired. From the drawing of Cython to Airar's bed by magic, which ended with her cry, "If it were only Visto!", through the tales of the Well and how, though it brought peace to those who drank, it exacted a price which seems to those of us who value free will a terrible one, to the ultimate use of magic by Airar in coming to

his father's death-scene, the use of any means other than the wit,

strength, and courage of the striver was inevitably rewarded with gifts which turned to ashes in the hands of the recipient. Meliboe the enchanter is the archetype of the short-cut artist - although he possesses skills and wisdom above almost any other in the world, he is doomed to never be truly effective even in serving those whom he would unselfishly help, because instead of using his real intelligence and vast knowledge in a conventional way, he persists in trying the impermanent ways of magic. Airar, great as is his personal affection for the old magician, is eventually forced to banish him in order that his well-intentioned efforts to help may not undermine the whole of the anti-Vulking revolution.

Second only to this is the question of government. Three existing governments are well drawn in the story, and Airar is perpetually at a loss as to which is to be preferred. First is the Vulking system, where the state is everything, and all its citizens devoted to its welfare, in return for which the state will presumably insure their safety and well-being. Second is the system of the Dodekapolis, especially Carrhoene, which is in effect anarchy, with the strong taking what they like and the weak doing with what is left. Third is the Empire under the Well - by which means the quarrelsomeness inherent in the Carrhoene system is eliminated without the iron discipline of the Vulkings, but at the cost of a great loss of initiative and will. A fourth system, that of Os Erigu, is shown, but found ulti-

mately unworkable. This is the idea that each man is free to join at will under the banner of a leader, and to leave at any time he chooses, but that while he is serving the leader he must obey whole-heartedly. While looking attractive at first sight, it founders on its inability to meet adverse conditions, as the Confederate States of America, which were organized on much that principle, discovered.

What, then, is the answer? Pratt wisely does not even try to give one, because no one has ever been able to find one in the past and it is unlikely that anyone will ever find one in the future. The solution, such as it is, is the solution that has always existed and which will probably continue to - take a bit of Carrhoene and a bit of Briella, varying the proportions to the situation, and make do as best you can. It is not, after all, essential to be philosophically consistent in your government, and no real government is. The closer they approach it, the more unbearable living in them becomes. And this, ultimately, is the point of this facet of the book.

Another point which the book makes is that while peace is wonderful and war is hell, there are times when the price that must be paid for peace is too dear, and war is necessary. The Tales of the Well are perhaps the chief illustrative examples of this point, albeit they are also significant in pointing up the other issues which Pratt wishes to air. For instance, when Vulk the Ninth decided that he could not defend himself against the father of his beloved and drank at the well, he was indeed freed from the necessity of that war - but the means was the loss of his mistress by her repentance and return to the Church, which was his reason for avoiding the war in the first place. Nothing was gained and his crown was lost.

Or again, when Brodry and Bardis, Argyra and Aurareus, seeking an end to their personal quarrel, went to the Well, they found an end to the quarrel right enough, but Aurareus became a homosexual and by thus dropping from the picture as a rival of Bardis effected the result. This is hardly a desirable means of settling an eternal triangle - yet it is the sort of solution that reliance on such means as the Well forces upon one. In a sense this is a part of the first point - that anything which is to have lasting value must be attained without magical short-cuts. Sometimes that means war, or other unpleasantness.

And perhaps the most significant scene in the entire book is in the Fourth Tale, when the she-wolf who drank at the Well is unable to kill the deer though she be dying of hunger. A wolf cannot live without violence; its metabolism will not allow it to become a vegetarian. Symbolically this may be considered a fact of human nature as well - not that violence is necessary, but that by tinkering with the natural instincts of a human you may make impossible something which is necessary to his life, and thereby with the best intentions in the world you may kill him. The whole book is on one level a strong argument against any sort of artificial influencing of human behavior, phrased entirely differently from the classic science-fictional devices of the same nature. What does the Well do, after all, but implant a psychological compulsion against violence?

Pratt was a noted military historian as well as a writer of fiction, and this is evident throughout the book. Even the most superficial reading of the two books under discussion will reveal that Pratt knows a great deal about military tactics and Eddison knows virtually nothing. This is not necessarily a fault in Eddison; he never really tries to describe much in the way of tactics. His idea of a battle is that these two armies meet, with whichever one he wants to win this time taking the other one in the flank, and then the mighty heroes of both sides hack away at each other until one or the other army gives up and runs away. Pratt, on the other hand, gives very good tactical dispositions for his armies (which may be only a few score), has well-worked-out military organizations, and in general shows that he knows what he's talking about.

A very significant thing which the two books have in common is the lack of the typical adventure-story dichotomy of Good and Evil. There are very few characters in either book who can be called truly evil - they may be opposed to the protagonists, but their motives in their own ways are as valid and reasonable as those of the protagonists themselves. The Witches were less honorable than the Demons in WORM, but this was treated as part of their nature and not a conscious evil. Gro, to my mind the most interesting character in the book, is constantly changing sides, but one feels that at every turn he is really honestly changing his mind - that he is not a born traitor but simply a person with so great an ability to see both sides of a question that he cannot refrain from moving from one to the other as his sympathies shift.

In THE WELL, there is even less of the "good guys vs. bad guys" bit. If the slaughter of the Mariolan syndics by Vanette-Millepigue was unnecessarily bloody, it was no more than rebellious cities usually receive, and in general Mariupol seems not to have fared worse than most. The Vulkings were strong rulers, and favored their kind over the Dalecarles or other subject races, but in general the picture of the land under the Vulkings resembles that of the Roman or Persian Empires - a stern and strong government, but one that was reasonably fair and which did not oppress their subjects as long as the laws were obeyed.

In short, the countries of THE WELL are pretty much like real countries, with no certainty of right or wrong but only a matter of relative preference - and that is likely to vary with the individual reader. You are intended to identify with Airar and his goals, but I can imagine many people preferring one of the other societies. The Empire is a real Utopia for those who are for peace at any price - Carrhoene is practically an Objectivist state (before the "dog-smellers" took over) - Lacia is appealing to those who long for a strong state to protect and direct them. The characters in the book, like the Vulkings, the Star-Captains of Carrhoene, Sir Ludomir, and Earl Mikalegon, all are genuinely convinced that their system is the best, not because it is of the most benefit to them personally but because they are convinced that it is the best for all. And Airar, like the reader (in most cases), is not convinced by any arguments, but sees the weakness in all, and in so doing begins to realize that there are questions which may have no satisfactory answer.

I would like to see some of the better fan artists go to work on these two books; THE WORM has only a few illustrations and those rather poor, and THE WELL has none at all except for maps. There is a wealth of material here for illustration; both books are abounding in visual imagery crying for the hand of a good artist to put them on paper or canvas. Someone who likes scenes of large armies, for instance, has a natural in the march of the Duke of Salmonessa over the causeway to Mariola; the burning of Os Erigu, the summoning of Gython, the exorcism of the demons from the iulia, any of the many battle scenes, especially the burning of the ships in Bear Fjord (and the trapping of Earl Mikalegon by the bear is good cartoon material itself), or a group portrait of the Star-Captains, one of the most striking groups in fiction; from THE WORM the opportunities are if anything greater, because Eddison describes so many impressive landscapes as well as much of the same sort of thing as is given in THE WELL. I strongly recommend these books as sources for heroic fantasy material in the next Art Show.

In conclusion, here are two certified classics of the heroic fantasy genre, two books which should be read by anyone with any pretensions to be a serious devotee of this branch of literature. I feel that THE WELL OF THE UNICORN is the better of the two books because of its greater depth of meaning; it is also much easier reading. But reading the Eddison book is an experience which no one should miss; the only precaution is to be sure that you will be able to read it without too many interruptions. Otherwise the flavor will be lost, and with it the enjoyment that should be yours - and that would be your great loss.

THE COMPLEAT CARD PLAYER

Any attendee at any LASFS party in the past year or a bit less could not have helped noticing that there was almost invariably a card game going. While there have been poker games involving fans periodically in the past, and a few of the more erudite card-wise of us meet occasionally for bridge, the real card fever apparently began at a FAPA one-shot session over at Ed Cox's last January 25. I remember the date particularly because it was also a birthday party for Katya, and I'd better remember her birthday...

Anyhow, Ron Ellik chose this party to reveal to a number of us the intricacies of the British game, Brag. In that first group were the Pelzes, Jack Harness, Bill Blackbeard, Lee Jacobs, Elmer Perdue, and myself. I think that was the lot. The Pelzes weren't the Pelzes at the time, of course, but everyone knew they soon would be (less than a week later - no, exactly a week later!).

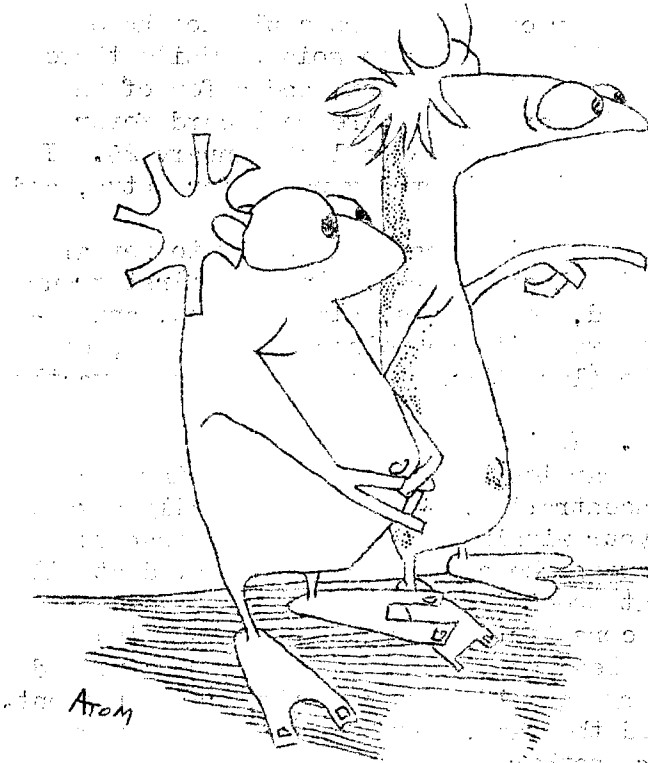
Brag is a pretty simple game. It is a game that can be played effectively in distracting surroundings, like parties, after-LASFS gatherings, car trips, etc. It doesn't require intense concentration, yet it is basically a game of skill, and correct play will result in your winning much more often than you lose. For all these reasons, it began to sweep the club. Brag was played at all parties. Occasionally it even was played at special Brag parties, though they were the exception. The original group as constituted above, except for Elmer, plus Fred Patten and Phil Castora, were the leading players; many others came and went, but the "regulars" were in almost every game if they were physically present. As time went by more and more people learned the game, until now almost everyone in LASFS plays or has played at one time or another.

I have been an avid card player for many years - practically all my life; the first thing I learned to read, at the age of 3, was the spots on a deck of cards - and I like to analyze games. The strategy of Brag is relatively simple and straightforward, and I thought I'd take this opportunity while I have some stencils to fill of discussing the game of Brag. If I still need pages by the time I've finished, I may continue into the strategy of Bouree, of which I am probably one of the world's leading authorities (since it isn't even known to the great bulk of humankind, and as far as I know no other analyst has ever approached the game). If not, I'll probably discuss it in a later issue.

But on to Brag. First, a description of the game, for the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with it. Brag may be played by any number from two to seventeen in theory, but less than four isn't much fun and more than eight are unwieldy. If you get more than eight, it's usually better to split up into two games if there is another deck of cards.

Three cards are dealt to each player, one at a time in clockwise rotation beginning at the dealer's left, face down. After he has dealt himself his third card, the dealer places the remainder of the deck face up on his left. An ante is optional, but it livens up the game and is a good house rule. If an ante is required, it must of course be made before the deal.

Hands rank in the following order: 3 of a kind, or Prile - all three cards the same denomination, with three 3's ranking highest and then Aces, Kings, etc. in the conventional order of card rank; running flush - three cards in sequence of the same suit, actually harder to get than a prile, but relatively similar in frequency and so it doesn't make much difference, with A-2-3 ranking highest followed by A-K-Q, K-Q-J, etc.; run, three cards in sequence, with individual runs ranking as in running flushes; flush, three cards of the same suit, with the highest card determining the winner between two flushes, second highest if the highest is tied, then third, and the pot splitting with two identical flushes; pair, with Ace high and then down in the



conventional order, with the third card breaking ties between equal pairs; card high, no pair, run, or flush, ranked by the highest card, then second, then third.

Evaluating the hands takes some playing experience, but some advice can be given to the new player. An Ace high is a fair hand. A low pair is also a fair hand. A high pair is a good hand. A flush is a very good hand. A run is almost always a winner, and a prile or running flush will lose only on very rare occasions. I can only remember three times during my Brag-playing career that a running flush or a prile was beaten.

After the deal, the player on dealer's left makes the opening bet. We almost always play it open-or-fold, checking not allowed, but there is no inherent reason for doing this, and if you prefer to permit checking it can be done. If checking is permitted no hand under a pair should open except in the last two positions. But if checking is not allowed, the eldest hand must take some action.

What action depends on his hand and on the number of players in the game. In general, he should open any pair any time (when a hand is given as openers, it is to be understood that any better hand is also openable). With six or more players to act after him, he should fold anything less than a pair, and even pairs below fives are somewhat suspect. With five to go, any pair is good and an A-K-x is a possibility. With four to go, A-J-x should stay and A-10-x is a potential stay. With three to go, any Ace should stay.

If eldest hand folds, next hand has a similar decision, only with fewer hands to act after him. Whatever your position at the table, the important thing is how many people are left to act after you; the more there are, the better your hand should be to open. With only two players behind you, K-J-x is a possible bet; I make it most of the time. Less is unwise. But with only the dealer left to bet against you, almost anything is worth betting. In the first place there is a reasonable chance that you have him beaten fair and square, with a pretty poor hand no real deterrent; if you don't, he will probably fold unless he has at least a King, so you have a chance of bluffing him out. This is also the one position at which the opening bet should be varied - in all other cases the minimum is the desirable opening. But in this position if you occasionally make a heavy opening, you run an excellent chance of driving out the dealer if you have a bad hand, or catching him calling when you have a good one. It is almost necessary to do this, because if you don't bluff occasionally in this position the dealer will simply call your minimum openings and you can never get any money out of your good hands. It is also sort of fun to bet a nickel or so on a handful of garbage and watch the dealer trying to figure if you really have garbage or are trying to sucker him in with a run or something of the sort.

But in other positions it is seldom wise to open for large amounts. While one person may fear to fold a fair hand in the face of a large bet, in case there is a bluff running, several people will fold fair hands and let someone who has a good hand challenge your high bet. And the result will be that unless

you are betting into a very good hand (high flush, run, or better), you will be called immediately by one player instead of getting several rounds of action from several players.

Because the betting system of Brag is peculiar. After the opening bet is made, each player may continue in the pot by matching or raising the last bet. This includes the man who made the first bet - he must not simply match any raises, as in poker, but must match the last bet. This means that a hand may go around half a dozen times with each person betting a penny when his turn comes - I've seen it happen. This betting continues until only two people are left in the pot. At this point, either of them may say, "I'll see you" as he matches the last bet and the betting stops. The person who was "seen" must then show his cards - if the person who "saw" him agrees that they beat his cards, he folds his hand and puts it on the deck; if he has a better hand, he shows it and collects the pot.

As each player folds his hand, he places it face up on top of the deck, with only one card showing. The deck is only shuffled after a pile is shown - which means about once or twice in an average session. A person with sufficient memory and concentration could rather easily get a very good line on where practically all the cards are; for this reason, it is inadvisable to play Brag with people who may be that good. I don't think anyone in our group of players is - no one wins that much that consistently.

How much to bet? That is the question that is the real essence of Brag. You begin with the opener. His bet has already been discussed. After the pot has been opened, check whether you think your hand can beat the minimum the opener should have had to open in his position. If you haven't, then you should fold unless you are in a position to "see" the opener - i.e. everyone else has dropped. Even then you should let him have it unless you know he frequently bluffs or is prone to bet on hands he should fold; in that case it's a judgment situation. If you can call a penny bet you generally should if you think there is any chance you could win.

If your hand is better than the minimum the opener should have, you should in general stay in. The exception would be if you were not much better and it looked likely that there would be several other players staying in. With A-Q or better I would generally stay one round unless the opener was under the gun and there were as many as two others in ahead of me; with a pair I would always stay one round if there were no raises ahead of me.

By the second round most of the ribbon-clerks should be driven out. If you are ribbon-clerking on less than a pair, you should join them unless you can "see" someone. With a low pair, give it one more try. If you can "see" at this point, do so with less than sixes; with a better pair simply bet even if you could "see". With a high pair or a low flush, a small raise is in order at this point. Better hands should play it cool and simply match.

By the third round, things should have settled down pretty well. Anyone who was working on a card-high is out or out of his mind. Small pairs are beginning to look like losers, but are still worth "seeing" if this is now possible. If not, pairs below sixes should fold. Medium pairs (less than honors) should also "see" at this point if they can, but can go on unless there is a raise. High pairs are worth continuing with, but no longer worth a raise. Any flush should now raise to 3¢ if it hasn't already. Runs and up should still lay low.

By the fourth round medium pairs should "see" if they can and drop if they can't. Jacks and Queens should see if they can, but are worth continuing with if they can't. Kings and up should continue and can call raises up to 5¢, although lower pairs should drop if the bet gets over 3¢. High flushes should raise to 5¢ now, and so should runs topped by the 9 or less.

The fifth round should be down to two people, if it has gotten that far. If it isn't, then you are in for a good pot, but these odd occasions are the exception rather than the rule. If there are still three people, any pair except Aces or Kings should fold at this point. If there are only two, any pair and any flush with top card 10 or less should "see". A run should raise to 10¢; so should any higher hand. Anyone who has lasted this long isn't going to pull out now; sand-bagging further is needless.

Beyond this point you reach a point of diminishing returns. No one can tell you how to bet if you have a running flush and the betting keeps going after you've stuck in a 10¢ raise. Eventually you should call with anything less than a prile of threes, but just when is a judgment situation and no one can make a rule. Offhand a run is usually justified in calling when there is over a dollar in the pot; a running flush or prile should wait longer, but after the pot has gotten over two or three dollars you have to have a lot of faith in your judgment not to call.

So far I have laid down rather rigid rules - but what about bluffing? After all, the name of the game is "Brag".

Bluffing is an art in itself, and few rules can be laid down for it. One that can is that you are not going to win much money in Brag by bluffing - not in Los Angeles. Too many people are willing to call almost anything. The primary purpose in bluffing at Brag, as in limit poker, and as opposed to table-stakes poker, is advertising - to make sure that when you get a good hand, everyone else doesn't drop as soon as you bet unless they have a hand that is probably as good as yours.

I prefer to bluff with fair hands, betting them as if they were better than they are, rather than betting garbage as if it were fair. I like to step in and raise with something like A-J-x on the second round, as if it were a high pair. Then I can do the same thing later on with a high flush and get called by people with pairs. And if I happen to find that my only opposition is also bluffing, or betting on a weak hand, I may even win on power. I prefer not to bluff on nothing, because I may be called and beaten before the betting has gotten high enough to make the advertising pay; by having a fair hand, I can be sure that if I'm called at a very low level I have a good chance of actually winning the pot.

But in general bluffing is not necessary with any great frequency. Vary your game often enough that no one can say for sure what you're doing, but adhere to the rules I've given and you will be right most of the time.

Ron Ellik, who brought the game to the U.S., is not a very good player because he bets too hard on bad hands or bluffs too much - I'm not sure which, because I'm not sure what he intends his under-the-gun openings with A-x-x to be - whether he really thinks he may have the best hand or whether he's trying to run a bluff. I do know he has criticized our Brag group for not playing the game the way it's supposed to be played - i.e. the way it's played in England. Evidently they bluff much more there. This really means one of two things - either Ron doesn't really understand what is going on in the British style of play, or they don't play Brag as well over there. Because if their way was the better way, a player who played their way would win over here, too, and Ron doesn't.

The remarks that I have made about Brag have assumed that it is a penny-ante game; the stakes can be set higher (or lower, with chips), but we normally play for pennies here and that is a good stake for fun and little loss or gain financially.

Brag is a good game for parties; it lacks the interest of poker, bridge, or bouree (for me at least), but it requires much less attention, and one doesn't get a headache trying to follow the play with a madhouse going on around one. At a LASFS party this is an advantage!