

# STARLING

IT'S  
ONLY A  
FLESH  
WOUND!



dan STEFFAN





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# NOTEBOOKLINGS

+ Hank Luttrell +

Well, shucks. Lesleigh and I just want to thank everyone who helped get us nominated for a Hugo. I must say honestly that I never expect Starling to win a Hugo. . . we just don't publish the sort of fanzine which has a chance. Starling doesn't have the circulation of most of the other fanzines nominated, nor do we concentrate solely on science fiction. This issue should be ample proof of that, since we have arranged that this is a "Special Mystery Issue." (Lesleigh mentions that really every issue is a mystery issue, since we never know until the last moment what is going to be in it, but that is beside the point.) But all of this really just makes our nomination more of an honor; obviously a large number of you were kind enough to think of Starling when you filled in your ballots. Thanks.

All the ballots are in and counted; and this year's Down Under Fan Fund emissary has been chosen. To save some postage, those of you who voted or otherwise contributed to the Fund will find complete details of the race in our last issue of the DUFFund Newsletter enclosed with this issue. But for everyone else, I'll just mention that the winner is that tremendously familiar fan face, who attends more US conventions than most people know exist, Rusty Hevelin. Rusty has been charming science fiction convention goers in this country for a long time; it is only fair that we share him with the Australians.

After Lesleigh and I returned from the Mad Minneapolis Minicon 10 in April, my mind was buzzing with dozens of thought about what had happened there. I poured as many of those thoughts as possible into an little fanzine that I happened to be publishing for an amateur press association that month, and sent a copy to the Minicon 10 committee so that they might react if they cared to. In response I recieved the fascinating letter from Don Blyly which appears on pages 31-33 of this issue. What will follow is a somewhat revised version of my Minicon 10 remarks -- and then you'll be able to read Blyly's letter of comment in this issue, also.

Minicon announced in their pre-convention progress reports that much of their program and their masquerade ball was going to be video taped. I've just finished taking a

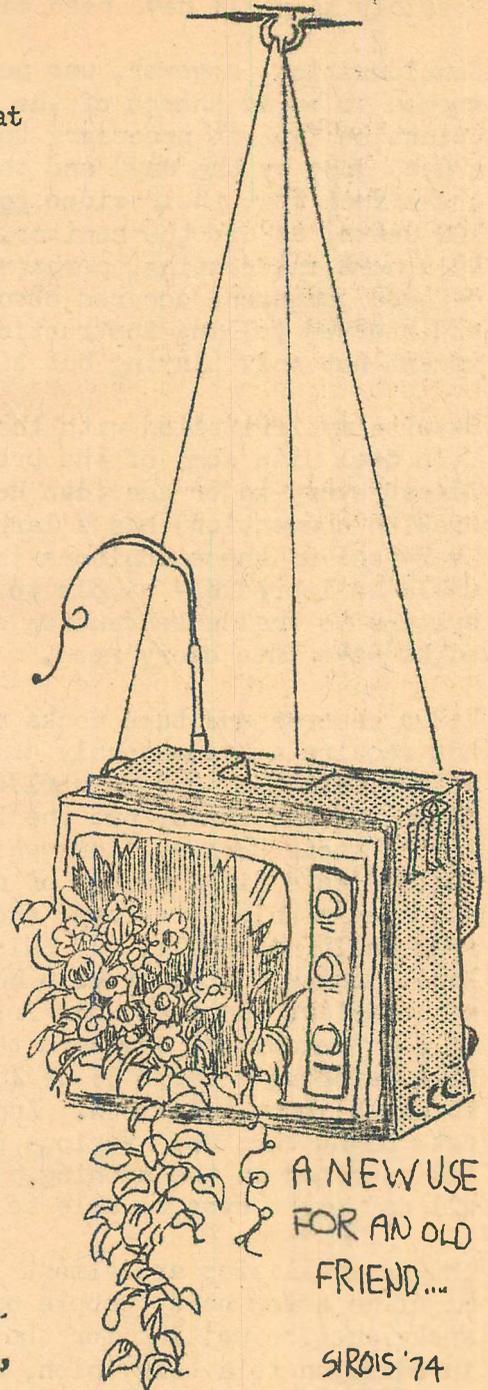


University Extension workshop in portable video, so naturally I expected to find a couple of people with portapacks taping the convention. Portapack video is the least expensive and most common sort of video equipment. As it turned out, Minicon had a great deal more equipment than I expected. I saw at least one small black and white camera, a big Sony video tape deck, a lovely Sony Trinicrom color camera, a small color monitor and a small black & white monitor which was placed many floors above the program floor in the registration area. There may have been more equipment I didn't notice. I don't know if the Sony color camera was actually a broadcast quality unit, but judging from the picture quality on the color monitor it might well have been. If it was of broadcast quality, it was about a quarter or less the size of any studio color camera that I've ever seen before. I don't know how or why, but all of these wonderful toys were provided to the Minicon free of charge by a Minneapolis electronics outfit.

I have seen video equipment at conventions before. In 1970 some east coast fan with lots of money was showing off a portapack in Toronto. If I remember correctly, some Boston conventions have been video taped at least in part. But even so, Minicon's use of video was an exciting experiment -- although there were a few unfortunate moments.

What the Minicon people are left with now, after the convention, are tapes of the program (in black and white) and color tapes of the masquerade. I don't know what quality the program tapes will be -- I suspect they are very static -- but the tapes of the masquerade were of low quality considering the fantastic equipment used to shoot them. I'm not an expert on the handling of Sony Trinicrom cameras, but I suspect that I know enough to feel that the camera used at the Minicon was mistreated. It made me tremendously nervous to watch the camera being pushed through the clusters of frantically dancing fans by an operator who was watching only his monitor, and I couldn't help but wonder how long the camera was going to last when it was aimed directly at the light show's strobe or right at the high intensity studio lights. One isn't supposed to aim a television camera directly at a high intensity light source.

There were other problems as well. For one thing, the light show and the lighting for the television camera worked in opposition. The television lights were aimed at the stage and the light show screens in back of the stage and tended to white out the light show. Which was unfortunate, since it looked like a very good show. The show was at least in part the work of fan artist Dick Tatge, and also featured some slides of drawings by Ken Fletcher. I don't think it would have been possible for the television people to tape and still allow the light show full visibility.



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Possibly it would have been considerate to tape for just one of the band's sets.

Consideration, however, was not one of the strong points shown by the person who seemed to be in charge of the video equipment. During the masquerade at several points he felt it necessary to snatch the microphone from MC Bev Swanson (who did a neat job, by the way) and shout announcements. One of his proclamations was to the effect that their video equipment was ecological, since the camera burned under 100 watts, as did the monitor. Another announcement was a plug for his employer. Both were interesting, perhaps, but at the wrong moments. But the most amazing lapse of good judgement occurred when he jumped up on the stage while the band was playing, and started yelling instructions into the face of the lead guitarist, who was at that moment not only playing but singing.

Despite my irritation with the Minicon video crew, I've come to think that video may help deal with some of the problems facing large conventions, especially worldcons. Almost every major American hotel (the sort that might host an American science fiction convention) has a large, high quality color television monitor in every room. Every one of these monitors is already connected to a central cable system. It would be incredibly simple to make a few temporary changes in these already existing systems to enable convention committees to run what ever sort of programming they might have into every room.

Video cameras and tape decks and lighting are all expensive, of course. But it would not require a tremendously complicated system, and I suspect that the rental would be well within the modern worldcon's budget. I'm not sure I'm at liberty to write about the specifics, but the Kansas City committee is facing a very difficult problem: one of their program items which is sure to be extremely popular will have to be limited to a fixed number of attendees. There is sure to be hard feelings among those who aren't able to attend, and over crowding will probably make those who do attend reasonably miserable. If this same program were available in full color on every hotel monitor, I can't help but think that almost everyone would be able to breathe much easier. The same goes for other very popular program events like the masquerade. As for the movies, I'm sure that some film freaks would prefer sitting in a darkened hall watching a large 35 or 16mm print, but many other people would be just as happy to watch it on television. And who knows what old videotaped TV programs of SF-interest might turn up. Various programs which happen at the same time could be taped and repeated in the evening. Why, dirty hucksters who were trapped behind a table all day might even be able to catch a little program in the evening.

The possibilities are almost limitless. One other wild idea occurs to me. . .there might be a few hardy people out there who actually enjoy standing around in a crowded, smoky auction waiting for the few items of interest to come up, but I don't. Since in addition to a television, each hotel room contains a telephone, it might be possible to conduct things like art auctions over a channel on the cable. Blyly doesn't like this idea, but he shouldn't give up so easily -- more than one phone answerer could be used, and you wouldn't have to keep an item on-screen until it was sold -- they could be displayed briefly and assigned a number.

Of course all my ideas about using video at conventions are dependant on a number of factors. It would require a certain amount of co-operation between the committee and the hotel. I'm sure the whole system that I've discussed could be set up without doing the slightest damage to the hotel video system, but making a typical hotel management realize that might be a problem. It seems unlikely that many conventions could be as lucky as the Minicon, and get their equipment free. On the other hand, if the convention was paying for the equipment, we could expect it to be used with

greater consideration. Which probably leads us to the most difficult question of all -- who is going to run all of this equipment. At the Minicon, it was run by volunteers. I can operate a portapack (it takes 15 minutes or less to learn), and I probably could have learned to run the bigger stuff, but I just wasn't aware they needed volunteers. I suspect that people could be found to run the equipment, perhaps in fandom, or perhaps from the community. In Madison, there is an active group of people known as People's Video, which is a co-operative venture in public access and personal video. Most large communities should have a similar group. People like this would be happy to help with the interesting problem of turning a hotel into a giant television studio -- and I predict that if you turn to an organization of media freaks like this that about half of them will be science fiction readers.

I must say just a few other things about Minicon 10. It was a real gas of a convention. The business in the huckster's room was slow, but we hardly noticed because the rest of the convention was so much fun. We got to see all our old Minneapolis friends again; we even witnessed a wedding ceremony for Ken Fletcher and Linda Lounsberry in the traditional Great Spiderism manner. The band which played before and after the masquerade was great. Called the Mother Goose Band, the lead guitarist was Reed Waller. You have probably already seen some of Reed's creativity, since he has been doing lots of art for RUNE. His first work for Starling is in this issue. There was (of course) a rather young Frankenstein at the convention masquerade; it was a very well done costume and it cut a very bizarre figure as it danced through the ballroom. Especially when it teamed up with the little Vaughn Bode' character. Saturday night the convention floors of the hotel became one big, noisy part, with lots of people everywhere. Somehow, though, the right people just kept showing up wherever we went, and a series of nice empty rooms just kept tuning up to provide shelter from the crowds. If you became thirsty, drink appeared; if you were hungry, potato chips would appear under your chair or peanuts would float by in a box. Scantly dressed women asked for help. It seemed like I was in heaven, except for the occasional loud crash from the hall.

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Lots of people liked the recent art of Doug Lovelace enough to comment on it. Some readers even guessed that this was the same artist who used to sign his work in Starling Doug Lovenstein. Doug recently gifted us with a remarkable book of his art titled "Pursuing the Porcelain Pirates with Motives." The artwork is fluid and lyrical, the same smoky style you've seen a little of here. It is a big book, 32 pages and a bit over 11x15 inches. If you are interested in getting it, write Doug Lovelace, R.D. 3, Box 196-A, Athens, Ohio 45701.

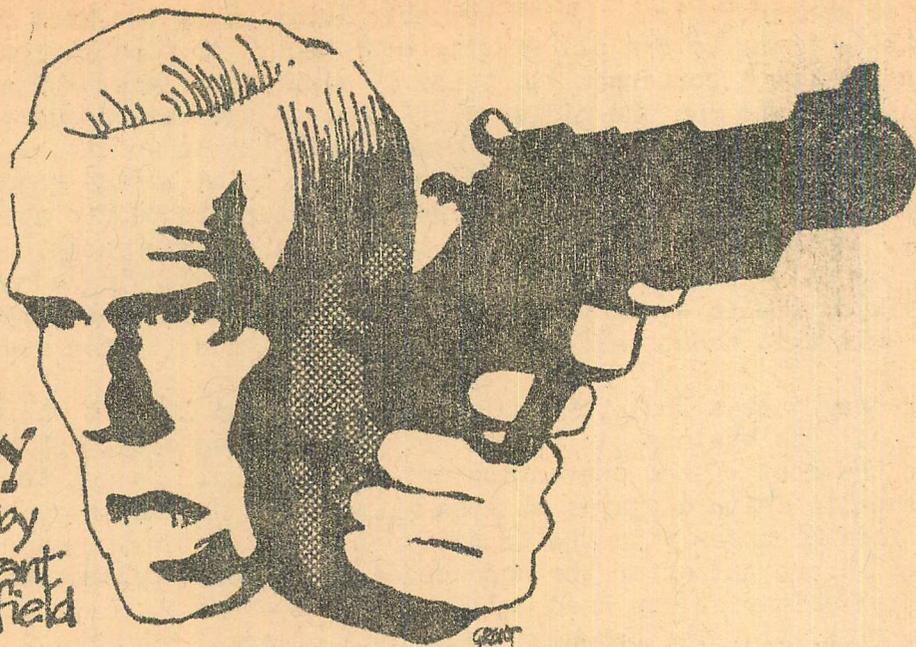
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Lots of nice things have been crowded out of this issue -- in particular Lesleigh's own contribution! So . . . see you next issue.



RICHARD  
STARK'S  
WORLD  
OF  
TOTAL  
AMORALITY

by  
Grant  
Canfield



If you believe the highest form of series crime fiction to be drawing room detection stories, or whodunits featuring the super-sleuthing of little old ladies with hatpins, you might as well stop right here. Pick up a stack of Peter Wimseys, or Miss Marples, or whatever, and retire to the library. We'll have the butler summon you when we need you.

If, on the other hand, you like crime novels with copious quantities of crime, action that is vigorous and violent, lots of loose lead flying, and enough corpses scattered around that you lose count, then take this advice; read the works of Richard Stark.

Just as Ed McBain is a master of police procedural series crime novels (the 87th Precinct), and Ross MacDonald leads the field in the contemporary private detective sector (Law Archer), Richard Stark has no peer in the specialized field of the caper story. A caper plot is the story of a major criminal operation--its planning, preparation, execution, and outcome--told from the point of view of the participants. In a police procedural, the protagonists are cops. In a private detective novel, the viewpoint character is (oddly enough) a private detective. In most cases, the "hero" of a caper novel is a thief.

The thief that Stark writes about is named Parker; if he has a first name, it's never mentioned. Parker has starred since 1962 in a series of action novels, seven of which were released (in improper sequence) in the United States in 1972 Berkley Medallion Books under the common series banner, "The Violent World of Parker". The packaging on these was similar to that on many of the other commando-type action series now on the paperback racks--The Destroyer, The Executioner, The Butcher, The Marksman, The Liquidator, The Penetrator (1), Malco, The Baroness, etc., etc.--but don't let this deceive you. Stark's novels stand out from this hackwork like a battleship in a bathtub.

Besides Berkley, a number of other publishers have printed editions of Stark's books. Among these are MacMillan and Random House in hard covers, and Gold Medal and Pocket Books in paperback. But the most handsome paperback editions I have seen are from Coronet Books of Great Britain. Each novel bears a stunning silver cover with a die-cut bullet hole revealing the title. More importantly, Coronet has taken care to release the entire sequence in proper order--unlike Berkley, who fucked up badly in this respect.

Stark's debut was a 1962 novel entitled Point Blank (also published as The Hunter).<sup>8</sup> Although #2 in Berkley's "Violent World of Parker" series, this book is actually the first volume in the series.

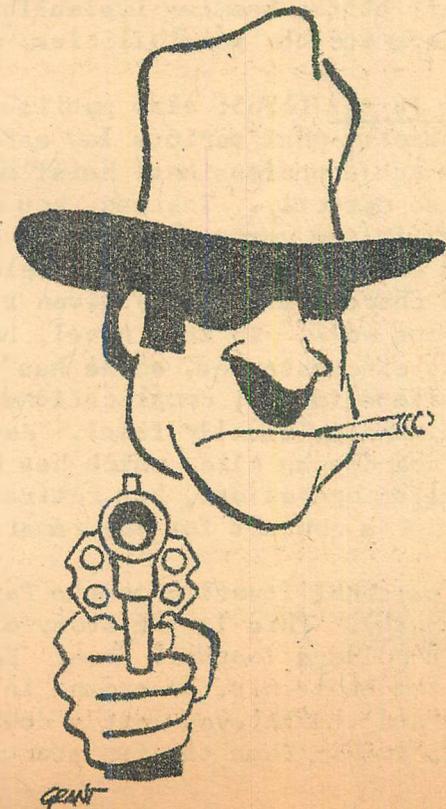
The plot of Point Blank is as much personal revenge as it is caper story. Parker, who never works alone in his armed robberies, but always in concert with a string of several other professionals chosen specifically for that particular job, has been double-crossed and left for dead in a Vancouver armory heist. Mal Resnick, the double-crosser, unfortunately fails to realize that Parker is not such an easy man to kill. (Otherwise, the series would have been exceedingly short, and we might instead have been treated to "The Double-Dealing World of Mal Resnick".) Stumbling around in a daze after being left for dead, Parker is arrested for common vagrancy, taking his first and only fall. With one month to go on a six-month sentence at a California prison work farm, Parker kills a guard and escapes, so he is wanted for murder. His fingerprints, under the name Ronald Kasper, are now on file, so he figures this is just another score to settle with Resnick. It's also important to the series concept, because it establishes Parker as a man with nothing to lose. His anti-hero appeal is precisely that he will do anything necessary to obtain his ends, and we can delight in his audacity.

Parker goes to New York, where Resnick has used the money from the double-cross to buy himself a low-level executive position in the East Coast organized crime syndicate, which calls itself the Outfit. Now Parker seeks out and obtains vengeance from Resnick, and how he goes on to get "his" money back from the Outfit, and the people he has to kill in order to accomplish this, is the story of Point Blank. Even if you don't go on to read more of the series, this novel is an exciting and suspenseful vendetta story in its own right.

An important purpose of Point Blank, though, is to introduce the character of Parker, a professional thief who specializes in institutional armed robberies--armored cars, banks, jewelry stores, that sort of thing. The reason he doesn't generally steal from individuals is not from any Robin Hood concern for the little people, but because institutions usually have more money to steal. Once or twice a year he gets together with a team of other professionals for such a job, living the rest of the time at resort hotels under a carefully protected assumed name. His personality can be described by several short adjectives: Parker is cold and cruel, hard and mean, and tough. Maybe the toughest there is.

I believe the next three novels in the series may have comprised the original series package. Series are usually sold, I understand, with one completed novel and two or three others at least partially completed or in outline. Moreover, plot threads extend from each of these novels to the next in sequence, a device which is dropped later in the series. Besides, all three of the books following Point Blank have the same copyright date, 1963.

The Steel Hit has also been published under the title The Man With the Getaway Face, a reference to Parker's new face, courtesy of a plastic surgeon in Omaha. Bronson, head man of the Outfit, had sworn in Point Blank to snuff Parker, so this is the method Parker has chosen to avoid



the Outfit's reach. He teams up with another competent professional named Handy McKay, a nervous thief named Skimm, and Skimm's woman, a waitress named Alma, for an armored car caper, but complications arise in the form of an anticipated double-cross by Alma and the sudden appearance of a punchy old boxer named Stubbs. Stubbs has come after Parker thinking he might have been the one who killed his beloved boss, the plastic surgeon back in Omaha. Parker wasn't, but he is forced to deal with the problem anyway. Nevertheless, he is only partially successful, and word of his new face leaks to the Outfit.

It becomes necessary to get the Outfit off his back, so that's what Parker, in his uniquely charming way, sets out to do in the third book in the series, The Outfit. By the time Bronson, the boss of the Outfit, begins to realize what a mistake it was to cross Parker, it's too late. For Bronson, that is.

A minor plot element in The Outfit, a gun used in a killing, ties Parker to a man named Harrow in The Mourner. Harrow wants a certain statue of a medieval monk in mourning (hence the title), and hires Parker and Handy McKay to steal it for him. After the requisite number of double-crosses and other complications, including the serious wounding of Handy McKay, Parker obtains not only the statue but also a sizeable haul of cash. This book, possibly because of a too-cute international slant and perhaps unintentional but still rather annoying parodies of The Maltese Falcon (a statue with a history of violence, a fat guy like Sidney Greenstreet, and a lust-interest, if not actually a love-interest, in the form of Harrow's daughter, and so forth), is certainly the weakest of the first four, and possibly the weakest of the entire series. However, as Calvin W. Demmon says, "The fourth issue of any fanzine is always the worst." Maybe the same observation could apply to series novels.

It's all uphill from there, though. The next three books are probably the best in the series, possibly because Stark has begun to explore some of the fascinating aspects of the mean, dark, criminal world in which he has set Parker.

Killtown (1964; also published as The Score) is a classic big-caper story. In this one Parker organizes a large team of a dozen professionals, experts in the necessary fields of driving, safecracking, arson, violence, and so forth, to loot an entire town. Don't scoff at the seeming implausibility of such a scheme. Parker does too, until he begins to examine the possibilities, and you'll wind up believing it right along with him.

The Jugger (1965; also published as Made in U.S.A.) explores the concept of criminal contacts--what various law enforcement agencies often call "known associates". If you are a professional heist man who wishes to contact Parker for a job, you cannot do so directly. Instead, you must contact Joe Sheer, a retired safecracker (or "jugger" in the vernacular of the trade) in Nebraska who acts as intermediary for Parker and several others in the field. Sheer is the only person who knows Parker's alias and whereabouts at any given time. It's an interesting concept, one which Stark develops well. In this novel, Parker's cover is blown when Joe Sheer dies under mysterious circumstances, so he has to travel to Nebraska and attempt to unravel the mystery. Needless to say, complications abound, which Parker deals with in his typical pleasant manner, usually fatal. Nevertheless, he can't hold it all together, and is forced to abandon an alias which has become dangerous. (Handy McKay, an accomplice from earlier operations, has retired to run a diner in Presque Isle, Maine. He becomes Parker's contact for the remainder of the series.)

My personal favorite in the Parker series is The Split (1966; also published as The Seventh). This is the story of Parker's next operation, a seven-man box-office heist at a college football game. Each man expects an equal share of the loot, one-seventh of the whole pie, an amount in the neighborhood of \$16,000. The heist comes off sweetly, and the thieves settle down to let the heat blow over for a few days before they skip town. Then the fun starts as members of the team are knocked off, one by one,

by an unknown assailant. To make matters worse, the loot, which Parker and his partners had worked so diligently to steal, is stolen from them! There's plenty of excitement, suspense, and action here as Parker sets about to solve the dilemma.

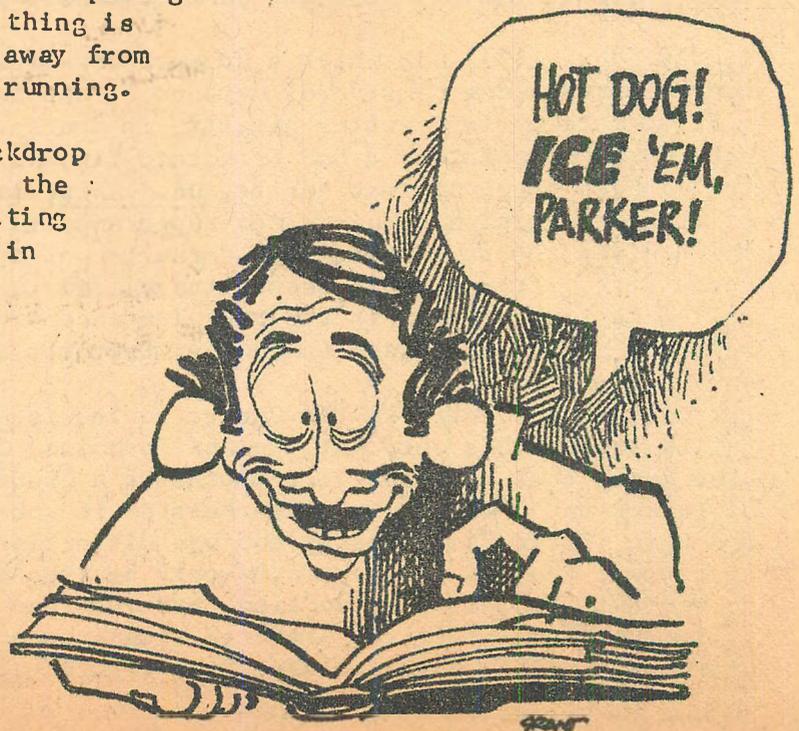
The police are usually a minor element at best in the Parker novels, seldom coming even close to catching him. Exceptions are the occasionally crooked cops with their hands out, such as the thoroughly unpleasant Captain Younger in The Jugger. An honest cop is rare indeed, but one makes an unforgettable appearance in The Split. Parker's confrontation with Detective Dougherty in his own home is a chillingly understated scene of quiet tension which should leave even the most jaded reader of "tough" crime adventure gasping for more. Yet this is but one of the magnificent episodes in a book which explores some of the complex relationships among men of a criminal nature and mentality, and their mode of survival at the ragged edge of society.

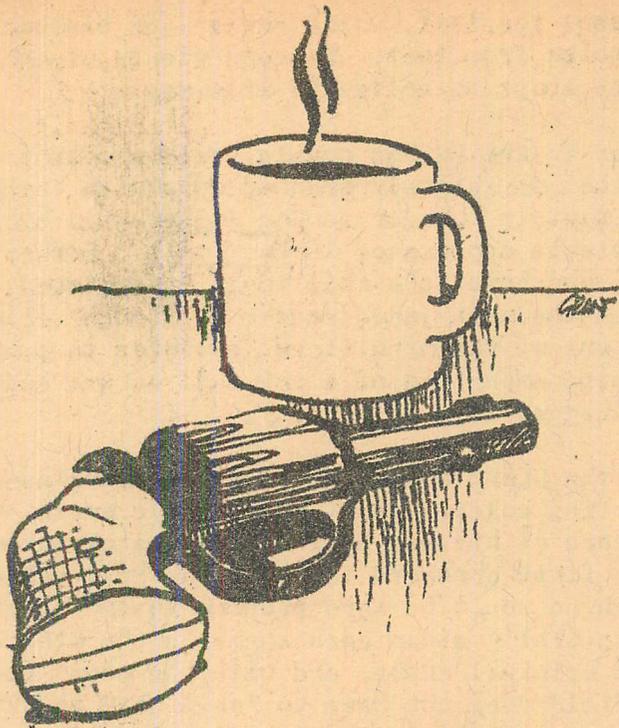
Parker isn't the only recurring character in the Stark books, of course. Other assorted murderers and thieves appear in supporting roles--Handy McKay, for example. Paramount among these is Alan Grofield, the hero of his own splinter series of action novels, also by Richard Stark. Grofield, who first appeared in Killtown, is a stage actor as well as an accomplished thief, though he would be hard pressed to say which of his two professions he loves the most. Especially since each augments the other. An actor's talents are often very useful on a criminal caper; and with the money obtained through such illegal enterprises, Grofield does not have to "sell out" to TV or the movies, but can devote his thespic talents solely to the legitimate theater--yet still live considerably more comfortably than such integrity usually allows. Tall and handsome, Grofield is a good-natured adventurous rogue in the Errol Flynn mold, though minus the little mustache. His series is only three novels long: The Damsel (1967), The Blackbird (1969), and The Dame (date unknown; I haven't been able to locate this one yet). Generally, they are lighter and less brutal than the Parker books; invariably they involve Grofield with a Romantic Interest--or, in his own terms, a Leading Lady.

As Parker's partner in Run Lethal (1965), Grofield is wounded in the course of action, an operation to knock over a gambling island off the Gulf Coast. Rescued by Parker, he is left in Mexico, with his share of the loot, to heal. That's where we find him at the opening of The Damsel, but soon a sweet young thing is crawling in his bedroom window to get away from hired thugs, and the story is off and running.

Just as Mexico provides the scenic backdrop for Grofield's exploits in The Damsel, the cold north woods of Canada are the setting for The Blackbird. Opposite Grofield in this one is a ravishing black woman, who learns by the end of the novel that Grofield is no bigot. Certainly not in the bedroom, at any rate.

The Blackbird opens with an armored car heist which aborts due to an inexperienced getaway driver, leaving Parker and Grofield to fend for themselves. The 1969 Parker novel, Slay-Ground, opens with the exact same scene; it goes on to show Parker fending, while The Blackbird gives us Grofield's





story. This is the only instance I know of in which two separate and distinct series novels by the same author open with the same scene.

Back to Parker. If you've read this many of Stark's books, you're hooked already, so I'll just briefly mention the rest of the titles in the series.

The Rare Coin Score (1967) and The Green Eagle Scores (1967) should be read as textbook examples of classic caper plotting. The story is broken into four distinct parts. 1) SCENARIO-- the target is identified, and the basis for action is established. Major team members are introduced. In The Rare Coin Score the target is a coin dealers' convention. In The Green Eagle Score, it's an Air Force training base payroll. 2) DEVELOPMENT--the plan is established, weapons and other materiel are obtained, and major complications begin to surface.

Both of these novels telegraph their "surprise" elements early in the story, but ignore that. 3) THE CAPER-- the operation starts to go down, the action crescendoes. 4) CLIMAX--all the action comes to a head until Parker, emerging with his bloody score, goes back to his waiting woman, Claire.

The Sour Lemon Score (1969) is another double-cross story. A sweet bank job goes sour when George Uhl kills his partners. He attempts to kill Parker, but Parker gets away naturally, and seeks vengeance. In an uncharacteristic burst of charity, believable because of the events which have transpired in the meantime, Parker leaves Uhl alive when he catches him, though with slightly damaged arms and knees. This generosity catches up with him in Plunder Squad (1972), in which Uhl makes another appearance. Parker doesn't make the same mistake twice.

Deadly Edge (1971), in which a concert box-office robbery is soured by the crucifixion and torture-murder of several members of the team, is dedicated to Joe Gores. Gores, a first-rate mystery writer himself, is the author of a new series of stories about Dan Kearny Associates, a San Francisco firm of automobile detectives. In the first full-length novel of that series, Dead Skip, Dan Kearny confronts Parker in the course of an investigation. This cameo appearance is mirrored in Stark's Plunder Squad, which gives the same scene from Parker's point of view, with Dan Kearny as the cameo guest star. It's a minor scene, tangential to the main plotline in both books, but as far as I know, this is the only instance of a series character from one writer making a guest appearance in another writer's series, and vice versa.

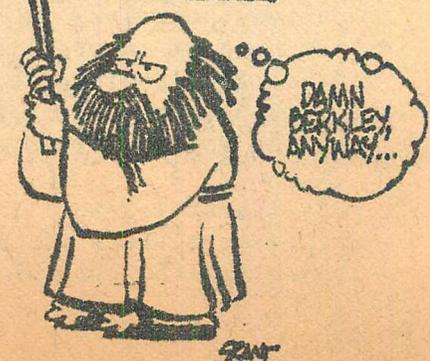
The most recent entry in the Parker series is Butcher's Moon. Unfortunately, I have yet to locate this one, but the San Francisco Chronicle has this to say about it: "The money that had been left behind in a Midwestern city was naturally the property of Parker and Grofield, who had heisted it some time before. Quite as naturally, it had been lifted by a mobster who was disinclined to give it up. The two men--with whom, as always, one can feel sympathy only because everyone else is worse than they--resort to violent methods of collection, and when those don't work, enter on a full-scale battle. The place is fairly littered with corpses before the end. As one may expect, Stark's narration fairly blazes with vigor." I can hardly wait to read it!

Let's see now, that leaves just one Parker novel undiscussed. In The Black Ice Score (1960), Parker is hired by representatives of an emergent African nation to train some of their men for a robbery. The object of the robbery is a cache of diamonds in the possession of members of a rival African faction. If some of these elements sound familiar to you, it may be because that synopsis is fairly close to the scenario of The Hot Rock, a novel by Donald E. Westlake. This is no accident, of course, as it is no particular secret that "Richard Stark" is a pen name for Donald E. Westlake. This fact goes a long way toward explaining the cinematic appeal of the Stark books, as a matter of fact. Among the Parker series, Point Blank has been made into a movie (starring Lee Marvin), as has The Outfit (with Robert Duvall) and The Split (Jim Brown). Westlake is no stranger to Hollywood under his own name, having written a number of books from which successful movies were filmed: The Busy Body (starring Sid Caesar), The Hot Rock (Robert Redford and George Segal), Bank Shot (George C. Scott) and Cops and Robbers.

The identification of "Richard Stark" as Donald E. Westlake also explains why the writing of this particular crime adventure series is a significant cut above the general run of paperback-series hackwork. Stark's style is, well, stark. Starkly crisp, starkly objective, and as starkly sharp and piercing as a rapier in the abdomen, the narrative is wholly and authentically American in flavor. Westlake, like Hammett and Chandler and precious few others, knows how to use the language to establish tone. In most of the books under his own name, the tone is humorous and light-comic capers, if you will. Writing as Stark, the tone he sets is grim, vicious, and deadly. A bantam-sized thief in The Split "looked like something that had been shrunk and preserved in the nineteenth century." A dead woman stapled to the wall with an ornamental sword in the same book is described like so: "She was stuck there like a scarecrow put away for the winter." Elsewhere, Parker looks at an adversary, "seeing him for the first time as a dead man."

I admit to a bias in favor of Westlake's material. I had read and enjoyed everything I could get my hand on that had a Westlake byline, and when I was informed that he had written a series of novels about a professional criminal under the name Richard Stark, I immediately sought these out and devoured them voraciously. It occurs to me, however, that I am merely an amateur critic. My enthusiasm for the Stark books, while hopefully effusive, at least, is nevertheless totally unauthoritative. In closing therefore, consider what an authority--the authority in the field of crime fiction,--had to say about them: "Nobody tops Stark in his objective portrayals of a world of Total amorality."--Anthony Boucher, New York Times.

- THE PROPER ORDER
1. Point Blank (The Hunter)
  2. The Steel Hit (The Man With the Getaway Face)
  3. The Outfit
  4. The Mourner
  5. Killtown (The Score)
  6. The Jugger (Made in U.S.A.)
  7. The Split (The Seventh)
  8. Run Lethal
  9. The Rare Coin Score
  10. The Green Eagle Score
  11. The Black Ice Score
  12. The Sour Lemon Score
  13. Deadly Edge } ? maybe
  14. Slay-Ground } maybe
  15. Plunder Squad } vicious
  16. Butcher's Moon



# WHAT DO YOU MEAN "WE" WHITE MAN?

+ Michael Carlson +

It's an old joke, really. The Lone Ranger and Tonto are riding away from a menacing band of Indians. They gallop into a canyon, only to find more and more Indians coming at them from all sides. The Ranger turns to his faithful sidekick. "Well, old friend," he says, "looks like we've had it." Tonto just looks at him. "What do you mean 'we', white man?"

There's more truth there than you might think, as is often the case with old jokes. For one of our very basic American myths is the pairing of the white hero with the dark sidekick; a myth that extends from Deerslayer right through films like Freebie and the Bean, or books like those we shall be looking at, three sets of detective novels all featuring a white/black hero-pair. These are the Hardman series (Jim Hardman and Hump Evans, in Atlanta), the Headhunters (Eddie Martin and Jake "T.S." Putnam, in Detroit), and Razoni & Jackson in New York City.

The myth has its origins in captivity narratives and other Puritan entertainments but its first clear expression is in Fenimore Cooper's novels of Natty Bumppo and Chingachook. We see the white man acclimating himself to his new world by running off into the woods with his dark-skinned companion, and fleeing formal white society, which is very often symbolized by white women.

It is a working out of the problem of the white European attempting to settle in a land that is simultaneously the Promised Land to the West, the heart of all his myths, and also an incredibly evil wilderness that tests his Christian faith to the utmost, with often puzzling results. For the white race to survive in the new land, much less realize their ambition of conquering it, the external menaces of the land itself and of its personification, the Indians, must be overcome, and that can only be accomplished if certain whites learn from the Indians, in effect become like their enemy. Of course, there is a definite association with the devil and the Indian, since both are colored red, which makes the task even more difficult, dangerous and, to white society, distasteful. Thus the man who learns from the Indians must be some sort of outcast, lest he pollute the rest of the race.

Hawkeye/Deerslayer/Leatherstocking represents the first stage of this sort of hero; he obviously now prefers the company and the life of his red companions, and eschews the temptations thrust at him by white women. Despite this refusal to attach himself to white society (no one with a wife in a cabin could live an Indian's life, after all) Deerslayer never loses sight of his white "gifts", in fact his constant blubbering about the different "gifts" of the races becomes a tiresome litany of loyalty.

This hero becomes refined to the point of Davy Crockett or Buffalo Bill, men who have adapted themselves to the necessary skills but are still white men through and through. They haven't adopted the red man's way of thinking about the land, as Deerslayer did; it has been replaced by white man's technology, thus they abuse the land and make their own reputations through slaughter. That Davy Crockett takes his own myth so seriously that he goes off to die at the Alamo is irrelevant, but worth mentioning.

Melville states the situation in symbolic terms: Ishmael, the white outcast (like the original settlers of America) and the noble dark-skinned prince whose death insures Ishmael's life (the white man's survival) in a hostile environment (America). Twain

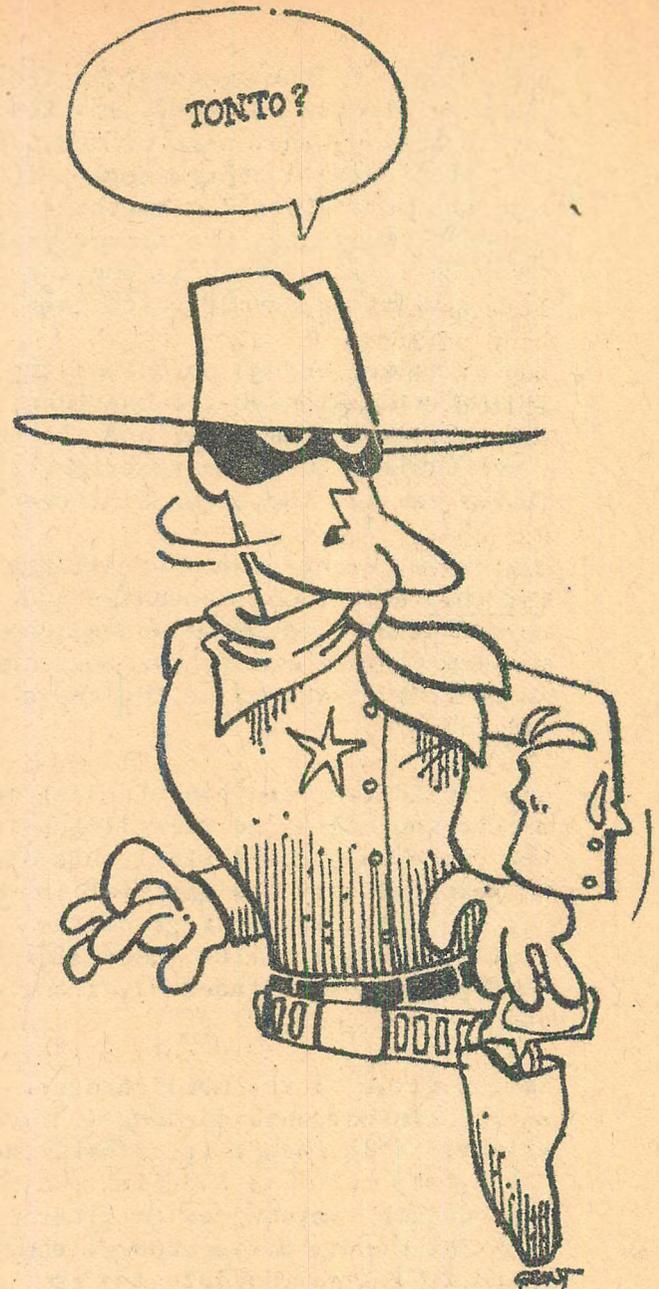
moves the whole thing directly into the white man's world, and modernizes it by making the dark savage a black man; the local Indian is a drunk and a laughingstock by this point in time. Huck and Jim again flee white women and their world, but there aren't many places they can go.

Throughout all this the white man's world was centered around something we will call the American Dream, and perhaps as late as the First World War this was still the New World, and its settlers were still driven toward expansion by that dream. It was partly a carryover from Europe, a dream of money and success and expansion sugarcoated with vague generalities, often left unobserved, about democracy and liberty. In this sort of society, the most representative figure was the confidence man, as Melville realized in his novel of the same name. He was a man of many faces and little principle, operating by the motto, as told in an old humorous tale, "it pays to be shifty in a new world."

As America reached the limits of her expansion, which Olson dates with the merger of the major steel companies into US Steel, 1892, she discovers a problem in that all the external menaces have been overcome. Because the society is as yet still not a realization of its own dream, the effects of each major contradiction of the dream (Roaring Twenties, Depression, Gangsterism) are felt deeply. There is a steady search for some sort of external menace (anarchists, communists) upon which to place the blame for the nation's troubles, in an attempt to deal with this schizoid difference between the Dream and the reality.

Externalizing of menaces is nothing new; it has been a tonic for troubled societies throughout history. Hitler did it in Germany, with Jews and Communists; Nixon/Agnew attempted to do it with any number of groups, druggies, hippies, liberals, the press, etc. Where the Germans had allowed themselves to isolate the Jews away from their own society, Nixon found that it was much harder to get people to abstract their own children.

Early 20th Century America, however, had a problem. They had wiped out the Indians, tamed and abused the land, and there weren't enough Saccos and Vanzettis to absorb the huge burden of failure for the American Dream. There were attempts in popular culture, however, most notably in the pulp novels. Operator #5, Jimmy Christopher fights all sorts of invasions and conspiracies, from all corners of the world, in every color of the rainbow. Among the pulp heroes he was not alone. Remember Boris Karloff as Fu Manchu in Mask of Fu Manchu, organizing representatives of the entire Third World to "conquer the white man and steal his women!"?



It was only in the greatest of the pulp heroes, the Shadow, that the menace battled was consistently internal, American, part of our own society. The Jungian definition of the shadow, that part of our psyche which we despise or fear in ourselves, and thus attribute to other people, fits very well here, in the context of a character who used the most violent of methods to deal with the darker part of America. Like the pioneers; he fights the menace with its own methods, becoming dangerously like that which he fights, which is why the Shadow is hunted by the police, why he is the part of the American psyche which goes unmentioned.

After the war brought us out of the Depression, and established a new sort of atomic powered expansionism for America; and with the wartime economy extended via the cold war, things looked good, and the threat to the American Dream seemed to disappear in a veritable orgy of consumerism, success, conformity, and keeping up with the Joneses. Mikita was all the external threat we needed.

But as we reached the 60s, all the hidden troubles rose to surface, first through the emerging racial consciousness and then through LBJ's schizoid desire to actually implement the American Dream and run a war at the same time, a guns and butter program that any Rockefeller could have told him wouldn't work. We saw all the violence, every protest, everything, on TV, and a desperate America looked for a hero to fight the menace.

But the faults were too visible; we were no longer living in the age of the pulps, or movies and radio; we were living in the world of tv, where all our heroes were smaller than life, and every little bit of reality that slapped our faces from the screen made us aware of just how fanciful our heroes were. Finally we became so disgusted with our own misunderstandings of the American Dream that we threw out our most perfect and visible example of the successful con man, the "it pays to be shifty in a new world dictum", namely Richard M. Nixon, and replaced him with a solid rotarian-type average joe.

As the image of the hero changes, the soul of the American hero is no longer as isolate as DH Lawrence once portrayed him, although he remains basically cold and certainly a killer. This change is probably most visible in detectives.

The sidekick existed as an alternative to some degree to the hero's isolation, although he had taken a back seat over the years to his white boss, as in the Lone Ranger and Tonto, the Green Hornet and Kato, or the Spider and Ram Singh. The solo, hard-boiled dick had stepped to the forefront, the white man existing in a basically white world, no longer needing the aid of the dark man.

Hammett's hero exists in a world of professionalism which enables him to deal with a society built up on an intricate framework of lies. It takes a man totally committed to an ethic, any ethic, to unravel the many deceits in a Hammett novel. Chandler takes this hero and works in the essence of Natty Bumppo; Marlowe is a traditional hero-type from Europe (note the Elizabethan associations of his name) placed in a new environment, and he copes only by sticking to his somewhat fantasized code of honor, which we shall come back to later.

And then, after the war, the hero is mutated even farther, to Mike Hammer, who seems a product of the violence he fights, who is the Shadow made small and human. Hammer is isolate, but he is also involved in his corrupt world in a way that Bumppo or Marlowe never could be, because their own moralizing precluded it. Hammer sometimes falls back on a Sam Spade-like professionalism, but it never lasts long.

The mixed race hero pair virtually disappears at this point, with the exception of I Spy, which presented an intelligent black playing lackey to a horny white, a very subtle and ahead of its time role reversal, toned down, no doubt, by the LCD of TV.

With the failure of the Dream becoming most violently visible in the black-dominated cities, however, it was not long before a working agreement again springs up between the white man and his more primitive ally, although again the terms have been changed; and unlike I Spy, the changes are not subtle.

The three series which we will examine all began in 73 or 74 and their make up seems to derive, in part, from the film Hickey and Boggs, a clever alteration of the I Spy format written by Walter Hill and directed by Robert Culp. In this one, Culp and Cosby play a couple of down and out private eyes, with vague undertones of Marlowe...but here it is Cosby who is the stud, with a beautiful wife, and there is a very subtle hint of homosexuality in Culp, tied in with his self-destructive love for a blonde bitch goddess, a stripper in a bar. Again, the white man turns away from white women, who are corrupt, and the black man loses his woman (in a new twist) but gets his revenge and they walk off, not happily, but alive, at the end.



The essence of the white/dark hero pair has been that the dark man is somehow closer to nature, the white man presumably having been corrupted by civilization. Note the difference between Rebecca, the dark Jew and Rowena, the fair Saxon, in Ivanhoe, as evidence of the deep-seatedness of this myth. When the outcast from society forbids himself white women, he forbids himself all women, so there is a current of unconscious and sometimes innocent homosexuality which continues even today, in films like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, The Sting, Scarecrow, Busting, etc. The whale-sperm squeeze in Moby-Dick is probably the sexiest scene in American literature up to that point.

The modern problem is that America is now the white man's land, totally, and we are still at odds with it. The cities, once so synonymous with the white society, have been abandoned to the blacks and the freaks, and they are written about in the same sort of language that the Puritans used to reserve for the evil woods, in which Indians and/or the devil lurked. What else is Death Wish if not the rite of passage of a white man in a hostile world, a rite which involves ruthless violence. In effect, the realities of America have taken over the fantasies of the Dream, and our heroes no longer pay homage to that dream.

It is strange that in a black environment (the city) and in a situation where the black partner in the hero-pair has more status than ever before, that he should still be as stereotyped as he is. But in all three of the series novels we are about to examine, the basic set-up is the same, and the characters are revealing.

Razoni, Martin and Hardman are all instinctively good cops, but all have a basic character flaw. Hardman is getting old, fat and slow, living on his wits, and was kicked off the Atlanta force, though he wasn't really guilty of anything. Martin has a taste for high living, fortunately supported by his wife's inheritance (which also makes him immune to corruption...money can do anything in America), Razoni is a wise ass and a bit of an anachronism...the time of the real wiseass tough cop is gone, and he finds it hard to keep up with the changes.

Likewise, the three blacks are all big, strong, and studly. Hump Evans is 6'6" or 6'7"

(the author can't decide, or there's 2 authors) 270lb. ex-pro football player with the sexual appetite of a bull in heat. Tough Jackson is also very large, but he's married, although not above knocking off an occasional piece on the side. And TS Putnam dresses, drives, looks, talks, snorts coke, and balls like a pimp. Lucky for him he's a cop.

The point is that none of these guys are, if you'll pardon the expression, lily-white. The hero can't be pure and be believed. It's partly the old you've got to be like your enemies to fight them syndrome and partly the realization on the part of the audience that no one is totally good (anymore).

In Atlanta Hardman & Hump are not above picking up spare change by running heroin in from New York City, a fact which is played up in a couple of the novels and ignored in the rest, as if perhaps the thought of heroin is too much. But they definitely are operating outside the law and society; a couple of the books center around the black ganglord known as The Man, who seems to control a good portion of Atlanta. And in the new land which is the modern urban jungle, the white man lives by his old time city wits, while the black man still has to resort to native expertise--the city, or many parts of it, at least, are his turf; he is at home in the animal streets; he is the dynamo of animal energy with the clever white man as the brains. Hardman and Hump are tending to work together more equally, breaking down the older mythic barriers, and creating new ones that might signal the decline of the white hero as we know him. There is a new sort of equality that, from a white point of view, seems definitely paranoid...the white race's last desperate grip.

In this gripping all bets are off as far as morality is concerned. Robert Altman sensed this early on, and has made a series of movies demolishing our genre myths. The latest of these, The Long Goodbye, takes away the only thing that separates Marlowe from the mass of society, his white armor as it were, namely the hard and isolate moral integrity. To Altman it is anachronistic, a fantasy, and in 1973 completely unviable, even for a private eye.

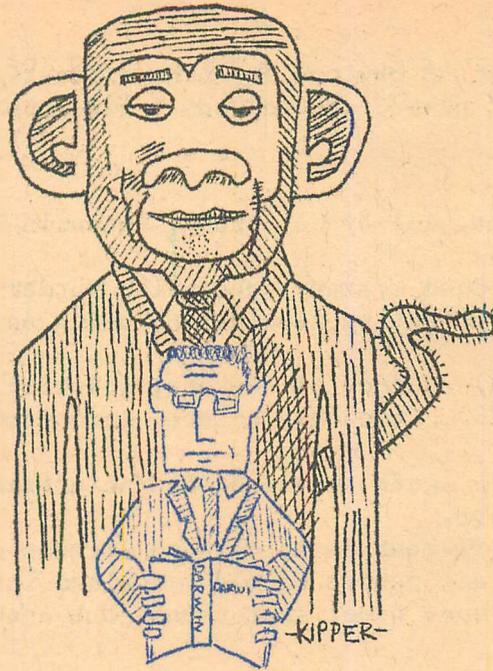
So what is our motivation, then? Beyond the drive for "trim" which seems to motivate a number of these heroes, the overwhelming goal is money. Money was the root of the American Dream, money was and is the reality of the American Dream and all else that is American passes through the moneyground.

The Headhunters are the most effected by the drive for money, although Hardman obviously has no scruples about extremely dirty bucks. Martin's wife keeps him in luxury, but Putnam is blessed with a superhuman lucky streak, which lets him hit the number regularly and win at any game of chance. Without this piece of (unbelievable) purest chance, Putnam would probably be a pimp, or a dealer, or a racketeer; it would be the only way for him to afford his life style. It may just be a coincidence, but the deaths come faster and more frequently in the Headhunters than in the other series, or maybe that's just because it's set in Detroit, the Motor/Murder city.

Strangely enough the Headhunters is at times almost slapstick funny, but perhaps that's only our perverse American outlook on violence that allows it to seem so.

Razoni and Jackson walk the middle ground, toward a more serious solution. Although Hardman and Hump get along better, at least on the surface, Razoni and Jackson are the only ones really actively boasting any sense of real morality. It's not much, but it's something. They're forced to, in a sense, because they are portrayed as real humans on a real police force in a real New York City; but they seem to react well to their most difficult situation. There's a definite sense of anarchy and fatal chaos in the Headhunters, but in Razoni and Jackson we feel that the city may still have a chance.

This is in decided contrast to the latest filmed hero-pair, Freebie and the Bean, where



we have a white and a mexican working together in a city that seems LA and San Francisco. In this series the transformation has been worked completely--Freebie, the white, is a crooked cop through and through, a creep basically, and out for as much as he can get. Bean is still impressed with the fantasy part of the dream, trying to live with a real family, and a job with honor. Freebie only can react when his own pride or the life of the man he "loves" (again a really strong sense of homosexuality pervades the film) are threatened. He is unable to feel any other real feelings except greed. Which is what the white man has come to.

Jackson is also the solid citizen and the more honest cop in his books, although Razoni is not the creep that Freebie is. But Razoni has been trapped a bit by his society, and in trying or thinking to get out of the mess he really only digs himself further into it. Perhaps this is because he is a myth-Italian, rather than a WASP, and somewhat of a shady character by nature as a result.

Razoni and Jackson are the unwilling pillars of the society that employs them. The Headhunters are actually helpless pawns in the face of Henry Paquette, Detroit's leading black gangster; they manage only to keep him from taking over everything. And Hardman and Hump are the heroes removed from society...living the reality of the Dream, still effecting by and at times affecting its fantasies, but for the most part living the life that we've seen on our tv news that the American Dream, if followed whole heartedly, demands. They are hard, and isolate, and killers...and their morals are slowly (or quickly) eroding into nothing more than an ethical manifestation of their greeds.

Whether society's hope is white or black, or whether it lies with the more traditional myth of Razoni and Jackson or the more realistic myth of Hardman and Hump is something that America can only decide for herself.

And time will, as ever, tell.

note: Some of the sources upon which i drew in the above article should be fairly obvious: DH Lawrence, Charles Olson, William Carlos Williams, Edward Dahlberg, Leslie

Fielder. One that is not so obvious is Richard Slotkin, who got me started along these lines in the first place, and to whom I owe more than this article.

\* \* \*

Razoni and Jackson series, all by WB Murphy, Pinnacle Books, #1 - 4, 95¢; #5 \$1.25

1. City in Heat (2/73) Good mystery concerning murder of black leader, with good characterization and effective resolution, using sexual myths that are very old, in parody.
2. Dead End Street (5/73) Murder of hookers, solution obvious.
3. One Night Stand (10/73) Truck hi-jackers, Razoni and Jackson suspected of murder, very good.
4. Down and Dirty (5/74) Again excellent characterizations in gang war between blacks and Italians, well done.
5. Lynch Town (12/74) Off-beat as Razoni and Jackson encounter KKK while passing through the south, again parody of old myths and interesting handling of subtle changes in myth; more humor than usual, but again less effective as scene shifts from NYC.

Headhunter series, all by John Weisman and Brian Boyer, Pinnacle Books, \$1.25

1. Heroin Triple Cross (2/74) Very good, fast-paced, and funny story of black gangsters, with ambiguous ending that sets the pace for the others.
2. Starlight Motel Incident (4/74) Sort of a follow-up to the first, again fast-paced and fairly good.
3. Three Faces of Death (10/74) Less effective as locale shifts to Chicago, tons of violence and a bizarre villain, but not so good.

Hardman series, all by Ralph Dennis, Popular Library, 95¢

note: I suspect at least one and maybe as many as three of these could have been written by different authors, but have no way of knowing.

1. Atlanta Deathwatch (74) Excellent novel, probably the best mystery of any here. The man has a white girl friend and she's murdered and Hardman's got to find out by whom.
2. The Charleston Knife's Back in Town (74) More a procedural, unknown knife-artist trapped in whorehouse.
3. The Golden Girl and All (74) College Professor's wife involved in kidnapping, fairly good, but not up to the first two.
4. Pimp for the Dead (74) Murdered hooker, slim plot, but a few good characters.
5. Down Among the Jocks (74) Ex-athlete blackmailing other jocks, off-beat and good.
6. Murder's Not an Odd Job (74) Very good, Hardman and Hump versus hit-men.
7. Working for The Man (74) More good characterization, good story again centering around The Man.

# WITH MALICE TOWARD ALL

\* Joe Sanders \*

The Golden Soak by Hammond Innes. Avon \$1.50

Since Hank tells me this issue of Starling is going to be a special mystery issue, I'd like to lead off "Malice" with some praise of Hammond Innes's novels. I've admired Innes's work for several years, and this seems a nice opportunity to recommend them to others.

Can Innes's novels be considered mysteries, though? Yes, I think so without too much stretching of definitions. In the classical, formal mystery story, the center of interest is a problem to be solved. In a John Dickson Carr novel, for example, the characters are never intended to behave like people; if they were anything more than clockwork dolls, their actions could foul up the workings of the clockwork plot. The function of the detective is to untangle mechanical confusion. He is an isolated, eccentric figure looking down at the action and--to switch images--moving puzzle pieces around with the tip of his cane until they can fit together. The detective, in what developed later in America as the detective novel, is less above events. His problem, as in Dashell Hammett's novels, is how to adjust himself so that he can hold the relevant aspects of events in his mind and find a coherent pattern. Viewed chronologically, Hammett's novels show heroes at least as concerned with trying out different ways to live as solving mysteries. How can you evaluate what you hear as you move among people who are more apt than not to be lying or misinterpreting events? Do you have to wear a hard shell in order to protect yourself? How much can you let yourself care for someone else? How far can you trust a friend? When Hammett reached a personally satisfactory solution to those questions, he stopped writing.

An Innes hero, too, confronts a problem--a mystery in the technical sense. More than that, the typical Innes hero begins with personal problems to solve. He usually lacks a driving purpose in life, or at least the purpose that he's been using is frayed and outgrown. In the course of the story he comes into contact with a person who is driven by such an overwhelming obsession that he appears larger than life, almost superhuman. This character holds the key to a puzzle. The hero is forced to work out a relationship with him, in the course of which he is infected with the man's drive; only in this way can the hero's nature be made capable of comprehending the solution. It's not that the hero solves the mystery; but that as he changes, he sees the whole process that looked mysterious when he was a naive outsider. To do this, the hero must experience some of the forces that shaped the dominant figure. That usually means that he's placed in an unfamiliar, hostile environment and forced to use every personal resource--both those he knew about and those he never suspected he had--to survive.



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In The Golden Soak, the hero is Alec Falls, a British mining engineer who fakes his death when his company gets into financial trouble and flees to Australia. Falls wants to make a big mining strike because he wants money and all the luxuries--like his wife--that money can buy. He will, early in the story, do almost anything for cash. He's attracted to Australia by what he's heard of The Golden Soak, an abandoned gold mine, and he also becomes fascinated by the legend of McIlroy's Monster, a lost mountain of copper. But McIlroy's disappearance is somewhat involved in the history of the Soak--and of the Garrity family that owns it. Alec must understand Ed Garrity before he can acquire the secret and get what he wants--except that by then his desires have changed. The setting is in the Australian outback, and crucial scenes take place deep in the desert, completely isolated. At one point Alec must navigate himself on foot across the bush or die. The closest comparison I can make within the mystery field is to Arthur W. Upfield's Inspector Napoleon Bonapart's novels, and the mood there is entirely different. Boney knows the land intimately; and he moves through it with certainty that he can master whatever happens. Alec Falls is a stranger, thrown into the middle of a tangled situation and trying to get through it by using all his brains and his courage.

No more plot summary. If you like this kind of mystery leading to this kind of adventure--man not just against a criminal but against nature and himself--I recommend The Golden Soak. And if you can't find that, look for Atlantic Fury or Gail Warning or The Land God Gave to Cain, my personal favorites of Innes's novels. Or North Star, which is just out in hardcover. Or, really, any of Innes's novels. Unless you're careful, you may wind up addicted, too.

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Several issues ago, I gave a qualified recommendation to Don J. Marlowe's series of crime novels about "Drake: The Man with Nobody's Face." I said, though, that Marlowe had erred in getting Drake too entangled with other people, like his "great redhead", Hazel. I suggested that he correct this. In the latest Drake novel, Operation Killmaster, Marlowe obligingly plants a bomb in Hazel's car and sends her off to the hospital, thus freeing Drake to take on a clever and nasty bunch of kidnapers. It's a spectacular, if rather gory, demonstration of the power of a book reviewer, and I recommend the book.

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LOVECRAFT: A BIOGRAPHY by L. Sprague de Camp. Doubleday, \$10.00.

The review is probably unnecessary. As the first major biography of America's greatest modern writer of science fantasy, Lovecraft would be a must if it were at all well researched and adequately written. In fact, it's much more than that. De Camp has done an overall admirable job. I recommend the book, with only a few words of caution.

De Camp obviously has done a lot of research. His description of Lovecraft's family background is detailed and horrifying. Other sources have already told us how Lovecraft's mother gave her son freedom to explore any hobby or arcane interest he wished, at the same time telling him he was so hideous that no one from the outside world could bear to look at him; however de Camp not only builds a thorough picture of Lovecraft and his mother but describes the other members of the family, their circumstances--all the things that made it possible for Lovecraft to develop as he did. De Camp shows how this accounts for both Lovecraft's depth of understanding in some areas and for his total naivete in others. De Camp's research occasionally turns up some rather startling information, such as the fact that Lovecraft was prevented from attending college not simply by ruined nerves but by the fact that he never completed high school.

Here again, de Camp's research is extremely valuable in showing more of Lovecraft's background than the man could reveal himself; it also illustrates Lovecraft's personal sensitivity. Finally, de Camp's presentation of the painful subject of Lovecraft's religious and racial prejudice is overwhelmingly convincing. Although he quotes Lovecraft's friends to the effect that in person Lovecraft was as courteous as could be, de Camp also quotes passage after passage from Lovecraft's letters and amateur journalism that will make any sensitive reader cringe. Still, this too was part of Lovecraft, and we must face it before we can really understand the man.

In general, then, de Camp has done a good job of presenting a detailed picture of Lovecraft as a complex, sometimes grotesquely crippled human being. We can be grateful that the book was not written by someone who would have been so outraged by Lovecraft's excesses that he would have done a hatchet job on the man (as has been done by some critics surveyed by de Camp). But we also can be grateful that the book was not done by one of Lovecraft's wholesale admirers--especially by one of the people who had been bound tightly to him by the voluminous correspondence into which Lovecraft poured so much warmth and generosity. For Lovecraft's nature was so mixed that a generally dispassionate presentation of the facts is the best way to show the man's development.

I think de Camp does a rather fair job of seeing Lovecraft whole and showing how he changed. He shows, for example, that Lovecraft's views on foreigners and of racial and religious minorities became more tolerant with time. It was not a smooth development, and it certainly wasn't easy for Lovecraft--he groped in confusion, stumbled repeatedly, lapsed back, yet somehow still ended up a different and much better person than he was earlier. I think that's extremely important: Lovecraft was overcoming his handicaps, despite all odds. I'm glad de Camp appreciates that fact and traces it even within his rather truncated analyses of Lovecraft's fiction. (In order not to spoil the stories for new readers de Camp ends all plot summaries in midcourse with an ellipsis. Even appreciating his motives, I think he could have used more of the fiction to illustrate what was happening inside Lovecraft. One outstanding example that he does use--and to which I also called attention in a 1971 Starling column, reprinted last year in Seldon's Plan as "Brunner and Lovecraft: A Comparison in Fantasy"--is a passage in "At the Mountains of Madness," in which Lovecraft's hero manages to extend sympathy to the suffering of bizarre monsters.) What Lovecraft did with his life was at least as laborious and heartening an achievement as what he did with his writing.

The words of caution I mentioned above are, I suppose, largely another way of viewing de Camp's strength. De Camp is a professional writer--sometimes a very good one when he hits the right subject, always a minimally competent one. He does not--by his very nature he cannot--sympathize with Lovecraft's failure to become a commercial success as a writer. He views it simply as foolish inefficiency, explainable by Lovecraft's obsession with the traditional role of a gentleman amateur. At this point, especially, I think closer attention to Lovecraft's fiction--and integrating that study with the biographical information--would produce better understanding of the dynamics of Lovecraft's growth. De Camp describes Lovecraft's scruples against commercial publication as foolish. Yet that pride surely contributes to the sense of utter personal horror, involving a threatened self-image, that fills Lovecraft's fiction. (And, for that matter, de Camp shows such pride himself in his refusal to let his fiction be adapted into comicbook form.) It seems to me that Lovecraft was using his writing to make sense of himself. De Camp's treatment of Lovecraft as a writer is thus inadequate. Above all, de Camp's final judgment seems pretty superficial; whatever his hangups, Lovecraft wrote some good stories, and maybe if he'd been better adjusted he wouldn't have written as well. The reciprocal relationship between Lovecraft's life and work deserves much more study.



But the great worth of de Camp's book is that it makes such study easier. LOVECRAFT is a really indispensable presentation of the facts of Lovecraft's life. First hand personal memoirs can only supplement de Camp's work. And critical studies can start there, too.

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REPLY TO SAM MOSKOWITZ

I never claimed to speak for libraries -- just for those who use them. However, based on my six years of experience as a freelance editor for Bobbs-Merrill, I do have some knowledge of how books are published. And my better than four years of sales work for B-11 gave me some experience in how books are

sold. Therefore, I must say that your remarks about reprint editions in general seem quite beside the point--unless any of the Hyperion Press books were published "in editions as small as 100 copies," and unless they were sold as simple reprints of rare books. No. Hyperion promoted the series to individuals by expensive mailers and to a mass audience by two-page prozine ads. They obviously intended to sell a large number of copies. And part of Hyperion's promotion of what they called "the definitive series on the development" of stf promised a great deal more, in literary quality for the books and in informational quality for the new editorial material, than was delivered. That's what I was talking about--not binding, paper stock, etc.

Overall, we may be working with different understandings of the reviewer-critic's job; You evidently believe that one is to make the most of whatever the book offers; that one should, in this case, simply be glad to have the books available again. I am glad, and I said so. But the editorial work on the Hyperion series was quite slapdash in some important areas. Your comments do not explain that issue at all, but surely you can see that it is relevant, especially for the academic audience that Hyperion is trying to sell part of its editions to, especially in what is billed as "the definitive series." I saw that. and I said so. I think that any reader who sees where a piece of work falls short of what it ought to be should say so. Loudly.

Talking about the books' production, I must note that it is possible to correct errors in reprinted books. The purpose is not mere neatness, and I was not objecting to the blotchiness of the printing in Cook's novel. I wondered if you had considered the possibility that the edition you picked for reprinting might have had its words, its content altered. But it appears that you paid little attention to such textual accuracy.

I've come across a critical review that seems to reinforce my position. Commenting on Williamson's study of H.G. Wells, the writer finds it "shocking" that "in virtually all cases, Williamson didn't even consult first book printings of Wells' material, let alone first magazine publication. Completely ignoring the fact that there were frequently dramatic changes in the texts of the stories which altered the interpretation of Wells' meaning, he based his thesis on popular editions." The review is published in The WSFA Journal #84. The reviewer is Sam Moskowitz.

# WORDS

FROM

# READERS

Don D'Amassa, 19 Angell Dr., E. Prov., RI 02914

Joe Sanders, despite Sam Moskowitz's response, is rather fair in his evaluation, though I too interpreted the revolt in Round Trip to be at the motivation of the robots. Joe didn't read the best offerings though. The complete Weinbaum short stories is the best single volume. George Griffith's two novels, Angel of The Revolution and Olga Romanoff are two prime examples of the future war novel, although I was rather disappointed that Wells' War in the Air was overlooked, as this is long overdue for a paperback publication. The Life and Times of Peter Wilkins was the real sleeper of the lot. I'd never heard of it, and it aged surprisingly well. There were a couple of real flubs though. I can understand reprinting Serviss' The Second Deluge, but why A Columbus of Space? I think Sam overrates its historic interest or value. At least one of the anthologies in the series was useless also. Modern Masters of SF appeared as three popular paperbacks already.

dcuglas barbour, 10808 75th Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6E 1K2

actually im rather worried, not to say potentially horrified, by what sandra meisel has written. i thought i had a real friendly time with susan wood at V-Con in february, but obviously that was not the case. now she did seem rather fluttery at times, & i distinctly remember she said she flew out to vancouver for the con -- but i thought she meant air canada! geesh! this is a case for philip k. dick! & just what are those poor students in candadian literature going to have facing them from the front of the class next fall at UBC? it fairly croggles the mind! for a moth, though, i must say, she sure types good.

i don't really think sam moskowitz fully responds to joe sanders' remarks. i guess we do need any edition of some of these books -- for the scholars (i know i won't read too many of them -- why should i? most of them are unreadable), but when it is obvious that the major sales are specifically for university libraries, for scholarly research in the early work in the field, then the lack of true editorial preparation must be seen as somewhat saddening.

Who is doug lovelace? im not usually that impressed by fan art, but the sequence on 'tone of voice' by him in your issue is just about the best thing ive ever seen in a fanzine. witty, just the right amount of wierdness in the drawing, & it follows through, page by page, just beautifully.



Harry Warner, 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

Joe Sanders reminds me of an old mystery. Why doesn't a university library or a metropolitan public library somewhere set up a special collection of original manuscripts, to which science fiction authors could send a carbon copy of anything they consider important, exactly as originally written, before taboos and space requirements and editors' quirks had begun to create changes? It would take comparatively little space, acquisitions would be easy to catalog, there wouldn't be any expense involved for the institutions except postage for thank you notes, and such a resource would be priceless in later decades for students and reprint firms. I know how many pros have been grumbling about tamperings with their manuscripts in recent years, and there have been production bobbles like omission of an entire page, and there's next to no chance that the author himself will ever be able to arrange a later, corrected edition of his original manuscript. Years ago, I wasted a couple of evenings comparing stories in Famous Fantastic Mysteries and Fantastic Novels with their book versions. I was shocked by the frequency of the changes in the magazine version, and the way they ranged from omission or changes of single words to deletion of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. There's no reason to believe that the original book versions are free of just as many tamperings with the original manuscript.

I envy you the chance to hear the Bob Clampett talk. All that Hagerstown has is a junior college, and its idea of a big special event is to get three or four of the faculty together for a panel discussion of some book or other; money that might be used for such purposes goes to recruit basketball players from the District of Columbia and to promote the basketball games which nobody goes to. I began cartoon viewing somewhat earlier than you, of course, and I had stopped going to the movies regularly by the time the series which are nostalgic to you were being created. But I can't understand why nobody tries to promote a television series made up of the best short subjects from pre-TV movie days, live and animated. Maybe there's a fear of too great a contrast with the animated cartoons of more recent years.

+When I was a child all "cartoon shows" were collections of the cartoons made  
+in the 30's and 40's for the movie market. Now such programs put together by  
+the local stations usually consist of early Hanna-Barbera stuff. I would cer-  
+tainly like to see a return to older cartoons (since they were generally better  
+made) and I'm sure they'd be popular, but most of them weren't in color, and  
+so are unlikely to turn up on TV today.--LML

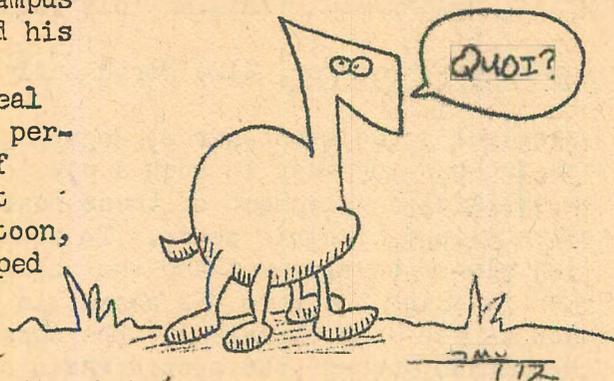
Sean Summers, PO Box 3000, Drumheller, Alberta, Canada

All my good cartoon experienc came from early morning Saturday and Sunday TV. The best shows to watch were the local ones which carried batches of the older cartoons. Those had real cartoons, Popeyes especially. The infiltration of modern crud was just beginning. On Cecil the Seasick Sea Serpant: Wasn't Beany the first fan to get a chunk of air time in his own series?

Roger Sween's musician friend is right. Internal relationships are the basis for most western music, and each interval has a consonance or dissonance when played. At different times different intervals are held to be dissonant but through the history of secular and classical music new dissonances have been accepted into certain roles and old dissonances, whose places the new have taken, become consonances. Melody is not all there is to music. You would be cutting down its beauty to a pale shadow if this were the case. It seems to be that Sween is saying that to view something other than melody to be important is to abandon melody itself. Not so. John Cage viewed the sounds of a street corner as 'music.'

Leigh Couch's 'Big Band Groupie' was great. Fans of both big band jazz and cartoons should take in the Betty Boop cartoons making the rounds of the campus cinema. You get both Betty and Cab Calloway and his band.

+Yes! The Boop cartoons were great! Surreal  
 +and imaginative; and Calloway's music is per-  
 +fect, sort of a free-wheeling calliope of  
 +jazzy tunes and noise. Calloway makes at  
 +least one filmed appearance in a Boop cartoon,  
 +and in many others the animators roto-scoped  
 +Cab's unique dance to use for one of the  
 +villains. --HL



Terry Hughes, 866 N. Frederick St., Arlington, Va. 22205

Your mention of Beany and Cecil reminds me of a question of extreme importance: What was the name of Beany's uncle? Beany always called him Uncle Capt'n. Those of us in this area could only come up with Captain Huff'n'puff but we are none too sure of its validity. Can you or your readers help? While I'm asking about cartoon trivia, here's one that has us all baffled: What were the names of the two moonmen on Bullwinkle/Rocket J. Squirrel? Nobody here can come up with the cognomens of those two even though we can see them clearly in our minds. When one lives near Washington, D.C., one's mind tends to dwell only on pressing issues of the day.

Leigh Couch's article on the big band days and her involvement in it as a young woman was tremendous. Leigh does not write much but what she does produce is extremely well done. I am very glad you were able to persuade her to write this account of her teenage life. It was nice on many levels, not the least of which was that it lets the young people of today know that they weren't the first generation to become involved in the music of the times. Music is an intricate part of young people's lives, for some it is always part of life. A musician needs to play just as much as a writer needs to write and the same could be said for a reader and a listener. The feedback between the audience and the performer allows the artform to grow and develop. So maybe we've gone from Kay Kyser to Alice Cooper, but we have also had the continuation of serious devotion to music as an art form and music as part of life. If you take away a radio or a record player from a teenager (of any generation) you have taken part of his life and stunted part of his development. "I can dig the beat, therefore, I am."

Eric Lindsay, 6 Hillcrest Avenue, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776 AUSTRALIA

I was much taken by Leigh Edmond's article on the non-tuneful attributes of Synthia. Although it does not prevent me from regretting that on my one and only attempt at 'playing' that device, my best efforts were rewarded by rude noises, in which any semblance to music was most assuredly missing. I have been interested in the various electronic instruments in the sense that I enjoy trying to understand electronic gadgetry & gimmicks, and even considered trying to make a Teramin, but with my hamfisted aptitude toward actually playing things it is unreasonably certain that it too would make rude noises. I remember in school managing to make rude noises with a recorder or some similar instrument of destruction. Still, is Leigh saying that the new music can partake of none of the tunes of old? That it must be atonal, and that the human will have to adapt to the unfamiliar. It seems to be that such is an invitation to the faker to 'play', relying on the critics being unwilling (as in literature) to criticise severely what they do not understand, when the real problem is that there is no content for them to understand. Perhaps before composers are set to work on

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their electronic gadgets they should have to prove, like Walter Carlos, that they can actually manage the familiar 'old fashioned' music that does have a tune.

Michael T. Shoemaker, 2123 North Early St., Alexandria, VA. 22302

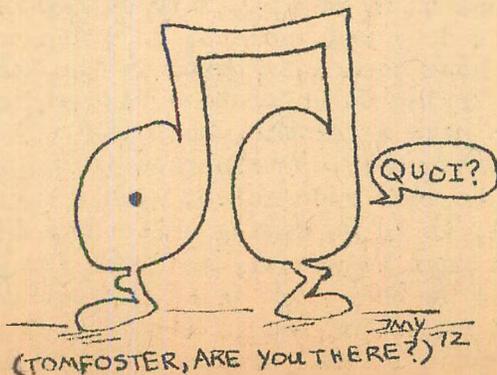
Disregarding the avant-garde, Roger Sween's view of music, "a succession of sounds that are put together in such a way as to make a melody. . .and that great music is the skillful development of these musical ideas," is extremely narrow and not at all accurate in a historic sense. To take the foremost example, Debussy eschewed the principle of development and the whole concept of music as a process. Melody, as Roger is using the term, is absent in much Baroque music in strict chordal style (such as the Bach Chorales). The absence of melody as we know it is even more apparent in much of the sacred music of the 16th century. Furthermore, this music does not contain development, but rather imitation and occasionally repetition of motives. Roger says "to depart from melody is to give up music for noise," but this is nonsense, as Prokofiev demonstrates, rather conservatively in *Sarcasms*, Op. 17, or as Webern demonstrates less conservatively in all his music. Don't get me wrong. I'm not against melody. I think melody is the most important element of music, but it is not always absolutely necessary.

This leads me to my next point. You say, "I would never try to define basic values of music, since individual tastes differ so widely." I believe it is possible to define a single basic value of music. Moreover this value is present in all music regardless of differences in tastes. How do we arrive at this basic value? By asking ourselves what distinguishes music from noise. The answer is that music is organized sound. Moreover, this organization has to be perceptible, though not necessarily consciously. Now the method of organization may vary greatly, and this is where individual taste enters the picture. Melody and tonality are only two methods of organization.

Despite my love of Webern, I hate electronic music. It is said that Scarlatti said that the only rule a composer need to follow is not to offend the ear. One of Webern's great strengths is that he had a fantastic ear for sound-for-sound's sake. My appreciation is further enhanced because I can perceive the masterful canonic organization present in much of Webern's music. Too much electronic music sounds as though the composer is more interested in playing mathematical games, and if he is pleased with his abstract scheme, to hell with what it sounds like.

Fernando Quadros Gouvea, Largo da Batalha, 92; 04031 Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brasil

Harry Warner's letter raises an important point: that music (and art in general) exists for the sake of people rather than theorists. There seems to have been a tendency lately for a few theorists to produce art for theorists, who applaud, criticize, and "understand." I am not sure, though, that electronic music is an instance of this: is there really no public for this kind of music? Though I'm quite far from the more important cultural centers, I have a feeling that there is, really an average-sized following for electronic music.



Leigh Couch's article is really a fascinating look at a phenomenon that occurred mainly in the US. It was immensely pleasing to look at



the written pieces. They're reinterpretations. I remember one item of fan fiction that he disliked: the cartoons were merciless in their sarcasm and gave the whole thing another dimension.

Peter Roberts, 6 Westbourne Park Villas, London W2 England

You'd be surprised at the ease with which I manage to avoid 'popular culture'; it may be all around me, but it's having a hard time penetrating my ivory tower. Pop music drifts noisily through the air on hot Sunday afternoons, so I sometimes hear strange oddments intermixed with the yapping of dogs and children. But I don't have a radio and there simply isn't much pop stuff on tv (what little there is should be avoided-- programmes like "Top of the Pops" are for Mum and Dad and their cretinous little teenyboppers). I don't watch much television, compared to most people, and I stick to a diet of esoteric BBC 2 programmes (with lapses -- I keep up with Dr. Who and turn on the late-night horror films). I don't buy magazines and few of my books could easily be called 'popular.' I am a rock, I am an island. Or does that give me away, after all?

Yes, perhaps I should come clean. I really just wanted to make it clear that it's easy enough to avoid the various forms of 'popular culture.' I think I honestly am pretty isolated, but I don't utterly reject it all. I have a genuine fondness for reggae, for example -- the only thing is I'm too scared to buy any of the good stuff at the specialist shops: it's not the done thing for long-haired, white people to like reggae, and the skinheads and West Indians are likely to take offense (they hang around the shops, and I'm damned if I'm going in on my own! I'd probably be ok, but..)

As far as I know, reggae (ska or blue beat) never became popular in the U.S. Is that true? I remember talking to a bunch of American fans at Heicon and they'd never heard of it in any form; mind you, that's five years ago now.

+Reggae eventually did become popular in the US, though I'm certain that for +the most part it was a very diluted version. --HL

Wayne Macdonald, 1284 York Mills Road, Apt. 410, Don Mills, Ontario, M3A 1Z2 Canada

Somehow I cannot take it seriously when someone describes the good ole days of \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with Jazz, rock, big band, country music, whatnot. . .). I suppose at the time Leigh was a young teeny-bopper or whatever, Big Bands must have been very important to her. But her article gives me the impression that this importance is more than subjective. This is ridiculous. Some lasting popular music survived the Big Bands, but so did lasting popular music from almost every other kind. Great art, a product of intellectual abstraction, just does not come from popular movements. Big bands and their music are intellectually small potatoes.

+We certainly disagree here, since I feel that most great art springs directly +from some sort of "popular" art form. --HL

Sugar & Spike? Org! How depraved. Next you will praise Jerry Lewis Comics and Mighty Mouse. I remember reading all these comics when I was an introverted young child. Why, I'm not sure. They interested me there's no doubt. They taught me English better than the schooltexts, and consequently I read much more than most people. Still, there is no great deal to be gotten from even the best of them. My favorites are not those printed in the long ago and far away, but rather in the here and now. My arch-favourite is the Conans of Barry Smith. The only other comics that hold a comparable place in my affections are Carl Barks' Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge.

+Sheldon Mayer, creator of Sugar and Spike, is a comic book artist and writer +who ranks with just a handful of other comic book folks, among them Carl Barks, +Walt Kelly, John Stanley, Will Eisner and a few others. Conan is okay for

+a super-guy comic, but only "intellectually small potatoes." --HL

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Steve Schlesel, 1113 Woodland Drive, .Arlington, Tx 76012

Your article inspired me to dig through the piles at the garage sales to catch some Sugar & Spike comics. I never once in my childhood opened a 'kiddie' comic. I was weaned on Marvels. Judging by the quotes given, Sugar & Spike seems a lot more sophisticated than the usual superhero comic. Sugar and Spike show an incredible insight into the human condition. Kiddie book? Bushwah.

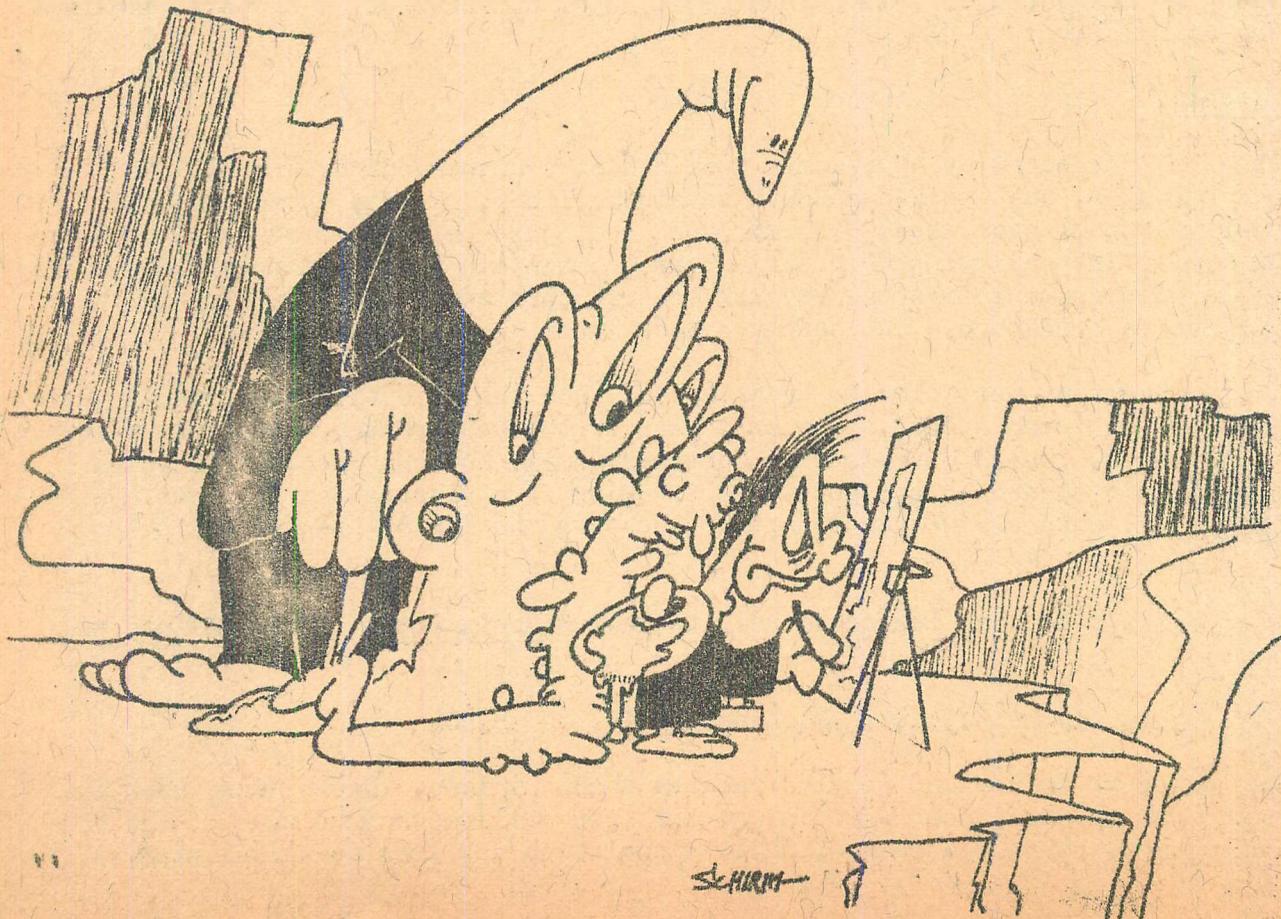
James Shull, 5454 Sylmar Avenue, Van Nuys, CA 91401

I read Sugar & Spike in the early '60s, then stopped in the mid 60's, yet never failing to stop at the newstand when a new issue came out to look at it. This means that I don't have any issues in my collection, just a memory that could, and in fact probably is at times wrong. Didn't S&S become/evolve into a comic with the name Merwin and His Monster? And didn't Sheldon Mayer also produce the Fox and Crow? Now there was a comic! Cover it if you can.

+Actually, if was Fox and Crow that was changed into something like Melvin and His Monster. Fox and Crow was by Jim Davis. Rick Dey once speculated that he might some day write about Davis and his comics, and we would certainly like to publish such an article, so we shall see. --HL

Rick Stoker, 403 Henry St., A lton, IL 62002

I'm not entirely skeptical about the idea of babies having their own language. I'm sure that the babies I give swimming lessons to don't communicate between each other; but possibly that's because they're strangers, and too intimidated by their unusual



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environment to make social contacts. When I was staying with the Browns, I slept on a mattress in the living room. One morning Alicia who was six and a half at the time, came in and asked me a question, I was so sleep-befogged that I don't even recall the question anymore. "Hey," Alicia said, "You understand The Language." (Her caps). It wasn't until she said that that I realized that she had asked her question in an unusual way. Was Alicia using a more sophisticated form of babytalk? And, more asleep than awake, was I close enough to my subconscious memories of my own babyhood to understand?

Jeffrey B. Kipper, 9015 N.E. 21st Pl., Bellevue, WA 98004

The trend of Comix Book and The Funny Papers (and Arcade) type publications seems like a turn for the worse if this is what we can expect to find from the Underground Comix field in the future. So far these new publications have exhibited material from what appears to be a closed clique of "underground" artists and severely restricts the material to stories of only a few pages long at the most, delivering mild spoon fulls of what Help magazine would probably be giving us if that long gone magazine were to have naturally developed to the present day.

There were a lot of awful comix coming out by the end of the underground era, but the freedom and variety of markets that made it possible for the bad comix to exist by the same token made it possible for the good artists to realize their creations with a more ambitious scope and in vaster quantity than is possible in the "short order" format of the overground-undergrounds. Also, with more books coming out, it was possible for more untested unknown artists to enter the fold. I sincerely doubt if Justin Green or Bill Griffith would have the status they have now if the conditions were not what they were a few years ago.

Well, both Comix Book and The Funny Papers seem to be gone, and I've never heard of Arcade so. . . all we can do is hope for the best, I suppose. And read the next letter: --HL

Denis Kitchen, PO Box 7, Princeton, WI 54968

As you've probably heard by now, Comix Book has been "suspended" by Marvel. The third issue was released, but the 4th and 5th remain in limbo. It's a crying shame, particularly because each issue was improving and, just before the suspension, I talked Stan Lee into allowing CB contributors to maintain their own copyrights. This resulted in wild enthusiasm among regular contributors and artists waiting in the wings for such a breakthrough. But barely a week later the book was snuffed.

Anyhow, I am devoting more time to Krupp again. But the attention is primarily devoted to keeping the old corp afloat. The past year or two has wreaked havoc on underground comics publishers. We'll be releasing Consumer Comix, but only because it is an educational comic funded by the govt. In the wings are Bizarre Sex #4, Snarf #6, and Death Rattle #4, whenever we can scrape up the bread to finish them up and go to press.

Letters of outrage to Stan Lee could help to revive Comix Book. Stan monitors the mail closely.

Don Blyly, 343 E. 19th St., Apt. 5B, Minneapolis, MN 55404

Jim Young asked me to respond to your remarks about Minicon. Scott Ines, who was the fan who got the equipment for Minicon for free will respond to some of the more technical comments that you raised, while I deal with the less technical aspects.

As you pointed out, we were experimenting with the video equipment. We found that some things worked like we expected them to, and other things went differently than we expected, and we will thus have to make changes for next year, and especially changes will have to be made before Scott takes the equipment to MidAmerica (as both Scott and Ken Keller hope will happen).

It was hoped that the monitor in the registration room, 12 floors above the programming floor, would provide both pictures and sound so that the people working registration would not miss the programming. The picture was great, but Scott never did manage to get the sound to work -- he is fairly certain he can get it to work properly next year. (Unfortunately somebody -- almost certainly a mundane -- cut the co-axial cable at about the 5th floor between 5 and 9 Sunday morning.) Scott had also hoped to set up a small camera in the registration room connected to a monitor in the basement, so that we would have a 2-way TV connection between the basement and registration for purposes of committee communications. This also did not work out this year.

What we have now as a result of the taping is a set of very good black and white tapes of the panels, and some less impressive color tapes of the costume ball, band, and light show. These are very valuable to the convention for a number of reasons. We can go over the programming with clear minds and try to figure out what we did right and what we did wrong and what we can do better next year. This should prove useful in our continuing efforts to provide the most interesting and useful programming possible with the resources available.



Local people who were too busy running the con (or were too hung-over) to get to certain programming items can now watch the panels at our convenience. This is nice for all of the people who worked on the con this year, who suddenly find out that -- unlike all previous years -- they didn't necessarily miss most of the convention by working on it. But it will be even more important when we recruit people to work on the next con. They will feel much more willing to volunteer their time, rather than saying, "I'd really like to help, but I don't want to miss the next panel."

You criticized the way the cameras were being handled. They were not being handled by employees of the electronics company. They were being handled by people that Scott could get to volunteer from the audience. Since people who might have known how to operate the equipment (such as you) failed to volunteer, Scott had to train people from scratch, plus operating the behind-the-scenes equipment, plus taking care of the equipment problems on the 11th floor, etc. All of this after several nights of very little sleep. Under the circumstances, I think he did a very good job. Of course, if he had had a crew of people available who knew what they were doing, he could have done a much better job.

I am surprised that you did not mention the one thing Scott did during the masquerade that bothered the most people -- he turned the high intensity lights directly into the eyes of the audience just before the beginning of the costume display, so that the audience could be taped. When I pointed out to him that he was needlessly blinding

most of the audience, and that I was receiving a lot of complaints about this, he bellowed out, "Don Blyly, stop bugging me!" It was clear to me that this action, as well as his grabbing the mike away from Bev a couple of times later in the evening, resulted from his being totally burned out from over-work, rather than from any inherent inconsiderateness on Scott's part, as you implied.

You complained about the amount of light during the light show. At the con, I received complaints about it being too dark in the room, and so I turned up the lights somewhat. You would have preferred less light, and you might also have preferred more volume from the band. But others would have preferred even more light and much less volume from the band. We had a problem of trying to balance these different tastes.

We have already discussed the possibility of doing for the next Minicon most of the things you suggested for future Worldcons -- that seems to be the best way to de-bug the various projects for MidAmeriCon. The number of things we are actually able to try depends largely on the hotel and on the kind of volunteer help Scott can get for next year. One possibility you suggested that we had not considered was that of running an art auction via TV. How fast do you think an auction would go if you had to dial a phone number -- and get through -- before making a bid? How persistent would you be about bidding after you got a busy signal for the 15th time in a row? I'm afraid we are not planning to experiment with that one idea.

One problem you get into with video-taping programming is that of legal rights and safe-guards. Once you have that completed video-tape, you have a valuable piece of property on your hands, that lots of professors (and fan clubs) would be interested in renting. Do you rent it to them? If so, how do you make sure that the pros get compensated for their ideas as expressed on tape? Will some pros hesitate to appear on a paper unless his cut of the royalties are to his liking? Do you really want a business corporation with a possible lifetime of decades to supervise distribution of the tapes and payment of royalties? Who pays the people who run this corporation, and who decides how much they get paid? How about copyright violations, illegal copies, etc.? To avoid all of this commercial hassle, we made it clear that the tapes made at Minicon would not be used for profit. But future worldcons will have to face up to all these problems if they are interested in video-taping.

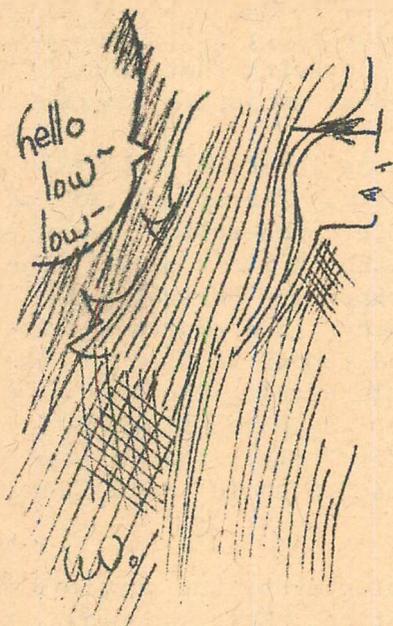


WE ALSO HEARD FROM: Brian Earl Brown, Sheldon Mayer, Ray Nelson, Sandra Hiesel, Sheryl Birkhead, Paul Anderson, Mike Kring, David Emerson, Jerry Kaufman, John Carl, Peter Presford, Laurine White, Barry Kent MacKay, Dave Piper, Jon Singer, John Dowd, Chris Hoth, Al Sirois, and who knows who else.

Get those letters in fast, folks. We want to publish the next Starling to beat the postage increase, so we don't have much time -- and neither do you.

# SUCH A STRANGE LADY

—Susan Wood—



One of the pleasantest minor characters in detective fiction is Miss Lydgate, the history tutor in Dorothy L. Sayers' Gaudy Night.

To the innocent and candid eyes of that great scholar, no moral problem seemed ever to present itself. Of a scrupulous personal integrity, she embraced the irregularities of other people in a wide, unquestioning charity... Only once had Harriet ever heard her speak with unqualified disapproval of any one she knew, and that was of a former pupil of her own who had written a popular book about Carlyle. 'No research at all,' had been Miss Lydgate's

verdict, 'and no effort at critical judgement. She has reproduced all the old gossip without troubling to verify anything. Slipshod, showy, and catchpenny. I'm really ashamed of her.' And even then she had added: 'But I believe, poor thing, she is very hard up.'

One hopes Sayers' own ghost will be equally charitable to the first biography of her, Such a Strange Lady by Janet Hitchman.

Sayers seems to have been an extremely reticent woman, who is said to have forbidden that a biography of her appear until 50 years after her death (though there is no written evidence of this.) Certainly her friends and executors refused to co-operate with Hitchman.

Lord Peter Wimsey has been public property for over 50 years, however, and so in a sense has his creator. Fine, let's have a biography of Dorothy L. Sayers, who tried to turn the detective novel into a respectable, even highbrow, entertainment; who presented us with a woman mystery-writer heroine; who discussed truth and values, reality and illusion, within the morality-play context of the hero unmasking the villain. Let's have a biography of the woman who, as a schoolboy wrote, "turned from a life of crime to the Church of England," writing religious dramas and translating Dante. Let's have a biography now that the British tv versions of the Wimsey novels have created a new generation of fans.

Let's not have this biography. Janet Hitchman says she didn't want to write it. She admits to being unqualified to discuss any of Sayers' work except the Wimsey books-- and her comments on those seem both unsympathetic and unperceptive. She lacked the co-operation of necessary sources, and access to relevant material.

The truth of these objections is amply borne out by Such a Strange Lady, a book which is sketchy, superficial, padded with gossip and blank pages, and abominably written. Hitchman, author of a bestselling autobiography and two other books, is described on the dustjacket as "a frequent broadcaster and public speaker." The best chapters deal

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with Sayers' broadcasting work, an area her biographer presumably understands, and documents adequately from BBC files. The book illustrates, in fact, the best and worst connotations of the term "journalistic." On the plus side, it is well researched, though much of the evidence is negative--for example, discovering that, though Sayers' husband claimed to be a journalist, two papers he claimed as employers "disown" him.

On the minus side, however, Such a Strange Lady has all the faults of a hurried attempt to cash in on the latest surge of Wimsey's popularity. The actual writing is atrocious, alternating sentence fragments and interminable comma-splice sentences, with an occasional seasoning of impenetrable syntax. Hitchman isn't sure of the functions of punctuation or the connotations of words, and expresses herself best in gush and cliché. She refers chummily to her subject as "Dorothy", and adopts a formula-ridden gossip column approach, presenting speculation and rumour in lieu of hard fact. Thus we have Sayers "fighting for composure" on accidentally hearing the name of a man on whom she had had an embarrassing crush 40 years before. We have Hitchman trying unconvincingly to argue that this man was the original for Wimsey; the two are dissimilar, but "This, of course, is one way many authors use to avoid identification in their novels."

Scholarly footnoting may not be necessary in a popular biography; but some acknowledgement of sources is, especially in a work of speculation. Hitchman claims to have read "hundreds of Miss Sayers' letters." To whom? What did they say, and why aren't they quoted? Most of her sources are, in fact, public ones: lectures and articles by Sayers, interviews. These are usually not identified. At least one fact which can be checked proves glaringly wrong. Each chapter is set off by a title page reproducing the Wimsey crest. (I told you this was an exploitation job.) The motto given, however, is "I hold by my Whimsy," while the Wimsey family biography appended to most editions of the novels gives "As my Whimsy takes me." In either case, Hitchman doesn't seem to understand the pun involved, and its relevance to the character.

Hitchman's portrait of Sayers in childhood, compiled apparently from unidentified village and school-friend gossip, school records and common knowledge, is a sympathetic one: Dorothy-the-misfit, shy, educated at home by an otherworldly minister-father, awkward in the school and college world. The book focusses, however, on Dorothy-the-mature-eccentric: her motorbike, her odd clothes, her supposed love affairs, her fanatical insistence on having the "L." in her name included in all her by-lines, her pig Francis Bacon, whom she raised and sensibly ate during wartime food-rationing. All this, however, detracts from Sayers the writer.

Hitchman seems, in fact, not to understand the creative process at all. She works on the assumption--which she does not justify--that Sayers "'wrote out' in some way all the unpleasantness of her life," that therapy was the basis of her fiction. "Murder in print the person who had deceived or hurt you. It assuaged the bitterness of her soul and enabled her to forgive and carry on. But she was wrong if she thought it did not show." Indeed?

Unable, it seems, to distinguish between actual and imaginative experience, Hitchman continually falls into the intentional fallacy. The facts of Sayers' life which she presents may very well "illuminate" certain aspects of the novels, though that light seldom shines here. It is easy to see, for example, why Sayers began to write the Wimsey books; she needed money, her work for an advertising agency (used in Murder Must Advertise) paid little, and "thrillers" paid a great deal. Generally, however, Hitchman provides only unjustified assumptions. She quotes Sayers' own vehement denial of the idea that she and Wimsey were one, or that Wimsey were her Ideal Man: "He exists in his own right and not to please you. Hands off." Hitchman then comments:

"So it is obvious that she cared a great deal for Wimsey, who may have represented a long lost lover, or stood for those moral and ethical values which she considered were vanishing from a civilized world." The first assumption is gossip-column trivia. The second (with a touch of the first) is an interesting literary premise worth discussing: do Sayers' novels present a romance world where everything comes out "right" (including love) and conservative values triumph? Of course, the former assumption wins in this book, in such statements as: "There is no doubt that Harriet is Dorothy, as she saw herself." Such a Strange Lady in fact leaves plenty of doubt.

Certainly, Sayers used Harriet Vane, especially in Gaudy Night, to express some of her developing views about detective fiction, and the problem of putting realistic people into a formula puzzle. Hitchman, however, ignores her subject's views on her own genre. Certainly, she condemns the critics who refused to accept religious plays and Dante criticism from a former mystery writer when she "stepped out of the pigeon hole into which the public had put her." Ironically, though, Hitchman herself pigeonholes Sayers' work. The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club is ranked as "one of the best Wimsey books, chiefly because it is straightforward in the telling.

It does not go off into side-issues, nor is it tainted with the worst of Dorothy's prejudices." (We could, incidentally, use more on those prejudices as revealed in her work, though there is a competent, if superficial, mention of the fashionable anti-Semitism she expressed.) Much of the complicated examination of reality and illusion in Murder Must Advertise, however, is dismissed as "nonsense."

Finally Hitchman rejects Sayers' greatest experiment with the mystery novel, and in my opinion her best: "If The Nine Tailors was Dorothy's best book, its successor, Gaudy Night was certainly her worst." She quotes (without source as usual) Sayers' statement that "it's the book I wanted to write" because "I do feel rather passionately about this business of the integrity of the mind." Then she goes on to carp: "The 'integrity of the mind'--but was she exercising that integrity to use the format of the detective novel to preach a sermon? Here was a captive, and captivated, audience; already in love with her characters, and wham! they are hit over the head with a treatise on ultimate truth. There is not even a corpse!"

After proving that the absence of a corpse is the only thing she really does understand about the novel (which involves an "ethical problem" stretching far beyond the suppression of a piece of trivial information), she complains: "The discussions go on interminably with, intermittently, a flurry into detection as if Miss Sayers had suddenly remembered what kind of a book she was supposed to be writing." Supposed to be writing indeed! (And if the readers were disappointed, why has it continued to remain in print,



and sell so well? If the critics complained, why not quote some contemporary reviews?) Hitchman herself is supposed to be writing "an introduction to Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957)"--that's what the subtitle says. Instead, apropos of Gaudy Night, we get a catty and questionable two-page identification of a minor character with a friend of Sayers'; and the quotation of a long erotic passage in which "the tiresome Harriet" acknowledges her physical attraction to Wimsey, followed by Hitchman's coy comment: "That woman, whoever she was, certainly loved that man, whoever he was."

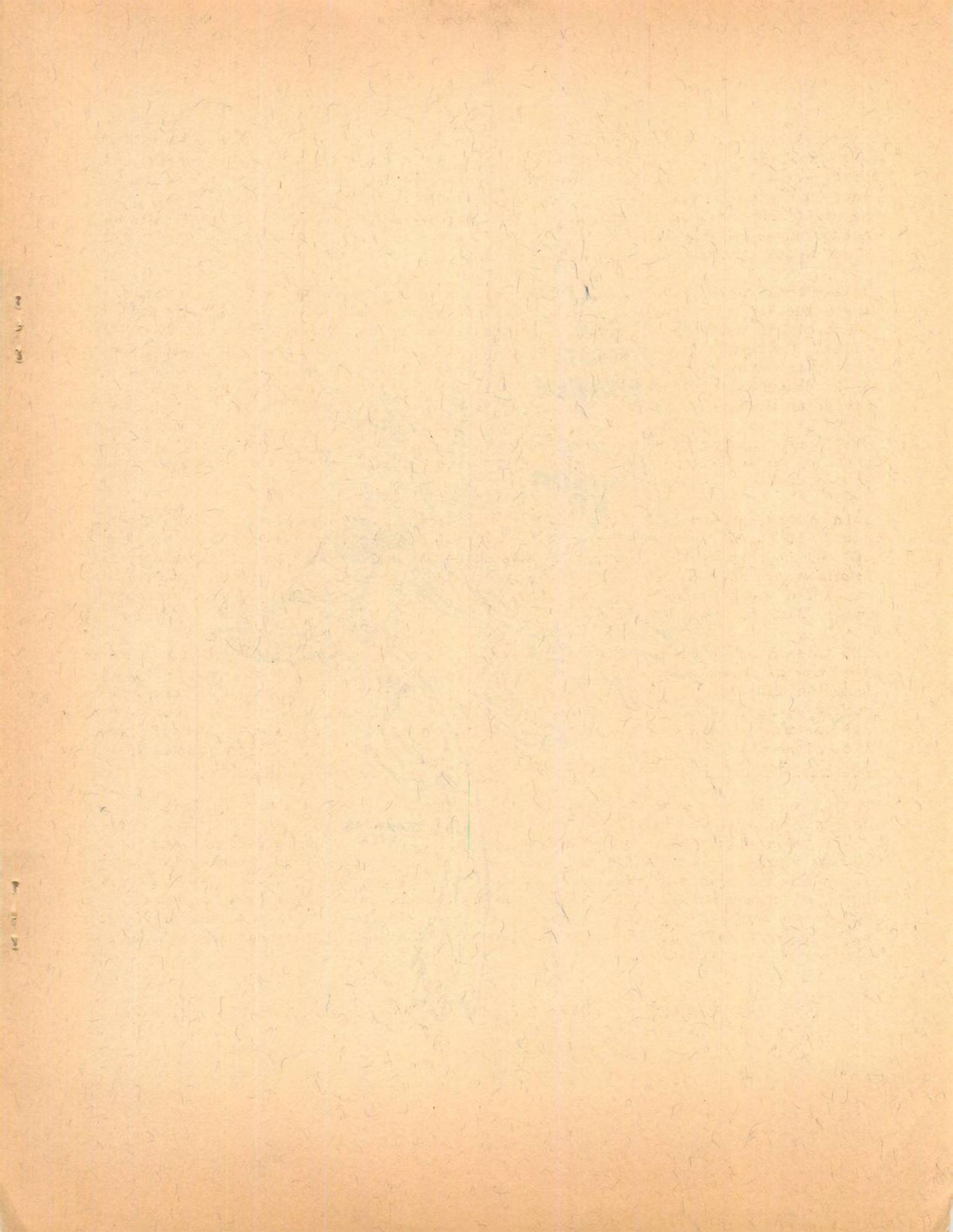
Well--"that woman", the "strange lady" of the title, seems to have been, reading between the lines, a strong shy, awkward, intelligent woman, "strange" only in a firm sense of her self and its worth, a refusal to subordinate that self to others' standards. Certainly she weathered the two crises the book reveals, with dignity and courage. Her marriage to "the late Oswald Atherton Fleming, the war correspondent," (as he is described inside each Penguin cover) was a mistake. Fleming invented his Christian names, his rank and his occupation, and let Sayers (and Wimsey) support him. Hitchman says that "it is suspected that his 'journalism' may have consisted mostly of propping up well-known Fleet Street bars." She does not verify the existence or non-existence of his rumoured cookbook, though surely this would have been easy enough.

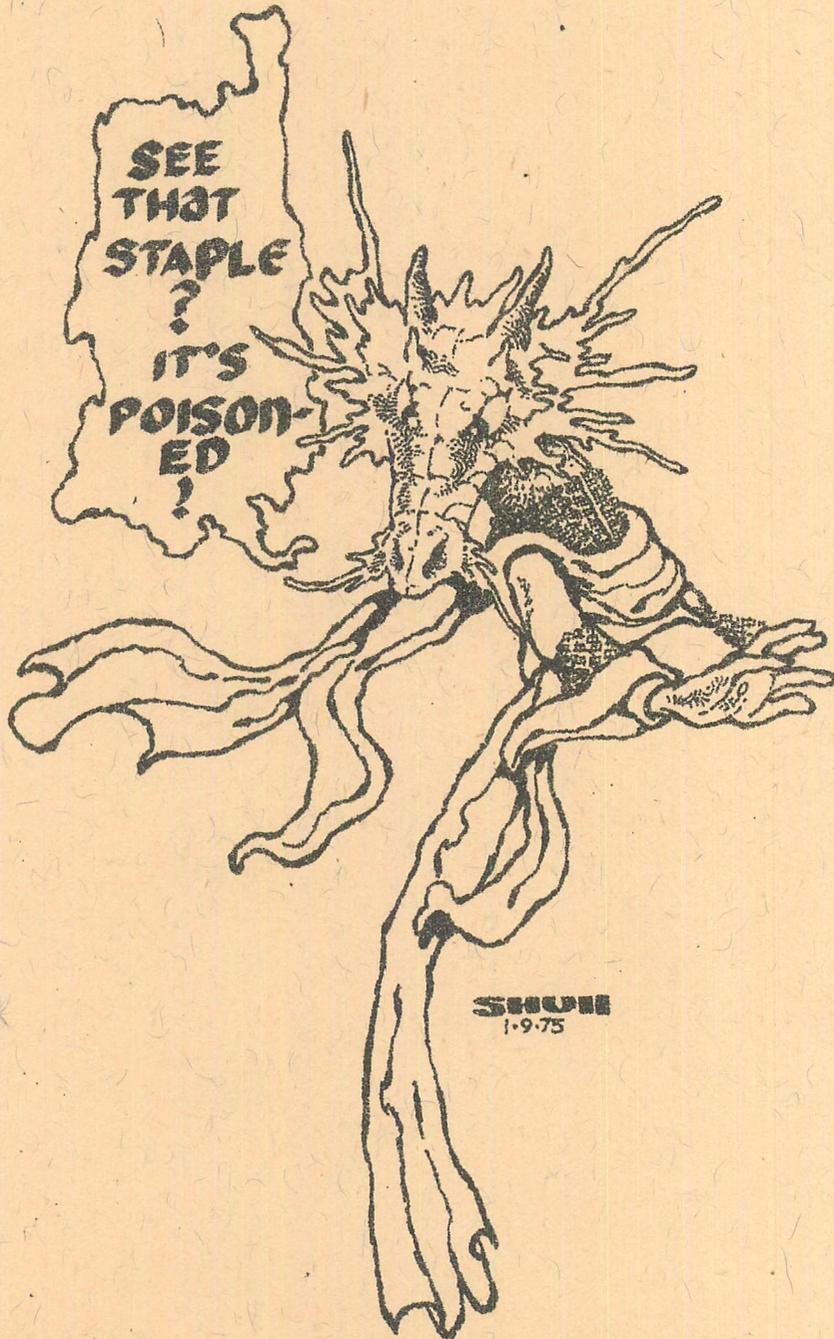
Furthermore, Sayers at age 31, two years before her marriage, bore an illegitimate son. "It is sad that both Dorothy and the child might possibly have been happier had she left it on the steps of the Foundling Hospital, close by her Bloomsbury flat," Hitchman comments. Instead she gave the child to an unmarried cousin to raise, supported two households all her life, but lived and died estranged from her only son. "Sad" is scarcely the word.

All this makes me admire Sayers also a person, as well as a writer. I wish I could say the same of Janet Hitchman, and the cheap product which she and the New English Library (a division of the Times Mirror newspaper chain) have rushed into print. Fortunately, as Hitchman notes in her preface, two Americans, a Swede and a German are all working on studies of Sayers. Until these appear you can always re-read Carolyn Heilbrun's excellent essay, "Sayers, Lord Peter and God," which appeared in The American Scholar and reprinted in the short-story collection Lord Peter.

Better still, re-read Sayers' own work. Hitchman opens Such a Strange Lady with an anecdote of a South African couple, bored at being shepherded around Oxford until their guide pointed out the bridge under which Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane became engaged. Immediately they became fascinated with Oxford, "gazing in awe at the blackened stones of the bridge, murmuring reverentially, 'So this is the very place.'" Speculations about possible human models, gossip about a woman named "Dorothy" whom Janet Hitchman never met, are really irrelevant. Successful fictional characters attain their own life in readers' minds; and Wimsey, Harriet and the rest succeed in these terms.

SUCH A STRANGE LADY by Janet Hitchman. London: New English Library, 1975.  
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