

STARLING

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NOTEBOOKLINGS

+ Hank Luttrell +

In the last issue of Starling I speculated that we might try to do another issue before the end of the year in order to beat the postage hike. Obviously, we didn't make it. As I indicated then, the main difficulty in getting issues out quickly is coming up with enough good material.

It isn't uncommon for one of Starling's regular contributors to try an idea for an article or column on us. Sometimes one of our readers thinks of a subject they would like to turn into an article for Starling, and queries us about it. Normally all these suggestions and ideas would just sit around in my files and gestate until the pieces were actually written, but since the "proposed" file seems a lot thicker lately than the "articles ready to publish" file, I thought I would share some of these proposals with you. I won't attach any by-lines to them, so the writers won't feel like I'm making unwarranted commitments for them. This is just to tickle everyone's curiosity, and if it serves as a timely prod to some of the contributors, then that is just an extra added bonus.

In this issue's letter column, Don D'Amassa briefly draws a comparison between the pulp magazines and all of the action-adventure paperback novel series that float across newstands these days. Well, as it happens one of our favorite Starling writers is thinking about doing a survey of these books, which will certainly be new territory to me, since I've never had the nerve to read one of them.

Also on some remote back burner is a series of articles about American humorists. Notably, Robert Benchley and possibly Thorne Smith and hopefully others. Our Great American Comics series, which Lesleigh began many years ago, is continued in this issue by Richard West. I hope that Lesleigh continues her series sometime, but for the moment she feels like she is about out of comics about which she is able to write. Richard's fresh blood is just what was needed. Another contributor has from time to time discussed a few topics which would make excellent additions to the comics series, but we'll believe it when we see it.

Some future issue might contain an article on the Menomonee Falls Guardian. That is an article I'm really looking forward to. Menomonee Falls is up on the north side of Milwaukee, right here in Wisconsin; the Guardian is a weekly collection of many of the best newspaper funnies, daily and Sunday, current and reprint. I was recently gifted a huge glob of back issues, pretty much completing my collection, and I've been reading them every chance since then. In case you were wondering, it is definitely not me who is planning to write this article -- which is why I'm looking forward to it.

Music is of course a perennial interest in Starling, and we are hoping to cook up lots of material about music in the near future. We have some particularly appropriate art on hand, and we do have several contributors who can be counted upon for some interesting music related articles. I'm not sure I have any of them pinned down to particular topics yet, but one of them I'm sure you will find electrifying, and the other will tap dance straight into your heart.

Did I hear someone mention movies? This is Madison, Wisconsin, home of dozens of 16mm film societies -- it would be unpatriotic for us not to have some movie articles. The only concrete rumor I can pass on, though, concerns 40's movies: Maria Montez, serials, Westerns, war movies and stuff like that.

I have another file of article ideas which might be called "outrageous." In it you might find a torn slip of paper with notes about the real story of what happened when W. C. Fields met Pancho Villa. There are lots of strange ideas in this file. . . Ronald Reagan should be president because he is so masculine, very weird.

With this issue of Starling comes a DUFF 1976 ballot. If there are a few folks on our mailing list who don't know what DUFF is, then the ballot should be reasonably self-explanatory. When the last issue of Starling came out, the ballot hadn't appeared yet. Since this issue is a little over-due, it is now late in the campaign, and the voting deadline is March 31, 1976. So this can serve as a reminder to those of you who haven't voted yet.

I think the least familiar of the Australian fans to most US fans is Christine McGowan. So it is a pleasure to have gotten a fanzine from her recently: The Hag and the Hungry Goblin. This fanzine has a distinct advantage over most of us poor amateur journals; it has at least two talented new artists. One is one Chris Johnson, who did a cover showing either the hag or Christine (I'm not sure which) typing away furiously while various goblin-sorts look on and give advice. The other relatively new artist is Christine herself, who does perfect little fillos and illustrations where ever they are called for. As an extra added bonus, there is an article from another DUFF candidate, John Alderson on what must be a favorite subject of his, cooking and eating. Lesleigh tells a story in her DUFF report about John's cooking -- when they were touring an Australian zoo, John had a recipe for every inhabitant, and gave his personal assurance that the dishes were excellent. (In case you were wondering, there are copies of Lesleigh's DUFF report left; buy them from us or Rusty Hevelin for \$1. And have you seen Leigh Edmund's DUFF report, Emu Tracks Over America? A fannish classic, even if the stuff he says about Madison does leave out all the good parts, like my one liners.)

Anyway, Christine is going to let us expand her US mailing list, and depending on how the Post Office handles her package, we might eventually have some copies to distribute.



In the mean time it would be a good bet to write to Christine McGowan at 4 Fulview Ct., Blackburn, Vic, 3130 Australia. Trade fanzines should be send to the Magic Puddin' Club, 259 Drummond St., Carlton, 3053, Vic. Australia.

Well, it does seem a shame to let our big old mimeograph just sit around practically all the time, doing nothing, when it could be publishing fanzines. Now, I consider the impulse to publish a fanzine rather rare, even in fandom. So I was surprised when some of the local sf fans decided to have a try. I mentioned the first issue in the last Starling. But publishing a second issue requires an even rarer impulse, and since then another Janus has appeared which is thicker, better and some of the typing mistakes were corrected. Lots of good stuff in this issue, and the third Janus is going to be better. The artwork (by Jeanne Gomoll of course) is all delightful, and all of the contents -- editorials, book reviews, film reviews, fiction, articles, and dreams -- communicate a strong sense of the personality of the creators, which is an important part of what I like in a fanzine.



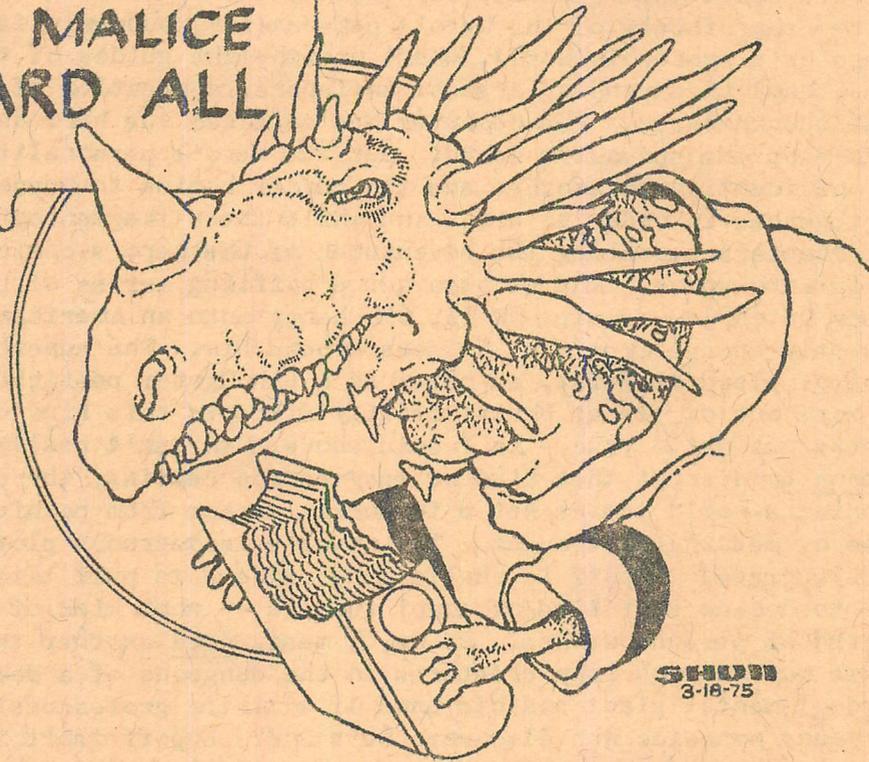
Make no mistakes, this is an ambitious crew here in Madison. It is all I can do to keep my weary old fannish bones from being swept along and working on their projects. For a while, it looked as if we were even going to put on a convention. I wouldn't recommend most of Madison's hotels or motels to anyone, since they tend to cater to either state legislators or university football crowds. But a University meeting facility with lots of meeting rooms and guest rooms looked perfect for a small regional sf convention. But as you know, the sf convention schedule is already crowded, as is the meeting schedule of the University of Wisconsin, and the two have yet to allow the planning of a full weekend science fiction con in Madison.

So now we've settled on having one Saturday's worth of programming and science fiction related speeches, panels and hoopla. We will probably charge a very minimum fee so we can afford to invite out of town guests and show some movies. The projected date is May 8, so if you plan to be in the neighborhood drop a note to Mad-Stf c/o Madison Book Co-op, 254 West Gilman, Madison 53703. You can also send 50¢ for copies of Janus, or trade fanzines to that address.

Last issue I announced Starling's policy on Trade-ins. I'm still willing to pay \$1 for any issue of Starling not listed as "in stock" on the contents page, provided they are in reasonably good shape. I'll also pay \$1 for any issue which is offered for sale on the contents page for more than \$1, since that higher price means I only have one stock copy left. Furthermore, I'll pay \$2 each for any of these issues of Starling: 5, 7, 13-18, 20, 22

We were talking about conventions, weren't we? I'm really looking forward to the Minicon this year, for many reasons, not the least of which is that they sure have a good line up of guests of honor. ## I always look forward to fandom's Festival of Summer, the Midwestcon. I don't think we'll miss any of those folks who decide to go to the New York SFExpo instead. ## And MidAmericon looms closer and closer, looking more and more like a real monster. . .the convention that ate Kansas City. It should be interesting, so I hope to see lots of you at one or all of these conventions.

WITH MALICE
TOWARD ALL



+ Joe Sanders +

Revising my VITA sheet, I struck the following phrase: "Book review column in STARLING since 1965." Strange thought -- a decade of "Malice." Strange. And I really just planned to write a few book reviews while I was in graduate school, to keep in contact with Stf. Strange.

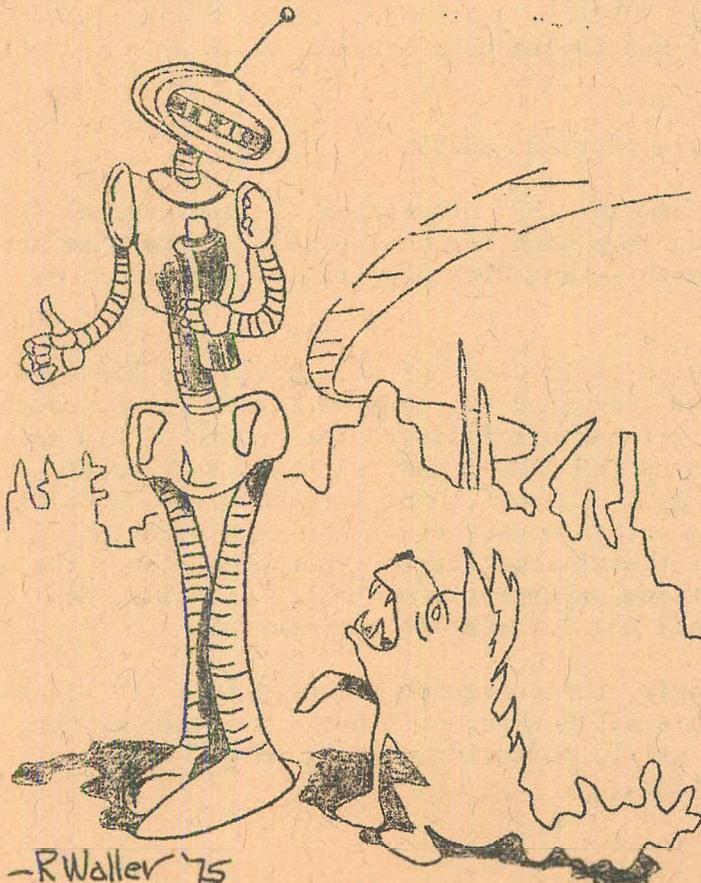
THE TRIUNE MAN, by Richard A. Lupoff. Berkley/Putnam; \$6.95.

More nostalgia. In a packet of snapshots from the 1957 Midwestcon, I find several shots of a 17-year-old Joe Sanders straining very hard for cool poses. There also are pictures of Sky Miller, Kent Moomaw, Doc Smith -- and Dick Lupoff, looking almost as straight as I look now.

That was a long time ago. I haven't seen Dick in 15 years or so. I enjoyed his (and Don Thompson's) ALL IN COLOR FOR A DIME, and I admired his book on Edgar Rice Burroughs, though I couldn't share his liking for ERB. I haven't followed the growth of his writing career very closely. So when I picked up THE TRIUNE MAN, with its dustjacket blurb beginning "In the great tradition of A.E. van Vogt, here is a colorful, complex galactic adventure in which the fate of the universe depends on the reintegration of one man's fragmented mind and in which a fictional comic-strip superhero becomes the real key to the galaxy's fate," my expectations were pretty minimal. Actually, MAN is quite an interesting novel, both in itself and for what it represents.

First of all, the novel itself. Astonishingly, the paragraph I quoted from the blurb is justified. Lupoff is doing all those things. However he's not doing them as van Vogt would. Most of van Vogt's heroes are stiff, posturing power freaks who look at all natural only in a fractured, alien setting.

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Lupoff tried to explain that character, to show how he represents a fragment of reality (which accounts for the fascination van Vogt's early work has). In MAN, Lupoff's schizophrenic hero is split into separate identities, one of whom is a paranoid nazi who, along with the other facets of the hero's personality, suddenly is transported to a gigantic computer's spaceship/world, where wraith-like guides of the computer's creation show him (them) an expanding area of antispace, a negation of life that eventually will engulf the universe. The computer has selected the hero as the one person who may be able to stop the spreading death. But the hero's personality wobbles unpredictably from one identity to another and the reader begins to wonder how he ever can pull himself together in order to act. And while these fragmented chapters flash by, we find other chapters narrating the adventures of the hero's comicstrip creation as he begins a trip into space. And we also get a baffling series of glimpses into the life of a young Dutch jew, during WW II, who hangs onto an American superhero comic book as his only escape from what he sees around him. The superhero narrative seems horribly out of place at first, as hokey as a Lin Carter pastiche. The WW II scenes seem even more out of place; brutal reality disrupts this kind of adventure novel. Well, that's not quite true. As I said above, MAN isn't really that kind of novel. Lupoff means to disrupt that kind of easy escape reading, the craving for an oversimplified, private world that's not a temporary escape from painful reality but an utter avoidance of meaningful thought. The novel's incongruous plot elements and choppy form are deliberate. Lupoff is challenging readers to pull things together for themselves -- to decide what kind of novel this is -- what kind of novel we want to read -- what kind of persons we are. Do we, I mean, need another tale of a barbarian slashing his way through icky creatures in the dungeons of a decadent palace? How about a supercool mental giant and his band of admiring grotesques? Or how about a put-upon young amnesiac who discovers he's God? Lupoff isn't ignoring the attraction of these daydreams, but he's saying: okay, fellows, enough is enough; there's a real world out there, too. The only way Lupoff's hero can do anything is, literally, to pull himself together, facing the things he's tried to forget as well as judging the wishfulfillment fantasies he's constructed to escape the pain.



Did I say that THE TRIUNE MAN was not just a laborious sermon -- that it is a well written and enjoyable novel. It is.

So I'd recommend the book. I do recommend the book for your pleasure. But I think it's also interesting not just for what it is but for what it represents, and my interest here is not altogether approving.

In EPOCH, Elwood and Silverberg's huge anthology of new stories, Alexei and Cory Panshin have a novélette entitled "Lady Sunshine and the Magoon of Beatus" that strikes me as an uncommonly interesting failure. The Panshins have expanded the story of Beauty and the Beast, decked it with spaceships and phallic symbols, written it in a pseudo-childlike style, and offered it as Naive but Profound Truth. I admire their nerve for trying the project and the integrity of

their effort, but I'm afraid the most important aspect of this story -- the thing that means the most to me, finally -- is the Panshins' purpose in attempting this unlikely/impossible thing. They have deliberately set themselves to write for a new age, the time after the death of the flowerchild-greening of America time. They feel that a new consciousness must be born. They've deliberately changed the kind of fiction they (or at least Alexei) had been writing, to aid that birth. The key word, above, is "deliberately." This is a very conscious decision on the Panshins' part. I'm afraid it shows. Yeats, I believe, spoke of the failure of literature in which the will does the work of the imagination. Unfortunately, even the best intentions count only if they animate the imagination, not if they control and push the story in ways, in worlds, where it would not naturally go.

I feel that way, to a lesser degree, about THE TRIUNE MAN. Lupoff is doing a number of difficult things very well. Moreover, I really would like to believe that things would work out as happily and as neatly as the novel says -- hero freed of the sub-personalities that had complicated his life earlier, now suddenly self-assured and masterful enough to take charge of his life and do good. Unfortunately, to reach that conclusion, Lupoff has to nudge his characters, jiggle the situation -- he has to make things come out as he wishes, to prove that people can take command of their lives. At the end, his hero gives up the superhero comicstrip that he's needed earlier, to work on "'a good realistic strip. One that deals with contemporary problems in a realistic manner.'" The blast of good feeling at the novel's end encourages us to believe that he'll make a go of it. By the same token, the hero winds up free of his hangups, the other facets of his grownup personality safely split off into their own bodies, the superhero dreamworld laid aside, and the hideous memories of the brutalized boy sunk into womblike oblivion. The conclusion encourages us to believe that the hero is now securely whole and sane. I don't believe either notion. I don't think that the audience for mass delusion this novel is pointed at is going to be capable of pulling itself together and appreciating more realistic fiction. I don't think that sanity consists largely of chopping off the inconvenient parts of the self.

I wonder whether Lupoff really thinks so. Portions of this book are so good that I wonder why he didn't tackle -- inside or outside the framework of a stf novel -- the problem of how a shattered human being really might take hold of his life in order to take moral action. In a sense, that is THE TRIUNE MAN's subject; in another sense, Lupoff backs away from seriously facing the issue -- from doing the very thing he suggests is needed in the new comic strip. This happens because, I think, he wants so hard to make his point; he feels that it's important to say; he thinks his readers need to hear it. So he forces it.

Too bad. Really too bad. I can understand the craving for something new, to replace the bland confusion in which we sprawl. I can understand how important it must seem to writers to offer hope. But as long as their stories ultimately seem contrived, the hope they offer is bound to feel phoney.

I'm not evaluating Lupoff's point itself, just the way it's embodied in fiction. I wish, very devoutly, that I could believe that the point justified manipulating characters. There was a time when I also believed that you could consciously manipulate your life, deliberately make yourself as cool or loving as you wished, plan your future. But that was too many years ago.

As a contrast to the above, here's a review I wrote last fall for the Cleveland Plain Dealer but which never was printed (stf is not one of the book review editor's high

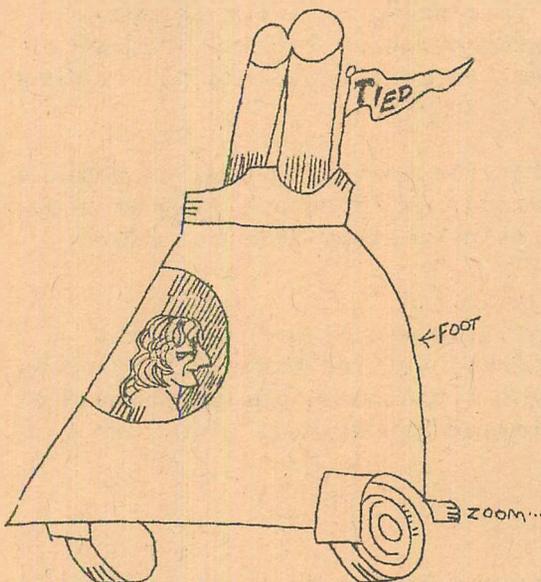
priorities). It's aimed at a general audience and is rather overcondensed, but I'd still like to give some praise to the book.

THE NEW IMPROVED SUN: AN ANTHOLOGY OF UTOPIAN SF, edited by Thomas M. Disch; Harper & Row, 208pp., \$8.95.

Utopia? A society in which people are both comfortable and free? We may find the idea absurd, preoccupied with government officials lying to us and themselves, cities slipping into chaos, and a cold winter coming on. Yet the dream of utopia still lives. We still tilt back in our chairs, musing: What if... .

After editing two anthologies of speculation about disasters that may await us, Disch has assembled these stories, mostly newly-written, to describe utopia in contemporary terms. Some are extremely attractive. James Keilty, for example, describes the isolated Asian city of Prashad, where everyone understands that he must cooperate to survive -- so they all do, joyfully. Brian Aldiss pictures one alternate world in which jews and arabs join to build a progressive state, and Joanna Russ shows another in which women creatively design their lifestyles. In these pieces, people generally feel happy because their lives are socially useful and personally satisfying. Even when the details of how they live differ from what we are accustomed to, their enjoyment of life is profoundly appealing.

Somehow, though, these stories are depressing. Utopia is possible, apparently, only in alternate time streams or in tiny, hidden communities. For such a society can exist only when people recognize that to get what they want they must join together unselfishly. That's not easy. More convincing is Charles Naylor's grim "Repairing the Office," in which a young woman takes revenge on a world that refuses to offer her a sense of community; her utopia is a private one, created at the expense of everyone else. Other stories, like M. John Harrison's "Settling the World" and Gene Wolfe's "The Hero as Werewolf" picture men alienated from utopia; the society may be good for its inhabitants, but the heroes cannot give themselves up to it. That's another sad thing about these utopias: To achieve them, we must believe in them; to be content, we must forego doubt. And we cannot do that.



We may have to settle for much less than the ideal. Disch himself offers a "serious joke" proposing that we devote our passions to building pyramids in Minnesota. But the anthology closes with a passage from H.G. Wells that reminds us again how attractive is the vision of Earth transformed. Despite our cynicism, we are moved by utopias. They reproach us for not trying harder to change the world, for not caring more. This book contains several such disturbing challenges.

The above review may seem to contradict what I said in my review of THE TRIUNE MAN. Not quite. Institutions -- even whole societies -- are much easier to change than people.

JAWBONE

The 1975 Jelly Troll Awards

+ Michael Carlson +

It used to be that I put out my own fanzine, which I called Jawbone, and which appeared as often as the vagaries of my travels would permit. Now that I am living in one place Jaw has slipped into temporary discontinuement, which means I've got to start writing locs again, and sending dollars to Geis (is that like coals to Newcastle?)

Probably the most popular feature of Jawbone, certainly the one that produced the most comment in letters, was my annual listing of the best things read and seen in the previous 12 months. Which was called the Jelly Troll Awards, since Jawbone was published by Sacred Troll Etchings, Ltd. So the first installment of this space which Hank and Lesleigh have so kindly offered will be given over to the 3rd First Annual Jelly Troll Awards.

I'd like to remind you that these cover only the books I read and movies I saw in the past year, and aren't presented as being the year's best anything. It's more just to let the people who know me, and even those who don't, get an idea of the inputs that are spurring my mind on, and my reactions to some of the same things they react to. They hopefully will inspire comment, but remember, they aren't supposed to be definitive. Except for me.

Reading

I. Statistics: In 1975 I read 194 books, not counting poetry volumes, which I usually attack in a random fashion. This was down from 200 of the previous year, and was probably affected in some manner by my return to school (I never would have read all those plays if I hadn't been taking a theatre of the absurd class, for example). The breakdown of the 194 volumes was:

Crime, mystery, and suspense:	74
Science fiction:	43
Non-fiction:	30
General fiction:	28
Plays:	14
Westerns:	3
Historical and Adventure:	2

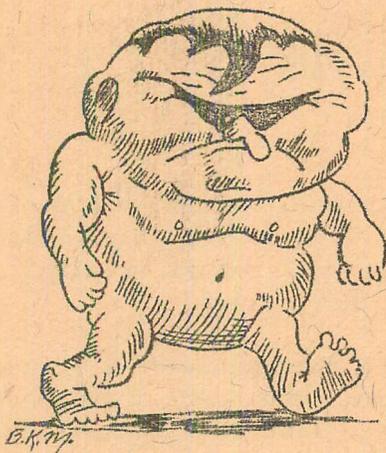
Of the 194 books, 129 I judged to be of more than average merit, something at least slightly more than a plain good read.

A few authors dominated the lists. I've mentioned all with 3 or more books:

Donald E. Westlake	10 (+2 as Richard Stark)
Brian Garfield	9*
Maxwell Grant	8 (Walter Gibson, Shadow series, for which I am a sucker)
Philip K. Dick	6
Colin Wilson	5*
Harlan Ellison	5*
Charles Runyon	6
Bill Pronzini	4

3 each: James McClure, Edward Albee, H.G. Wells, Jean Genet, Robert Silverberg (including two edited volumes, John D. MacDonald, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter.

(* = collaborations included)



As you can see, I went on a Westlake/Garfield kick; their books are rarely disappointing. The Shadow has provided me with a 55pp undergraduate paper and a 24pp graduate bibliography, so I refuse to feel shame for gobbling them up as fast as they come out. I'm still catching up with Dick, and closing in on Wilson. Runyon and Pronzini are both very solid mystery writers, who also do some sf.

II. Lists: Each book is listed, with its author and the original publication date. The ten best of the year I will print without comment, since each will be covered in its own section.

TEN BEST OF 1975

1. Another Roadside Attraction Tom Robbins (71)
2. Beautiful Losers Leonard Cohen (66)
3. The Day of the Locust Nathaniel West (39)
4. Memoirs of Montparnasse John Glassco (70)
5. Pages from a Cold Island Frederick Exley (75)
6. The Left Hand of Darkness Ursula LeGuin (69)
7. The Edible Woman Margaret Atwood (69)
8. Red Harvest Dashiell Hammett (29)
9. A Canticle for Leibowitz Walter Miller (59)
10. Dog Soldiers Robert Stone (75)

GENERAL FICTION

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Another Roadside Attraction Robbins | 8. The Wanderers Roger Price (74) |
| 2. Beautiful Losers Cohen | 9. Surfacing Margaret Atwood (72) |
| 3. The Day of the Locust West | 10. Fat City Leonard Gardner (69) |
| 4. The Edible Woman Atwood | 11. Sadness Donald Barthelme (72) |
| 5. Dog Soldiers Stone | 12. Up Your Banners Donald Westlake (69) |
| 6. The Southpaw Mark Harris (53) | 13. Lord Nelson Tavern Ray Smith (74) |
| 7. Horseman, Pass Larry McMurtry (61) | |

honorable mentions: Sex Diary of Gerard Sorme (UK: The Man without a Shadow) Colin Wilson (63); Miss America Daniel Stern (59); The Last Days of Louisiana Red Ishmael Reed (74).

I am more selective about my mainstream reading than any other category, except perhaps non-fiction. There were another six books worthy of mentioning as "bests", which would make a total of 22 out of 29, which is a pretty good average.

Robbins' book has been raved about by many many people; his new one is due soon. Cohen's reputation as a poet/songwriter has hurt his novels a bit, but BEAUTIFUL LOSERS is as good a novel that has come out of Canada in years. I finally read West's novel after seeing the film, to see if I understood why the film was doomed to fail. I did. Margaret Atwood puts two books in the list; she is a woman who can write, both poetry and prose. Powerful, yet controlled. Stone's DOG SOLDIERS is the book for our times, incredibly bleak, incredibly good. THE SOUTHPAW is the novel before BANG THE DRUM SLOWLY, which made last year's list; Harris uses baseball as a metaphor, as others have done, and it serves him well. The McMurtry was made into the movie HUD, and is better. Roger Price got a lot of publicity when THE WANDERERS first appeared; it deals with a gang in the South Bronx, 1962, when they still used zip guns instead of M-14s. FAT CITY is a tight, powerful novel. Barthelme's stories vary, but this collection is mostly good. UP YOUR BANNERS is a totally successful comic novel, a rare thing

these days (try Hjortsberg's TORO, TORO, TORO which didn't make the top 13 for another). And Ray Smith is a very talented Montreal writer whose book is an oddly, and effectively, structured novel.

Of these 13 books, 4 are by Canadians, 9 by Americans. And three (Robbins, Barthelme and Smith) could be included as sf with no great difficulty.

NON-FICTION

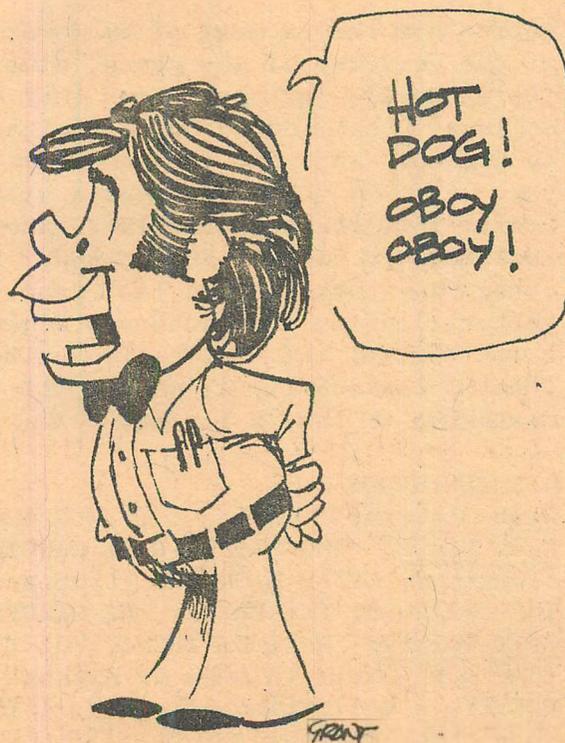
1. Memoirs of Montparnasse John Glassco (70)
2. Pages from a Cold Island Frederick Exley (75)
3. Olson/Melville Ann Charters (68)
4. Additional Prose Charles Olson (74)
5. Origins of the Sexual Impulse Colin Wilson (63)
6. Target Blue Robert Daley (73)
7. The Post Office Charles Olson (75)
8. A Sense of Measure Robert Creeley (72)
9. Hell's Angels Hunter Thompson (66)
10. Dashiell Hammett: A Casebook William Nolan (69)

honorable mention: Six Non-Lectures by Cummings (51); Shirley Temple by Jeanine Basinger (75); The Rolling Stone Reader (72); The Beat Generation by Bruce Cook (71).

Glassco's book is the best memoir of expatriate Paris I've read; the fact that the author dropped out of McGill to go there had nothing to do with my fascination with it. It is a beautifully understated and honest work. "Our amours, which were rather outré" indeed, eh Barbour? Exley's book is a sort of sequel to his brilliant A FAN'S NOTES, dealing with his inability to write a 2nd book and deals with Edmund Wilson's death. Charters' Kerouac biography was on this list last year; this earlier book is the first and only full length study of Olson yet in print. Limited but very good. ADDITIONAL PROSE contains Olson's "Bibliography On America" which makes it worthwhile right there. Wilson is still Wilson, always interesting, even if not right. Daley was a NYPD official in the Lindsey years; this book seems especially meaningful in light of NYC's problems now. Creeley writes about poetry, and Olson writes about his father, both very well. Nolan's study of Hammett is well-done, and HELL'S ANGELS is good because it shows the true Hunter lurking beneath the surface. And don't miss SHIRLEY TEMPLE, which Mel Torme raved about in the New York Times. Find out why she was the little sextop she was.

SCIENCE FICTION

1. The Left Hand of Darkness LeGuin (69)
2. A Canticle for Leibowitz Miller (59)
3. Grendel John Gardner (72)
4. War with the Newts Karel Capek (36)
5. Beyond Apollo Barry Malzberg (72)
6. The Reproductive System John Sladek (68)
7. Clans of the Alphane Moon Philip K. Dick (64)
8. The Cosmic Rape Theodore Sturgeon (58)
9. Breakfast in the Ruins Michael Moorcock (71)
10. The Iron Heel Jack London (07)



the second ten: 11) Soulmate by Charles Runyon, 12) We by Yevgeny Zamiatin (21), 13) Threads of Time (Benford, Simak, Spinrad) edited by Silverberg, 14) Vulcan's Hammer by Dick (60), Chains of the Sea, Silverberg, ed., 16) Flow My Tears the Policeman Said by Dick (74), 18) The Time Machine by Wells (1895), 19) Swan Song by Brian Stableford (75), 20) The Sodom and Gomorrah Business by Malzberg (74).

This was a good year for my quality of reading, mostly because I was lucky enough to sit in on Tom Disch's sf course at Wesleyan over the summer and then take sf for real with Darko Suvin at McGill. LeGuin and Miller's novels are both already classics in the genre, and the Capek novel should be; it's as clever a book as I've read in years. RENDEL seems to have been overlooked by everyone except Don D'Amassa; it's the Beowulf story told from a slightly different point of view. BEYOND APOLLO I think will be remembered as a very important sf novel; it is the Theatre of the Absurd transformed to science fiction. Sladek's book works well on a number of levels, and CLANS is one of my favorite PKDick novels. The Sturgeon is not his best, but is still plenty good; the Moorcock seems to set the stage for his Jerry Cornelius series. And THE IRON HEEL is an amazingly powerful novel that caught me very much by surprise.

CRIME, MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Red Harvest Hammett (29) | 6. Power Kill Charles Runyon (72) |
| 2. The Caterpillar Cop James McClure (72) | 7. Fly on the Wall Tony Hillerman (71) |
| 3. The Locked Room Sjöwall and Wahlöö (72) | 8. The Steam Pig McClure (71) |
| 4. The Gooseberry Fool McClure (74) | 9. The Hard-Boiled Dicks R. Goulart, ed. |
| 5. Kolchak's Gold Brian Garfield (73) | 10. Deep Cover Garfield (71) |

The second ten: 11) Dance Hall of the Dead by Hillerman (71), 12) The Prettiest Girl I Ever Killed by Runyon (65), 13) Snatch by Bill Pronzini, 14) Night Moves by Alan Sharp (75), 15) Somebody Owes Me Money by Donald Westlake (69), 16) The Way Some People Die by Ross MacDonald (51), 17) The Parallax View by Loren Singer (70), 18) Panic by Bill Pronzini, 19) Winter Kills by Richard Condon (74), 20) The Bite by Eric Corder (75), One Monday We Killed Them All by John D. MacDonald, The Fugitive Pigeon by Westlake (tie).

Notice how recent most of my favorites are; I suspect that, except for a few writers at the very top of the genre, other styles fade very fast, although I loved Raoul Whitfield's novels last year, and they are very dated. Hammett, however, will never date. McClure's books do to South Africa what Sjöwall and (the late) Per Wahlöö's books did to Sweden. And with the same level of quality. Garfield does large suspense novels very well; KOLCHAK'S GOLD deals with the lost treasure of the Czars; DEEP COVER with Soviet infiltrators; the last takes place in a sort of alternate universe which is continued in LINE OF SUCCESSION. POWER KILL was the best of the many assassination/conspiracy books I read last year. FLY ON THE WALL is political suspense, and even better than the same author's Edgar winner which is #11. The Goulart anthology was a joy for me; the hard-boiled writers are alternately brilliant or hilarious. Although the top ten quality is down a bit from last year, overall there were a lot of good mysteries in the 74 I read.

MISCELLANEOUS

Best Western: VALLEY OF THE SHADOWS Brian Garfield (70)

Best Play: WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF (Albee), THE LESSON (Ionesco), THE CHAIRS (Ionesco), AFTER MAGRITTE (Stoppard), THE MEAIDS (Genet), THE BALCONY (Genet), WAITING FOR GODOT (Beckett), THE CARETAKER (Pinter), THE BALD SOPRANO (Ionesco).

Best Poetry: MAXIMUS POEMS, VOL III by Charles Olson, EARLY BELECTED Y MAS by Paul Blackburn, four volumes of Michael Ondaatje. Also THE POETICS OF THE NEW AMERICAN POETRY, a collection of essays I flit through almost daily.

Worst Book Finished: GOING DOWN WITH JANIS. (I plead insomnia).

Films

- The Year's Best Images directed by Robert Altman (US 73)
2. Badlands Tarence Malick (US 73)
 3. The Godfather, Part Two Coppolla (US 74)
 4. The Phantom of Liberty Bunuel (FR 74)
 5. Hearts and Minds Davis (US 74)
 6. And Now My Love Lelouche (FR 74)
 7. The Magic Flute Bergman (SW 75)
 8. The Emigrants Troell (SW 72)
 9. The Yakuza Pollack (US 75)
 10. Shampoo Ashby (US 75)
 11. The Parallax View Pakula (US 74)
 12. Day of the Outlaw de Toth (US 59)
 13. Farewell My Lovely Richards (US 75)
 14. Day of the Locust Schleisinger (US 75)
 15. Lies My Father Told Me Kadar (CAN 75)
 16. Duck You Sucker Leone (IT 72)
 17. Lacombe, Lucine Malle (FR 74)
 18. Smiles of a Summer's Night Bergman (SW 54)
 19. Love and Death Allen (US 75)
 20. Young Frankenstein Brooks (US 74)

runners up: Willie Wonka and The Chocolate Factory (71 Stuart), Hickey and Boggs (72 Culp), Ruggles of Red Gap (35 McCarey), Ruling Class (72 Medak), Where's Poppa (72 Reiner), Mean Streets (73 Scorsese), Secrets of Women (53 Bergman).

The above were chosen from the films I saw on large screens, and for the first time, in 1975. I saw 91 films (including JAWS, yes), 75 of them for the first time. None of the 82 additional films I saw on TV are counted in the lists. A couple of special awards are in order, also:

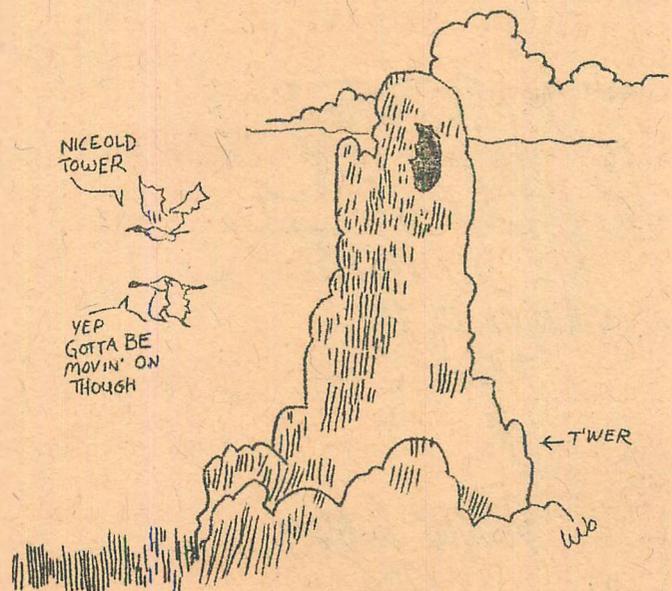
Worst of the year: Arnold. Runners-up: The Story of O, Barbarella.

Best porno of the year: Pussy Talk. Worst: Robin and Crusoe, The Story of O.

Images was the best film of the year by a wide margin; it's one of the best I've ever seen. I could tell stories about getting out of GodFatherII at 3am and not even realizing it had taken that long, or of suffering through 4½ hours of smoke and projector failures to see DUCK YOU SUCKER. But there's probably more common ground on this list than on the reading lists, so I think I'll leave it at that, except for the Troll awards, again taken only from those 75 films I saw:

Best director: Altman (Images), Bergman
 Best actor: Robert de Niro (GFII, Mean Streets) Martin Shëen (Badlands)
 Best music: Williams (Images)
 Best screenplay: Altman (Images)
 Best photo: Zsigmund (Images)
 Best Actress: Margot Kidder (Peter Proud Black Christmas) Susannah York (Images)

Oh yes, I saw The Texas Chainsaw Massacre too, and lived. That was my aesthetic 1975.



Words from Readers

Maggie Thompson, 8766 Hendricks Road, Mentor, Ohio 44060

Joe Sanders says that the series hero "must be somehow, however perversely, admirable." He then hedges it a bit by saying that he may be admirable "on terms that we would publicly reject. . .but he must convince us that his goals or the ways he pursues them are worth following at least vicariously. If we can't accept the man's values we can at least grove on the masterful way he goes after what he wants." Joe is hedging quite a bit, in fact.

We can think of two series in which the hero is virtually never admirable -- yet the series are grand ones. The first is the Augustus Mandrell series, and the second is the Flashman series.

Augustus Mandrell is a paid assassin. Period. Nothing cute, nothing charming. Oh, a masterful way he pursues his goal -- but not admirable, not even privately. Or do you think pulling the plug on an iron lung is admirable, even privately? The writing is admirable -- and it's by someone we don't otherwise know, Frank McAuliffe. The first book is Of All The Bloody Cheek and the second is Rather a Vicious Gentleman, both being Ballantine Originals. Unfortunately, there is a third volume, For Murder I Charge More -- in which McAuliffe got an attack of the cutes and put in all sorts of strainedly humorous comments by Mandrell. But the first two are polished works, very funny, concerning a completely unloveable villain.

Flashman is a bully, a coward, a lascivious brute -- the villain of Tom Brown's School Days. And Fraser has turned him into the star of a stunning series of books, presumably on the grounds that the period in which Flashy flourished as a young man was one in which all sorts of fantastic things were happening in the world. So Flashy sees an assortment of actions in India (The First Afghan War, the Sepoy Rebellion), Africa (as a slave trader), a Ruritanian kingdom, the Charge of the Light Brigade, etc., etc. And through it all he is the greatest scoundrel imaginable (almost) -- and comes out

smelling undeservedly of roses. The books are just plain loaded with historical information; Fraser must have absolutely steeped himself in the period and the countries involved. And they're incredibly funny. He's a vivid writer, and he's writing about memorable characters (Flashy follows the tradition of historical novels to the point of satire -- in that he meets all the important historical figures wherever he goes.)

But admireable? Oh, once in a while Flashman pauses a moment and does a decent thing (admitting ruefully in these, his memoirs, that he doesn't know why he did whatever decent thing it was he did). But not admirable. Not even in how he goes about

EVER

SIX SLY PEEKS
CAUGHT BY THE
TALE

⚡

DOUGLAS SOUTHWELL
1975

accomplishing whatever it is he does. For, like as not, what ever happens to him is by forces completely beyond his control and he is thrust, kicking and screaming, into whatever mess adds more laurels to his brow.

It may be for this reason that critical reaction to Royal Flash, the movie recently released based on the book of the same name, was so negative. When critics don't have the text there to explain to them that they're not supposed to be impressed by Flashy's cultivation, heroism and dash (since he doesn't possess any of those things, except dash when things are calm), the critics don't know how to react. (The movie wasn't up to the book -- but it's the most faithful screen adaption of any book we've ever seen. Maybe that's because Fraser did the screenplay.)

Rick Dey, 43 Grove, Highland Park, Mich.,
48203

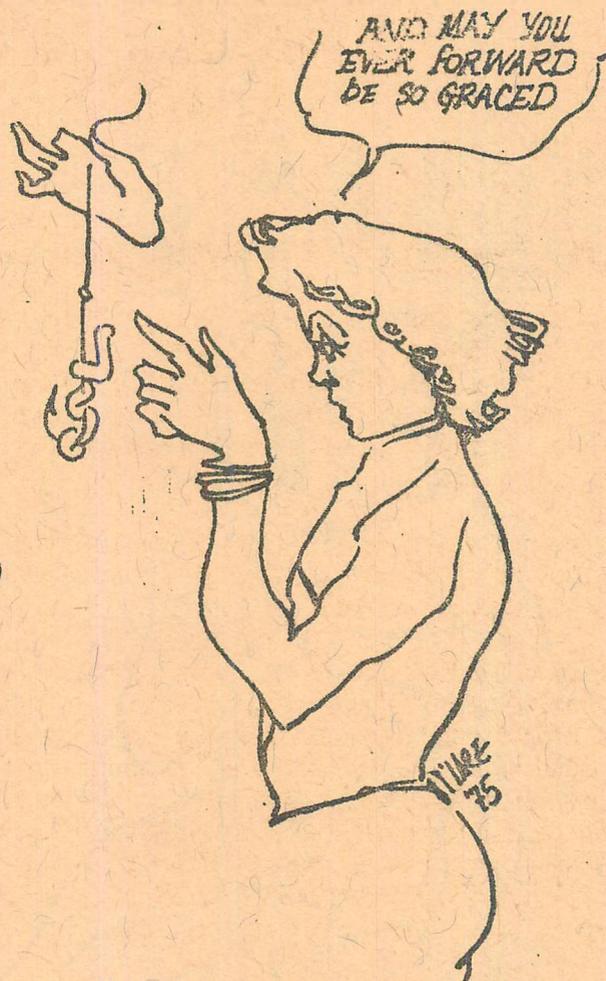
In an loc of mine which you ran in an earlier issue I complained that Buzz Busby's novel Cage a Man ended just as the hero launched an armada against an obnoxious enemy with the intention of whipping their collective ass. I have since discovered that either 1) the publisher split the narrative into 2 parts or 2) Busby decided to follow it up, for the Busby novel The Proud Enemy is now on the market and even in paperback, in which Barton, the hero of the previous novel, does indeed whip up on the dread Demu, but goes on to further adventures. I'm looking at the paperback now, but I haven't read it yet.

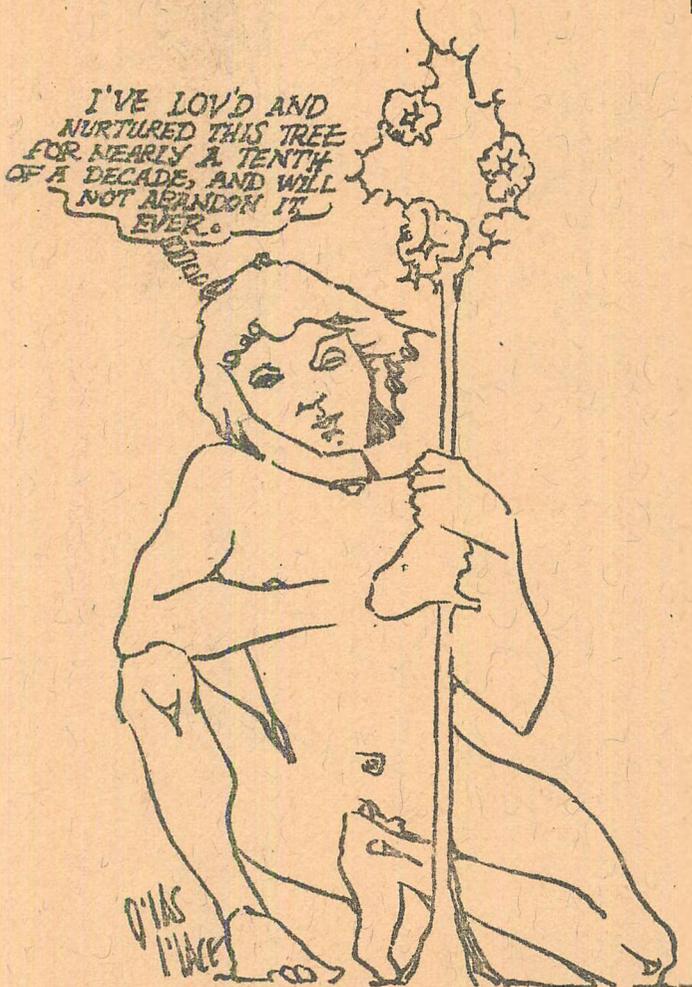
Lester Boutillier 2726 Castiglione Street, New Orleans, La. 70119

If it doesn't make sense to criticize the characterization in John Dickson Carr, then it doesn't make sense to criticize the characterization in pre-Campbell or even "golden age" stf. If it really isn't germaine to what Carr is trying to do, as Don D'Amassa says, then it isn't germaine to what Hamilton or Leinster or Williamson or Campbell or Gallun was trying to do.

I've always been bothered by the fact that characters in series rarely age much. Hercule Poirot seemed to. Dennis Nayland Smith and John Carter certainly did. And Tarzan lived to see his son Korak grow up. But these were exceptions. Ellery Queen even moved backward in time. Most of his adventures took place after his father supposedly retired from the force, if we're to believe The Roman Hat Mystery.

Clark Kent isn't predictable anymore. Julius Schwartz and Carmine Infantino must know that Superman will continue to sell well as long as the basics remain the same. So Clark's character has been explored more deeply, even modified, the same with Superman's. And i hear that the latest word out of New York is that Elliot Maggin and Cary Bates plan to have Lois Lane finally see some value in Clark Kent as a man.





In comics radical changes are the rule when a comic is in sales trouble. Changes are brought on to boost sales. And in Marvel comics even top selling characters are subject to major changes to make them more real, although sometimes the changes in Marvel characters are so sudden and illogical that they're actually very unrealistic.

Don D'Amassa, 19 Angell Dr., East Providence
Rhode Island 02914

I read somewhere (probably in a fanzine) that the series novels so popular today are really just another version of the Pulp heroes of the 1930's. So I went out and read some of them, and looked at a lot more, and that's absolutely correct. It tempts me to buy copies of them all, and lock them away in trunks, so that I can sell them twenty years from now for enormous profits.

Mike Glicksohn, 141 High Park Avenue, Toronto,
Ontario M6P 2S3 Canada

Enjoyed Al Sirois' delightful cover although I think it's somewhat out of character. Holmes would likely have said something like "Scoff if you will Watson, but. . ." as he'd never doubt the results of his own deduction. Still, that's just a quibble and doesn't detract from the effectiveness of the piece.

Although many of the characters Lesleigh discusses are unfamiliar to me, her article on series was extremely enjoyable to read. Like all readers I've a few series favorites myself and my pleasure in them is, I think, a combination of familiarity and the changes I see them undergoing. If Travis McGee was the same now as he was seven years ago I'd probably still be able to enjoy MacDonald's skill at writing and plotting complex mysteries but the changes in his characters as he ages, slows down, gets cautious add an extra dimension of enjoyment. A really good series should be more or less a fictional biography of the main character with each episode appreciated for itself and for its contribution to the whole story.

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

Jim Turner's tribute to Rex Stout was the high point of the issue. Jim once more employed his amazing ability to write in another author's style (who can forget his Lovecraftian "The Call of Oxydal"?) but this time it was a tribute rather than a lampoon. A wonderfully written piece of homage to an author I used to greatly enjoy. Jim's piece was a vivid demonstration of the fact that while an author may die, his creations will live beyond his days as a demonstration of the mark his writings have left on the lives of his readers. Archie and Nero will still be present on the newsstands but Rex Stout will be missed.

Jim Turner is a damn fine writer who should write much more than he does.

Your series article was particularly enjoyable in that I read it in the same period ^B in which I read Ted White's article on series characters in Science Fiction Review. Ted's piece dealt with the problems of other authors invading the private fictional worlds of another author. Both your piece and his serve to compliment one another and I hope your readers get the opportunity to read both.

There are few things more upsetting than to learn that a certain character who has captured your imagination appears in only one book. It seems like such an injustice. For example, despite the movies, Nick and Nora Charles were in only one novel. Yet so many more cried out to be written. The same is true of Sam Spade. Why oh why did Dashiell Hammett chose the weak Continental Op as his series character rather than Mr. Spade or the Charleses?

rich brown, 2916 Linden Lane, Falls Church, Va. 22042

Grant Canfield's article on the violent world of Parker (and his follow-up in Starling 32) was quite well done; I'm an avid Westlake fan. I think there were a couple of things he missed -- only "think," because Starling 31 has already been filed upstairs and I'm too lazy to go up and check.

As I recall, Canfield pointed out that two of Westlake's comic caper novels, The Hot Rock and Bank Shot were takeoffs on Parker novels -- the same basic idea, but for laughs rather than straight. In the third book in that comic series, Westlake assembles the same cast of characters: Jimmy the Kid is the title. It both is and is not a takeoff on a Parker novel. The gang decides to use, as their "blueprint," a paperback novel entitled Child Heist, which begins "When the guard came to open the cell, Parker said. . ." (The book is identified as being "by Richard Stark" -- but as far as I know, there is no such book in reality.)

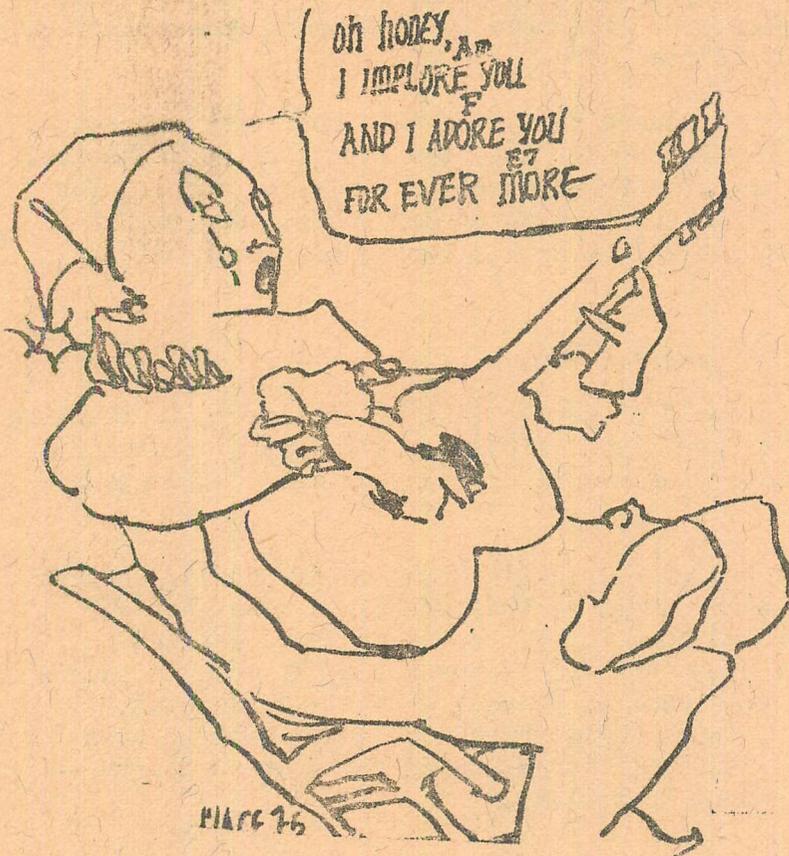
I also can't recall if Grant mentioned Westlake's other series (written under the by-line of Tucker Coe), about a disgraced cop turned private detective. There are (to my knowledge) only four books in the series so far: Kinds of Love, Kinds of Death; Murder Among Children; A Jade in Aries and Don't Lie to Me.

One other thing, which has to do with Westlake (and not the Parker series). In that Take One interview which Grant mentions in his follow-up letter, Westlake speaks of the books he's written that he's proud of. He confirmed a suspicion of mine -- that he is actually the "vibrant J. Morgan Cunningham," author of Comfort Station -- but he also surprised me with the revelation that he was Curt Clark, author of Anarchaos (Ace F-421). I knew he'd written sf, but I was surprised that Westlake considered it a good book.

Anyway, my thanks to Grant for writing about one of my favorite authors and one of my favorite author's best characters.



Harry Warner, 423 Summit Ave.,
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740



Juanita Coulson wrote splendidly but I'm disappointed in one way. She fails to try to explain why these particular settings and characters became obligatory for the gothics, just how those special characteristics of the gothics fit so neatly into what so many women want to read. The menace in the typical gothic, the suspense which the heroine must suffer through, and so forth are all slightly disguised versions of basic elements in almost every type of fiction, the same elements that predominate in the soap operas and Jane Austen's novels (written for a class and generation for whom spinsterhood would be as terrible as anything which a gothic heroine might encounter) and with a change in sex for protagonist, the typical Ziff-Davis Amazing fiction. But it's the fascination exercised by the ancient, huge houses and the one lighted window in the picture of the structures on the cover and those other special attributes of the gothic which I can't comprehend.

Another question might be: why is the gothic mostly limited to the printed page? If the paperback gothics sell so well, why aren't there several gothic-type daytime serials on the tube and enough gothic movies to permit all these women to see and hear what's happening in a genuinely huge house blown up on a screen?

Dan Marlowe's letter makes me feel a little better. Maybe someone should create a genre of fiction specifically for professional writers, which would cater to what we've suffered at the hands of editorial whims and would give us catharsis, no matter whether our problems have arisen from newspaper writing or mystery and suspense books or even fan history manuscripts, a cryptic conclusion to a sentence which I may or may not want to elucidate later.

His Last Waddle by Jim Turner was a touching tribute to Rex Stout, the kind of in memoriam that I believe he might have liked. It saddens me to think that I once had a chance to meet Stout and didn't snatch it. He was in Hagerstown many years ago as part of a troupe which the United World Federalists had organized to dramatize their message. I knew he was an author, and I was quite startled by the beard that he was wearing a dozen years or more ahead of the beard era. But that was a tumultuous night, because the UWF production created much opposition from local veterans' groups, a law enforcement agency copied down license numbers of people who had parked their cars near the auditorium, and there was a threat of a real melee in the midst of the evening until Hagerstown's super-conservative, super-patriotic leader startled every local person in the audience into paralysis by getting up and urging peaceful listening to these statements, no matter how many people disagreed with them.

So I didn't get a chance to talk with Staut while trying to cover all that for the newspaper, and it wouldn't have mattered particularly, because I didn't read any of his mysteries until several years later when someone gave me a whole stack of them to read while I was immobilized in traction for a broken hip. I enjoyed them despite a suspicion that my future mobility might be as restricted as Wolfe's. ²⁰

Bob Vardeman, P.O. Box 11352, Albuquerque, N.M. 89112

As to the Gothics, I guess I'm just not able to judge those properly. Juanita's article did give some insight into the types that would enjoy such incredibly imprisoned plots, though. I picture the same types reading true confessions, a grade upwards in explicitness.

The nuances are probably ineffable but maybe Juanita could pass along how she can tell if a man is the author of a gothic. I read Gene DeWeese's Carnelian Cat (in the Birthstone series) and it was identical to any of a dozen others I've come across (with the notable exception of Curse of the Conculens -- that's a minor classic, not of the Gothic, but of humor.)

I remember when pbs were 25¢. But then I dote on money. Paying \$1.50 for trash making the rounds today appalls. Seeing Ace reprinting halves of doubles for \$1.25 makes me shudder. Finding books that don't run 40,000 words selling for \$1.25 seems more of a sin than a crime. Perhaps this is one reason I'm getting more and more selective in my buying and going to 2nd hand stores.

Glad to see you mentioning Chad Oliver's stuff. His writing has a rare quality about it. A quietness, a realness, that just doesn't come across when other writers try it. His situations start out as believable commonplace and go to believable alienness.

Richard Labonte, 64 Marlborough Ave., Ottawa K1N 8E9, Ontario, Canada

Yesterday I read Juanita's Unto the Last Generation, as part of a survey of the first 18 Laser books I'm doing for the newspaper. She's done a neat job of transferring her gothic formula to the sf field; it was a quick, fun read, one of the few in the series I've finished.

I liked Juanita's comments on writing as a game. It works the same way in newspapers, at least at The Citizen. When I was reporting, the goal was to get some ideas -- to be honest, some bias -- past the city editor. Now that I'm at the city editor level, I find myself almost unconsciously playing the game on the other side of the net, or whatever. Have to make an effort not to edit a story so it reads as if I wrote it -- something many bad editors do. My worst moments come when I fill in as business editor. Hard not to tamper, there. So many lies, so much predigested poop from so many pompous, selfish and intolerant businessmen. How's that for objectivity?

Denny Lien, 2408 S. Dupont Ave., #1, Minneapolis, MN 55405

It's a debatable point whether or not the Avon Equinox format is "nicer" than mass market paperbacks, I think. I've never cared for the large "quality" pb format myself; small paperbacks take up less shelf space -- a point of importance to apartment dwellers like me who are also compulsive book buyers -- and are sturdy enough if treated with the care I instinctly give all books ("there are even margins in case you want to scribble while you read" -- horrors!). But as you note, the Equinox editions are aimed toward the college trade, not toward thee or me.

I recall LOCUS a year or more ago indicating that the Piper copyright logjam had

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broken and that someone -- Pyramid, I think -- would be reprinting both Little Fuzzy and The Other Human Race, plus providing first publication for the third Fuzzy book. But I don't recall ever seeing anything else about that, and now Hank says it is apparently to be Ace and the first book only. Fandom badly needs a Rumor Central to sort and index these things (alphabetizing by initial Word of Mouth?). Anyway, I hope someone does in fact do a reprint. (Does anyone know if Piper's mystery novel, Murder in the Gun Room, is any good? I've never seen a copy, and was asked by an Australian Piper fan I met -- Keith Curtis -- to find a copy if possible.)

I wonder a little about Juanita's assertion that "The constant reader, female variety" can always tell when a gothic author is male -- mostly because it seems impossible to prove. If true, she might let me know whether "Lydia Belknap Long" is really Frank B. Long or his wife, so I'll know how to file the gothics under that byline in my own collection (other than in the circular file, which is the obvious but cynical response.)

The day before I read Juanita's column, I picked up a copy of More Ghost Stories, a Lantern Press paperback reprint of A. L. Furman's hardcover anthology, More Teen-Age Ghost Stories. (Who wants to read about a teen-age ghost?) I was made slightly sick by the backcover blurb, which uses such promising descriptors as fantastic, supernatural, spooks, demons, phantasmagoria, eerie and spine-tingling -- only to close by promising that "there is a natural and scientific reason for each ghostly incident." I'm fond of an occasional double-cross of this sort (Jules de Grandin and Carnacki both solved an occasional mundane mystery which at first seemed supernatural, and knowledge of this possibility spiced up both series as a whole for me), but an entire book of them? Who, I thought, would be attracted by such a blurb? Juanita's notes give me the answer: what we have here is a teen-age anthology for budding gothic readers. I'm still slightly sickened, but at least now I know why.



I recall the two Moonmen in Rocky & Bullwinkle as "Gidney and Cloyd. I won't swear as to correctness of spelling though.

+As everyone knows by now, Ace has
+indeed reprinted Little Fuzzy. What
+follows isn't a letter of comment,
+but it would have been if it hadn't
+instead been published in Inferno 9
+by

Paul Skelton, 25 Bowland Close, Offerton,
Stockport, Cheshire, SK2 5NW England

I'm not sure why I should rush to help Terry Hughes when he won't trade me MOTA, but for his enlightenment I will reveal that the names of the two moon-men in the old "Bullwinkle" cartoons were Floyd and Gidney. I remember this so clearly because I was convinced at the time that not even a cartoon moonman would have a name like Gidney and so sat with my ear pressed right against the TV speaker whenever the show came on.

+Well that settles that. --hl

WE ALSO HEARD FROM

Clay Kimball: "The original title for Run Lethal by Westlake was The Handle and there is a 1st title in the Grofield series -- Lemons Never Lie. As far as I know this has only appeared in hardcover." Roger Vanous: "Al Sirois' cover was enjoyable. It's been done before, of course, but never with a chicken and a five foot carrot. It got me off on a Sherlock Holmes kick -- so much so that I read The 7% Solution. ##It was fascinating to see how gothic-writing fits in with most other things -- it's a game. Almost everything is a game. The college/grad school/teaching bit is all a game. So is managing an Arthur Treacher's Fish & Chips."

Rod Snyder: "Juanita's article was my 2nd favorite, even though I've never read a gothic in my life. It seems so amazing to me that people can just keep on reading that stuff over and over. A publisher might be able to switch covers around on the books before release, to see if anyone noticed." +I have a friend who reads lots of Harlequin Romances, and she is always annoyed when she realizes that she's read a book before. Some people like books with mansions & one lighted window; some people prefer books with rocketships on the covers --HL+

Laurine White, Carl Bennett, Wayne Macdonald, Martin Morse Wooster, Sheryl Birkhead, Mae Steklov, Ross Pavlac, Al Sirois, Harry Bell, Alan Sandercock, Nicholas J. Polack



+ + + + +

Back in Starling 31, I ended up my editorial with a mention of a remarkable book titled "Pursuing the Porcelain Pirates with Motives" by Douglas Lovelace. We've been publishing Doug's artwork (under one by-line or another) for almost as long as we've been publishing Starling, so it goes without saying that we like his work a lot. And the end of this letter column is a particularly good spot to mention the book again, since it has featured a delightful series of drawings by Doug, similar in style to the work in the book (which is a big one, by the way: 32 pages which measure about 11 x 15 inches). The address I printed for Doug in that earlier issue turned out to be wrong by the time it was in the mail, so if you wrote him and didn't get a reply, that was the reason. Also at that time I didn't recall the price of the book, which is \$5 (\$6 overseas) postpaid. Write Douglas Lovelace, 425 Coolville Ridge, Athens, OH 45701. --HL

A POSTSCRIPT

Gilt by Association

+ a review of "Farewell, My Lovely" +

Raymond Chandler wrote six novels, all dealing with the private detective Philip Marlowe. (A seventh, final novel exists in the form of a converted screenplay). All six novels have been filmed, some as many as three times, with varying degrees of success. None, however, has ever succeeded in portraying Chandler's world in the manner in which he himself envisioned it. THE BIG SLEEP gets the mood pretty well, but Bogart isn't Marlowe; MARLOWE gets the character fairly well, although too spoofy, but misses the setting entirely. Others miss by wider margins.

FAREWELL, MY LOVELY is the third film based on Chandler's third novel (his own personal favorite). It is the first of the films to carry the correct title, and is not only the best of those three, but comes closer than any previous effort to duplicating Chandler's actual written world. There have been better Marlowe films (The previously mentioned BIG SLEEP, for example) and better Chandlerian films (CHINATOWN). But for anyone who appreciates the consummate stylist of the hard-boiled writers, this film will be a treat.

The script by David Z. Goodman (STRAW DOGS) stays as close as it can to the original plot and style. The film's Marlowe narrates the story in voice-overs, often repeating the novel's best lines, and sometimes adding new ones that imitate Chandler with varying degrees of success, to repeat a good cliché.

The setting, the city of Los Angeles, is just as important to the feel of a Chandler story as the dialogue. LA has "all the personality of a wet paper cup" to quote Chandler; it is a gaudy world of neon and shadows, of illusions and dangers. John Alonzo's photography takes the LA he shot in Chinatown one step further; the entire film exudes an uncomfortable richness. The production design is faultless; Dean Tavoularis creates a world that complements the photography perfectly, as he did on GODFATHER II, his best work to date.

With all this production talent it is a shame the direction isn't more inspired, but Dick Richards seems content to let his good actors work with these good people and not get in the way himself. This is an unusual attitude for a director of Chandler to take (remember Robert Montgomery's subjective camera in THE LADY IN THE LAKE?) especially after Altman's LONG GOODBYE, about which more later.

The center of the film is Robert Mitchum's portrayal of Marlowe, and he comes very close at times to capturing the essence of Chandler's modern white knight/fallen angel. The problem with interpreting Marlowe on film is that he is so much a personal fantasy of Chandler's, so integrated to the dangerous world and the beautiful prose,

+ by Michael Carlson +

that it is hard to get a realistic image of him, the kind of image that the camera demands. **FAREWELL, MY LOVELY** begs much of the question by concentrating on Marlowe's tiredness (a little prematurely, by the novels), thus Mitchum plays Marlowe for a bit more of a sad sack than is true. But he comes closer than Bogart, Gould, Powell, either Montgomery, Garner or the rest to being Marlowe.

Charlotte Rampling has the female lead, and she is a fascinating woman, who should go on to many fine roles. Here, however, she is put in a Lauren Bacall imitation, which cheapens both her and the film. When she drops that, she is very good, whoever had that bright idea should be strangled with celluloid. Sylvia Miles does her usual good job as her usual fallen woman, and John Ireland is a strong Nulty, the cop whose honesty is a major factor in the film.

The show is stolen, however, by Jack O'Halloran in his first film role, as the ex-con Moose Malloy, who hires Marlowe to find his ex-girl Velma, whom he hasn't seen in seven years. Malloy is a hulking giant of a man, with some strange sides to his personality, and O'Halloran milks this good role (also done well once by Mike Mazurki) with impressive ease.

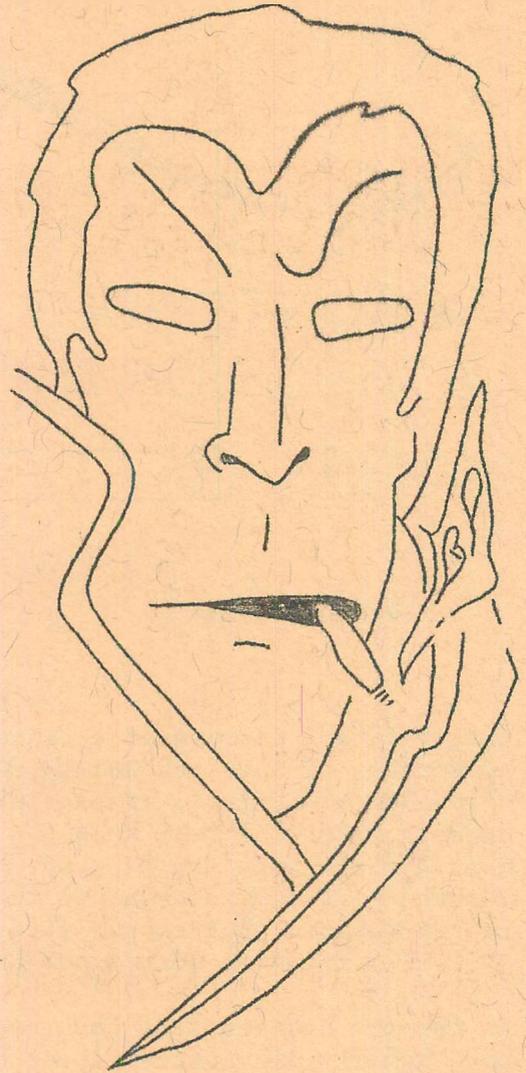
The mystery itself is done well enough to hold your attention. And in a way it's odd that this film, which plays the mystery straight, could be so good, coming so soon after Altman had in effect proclaimed that Marlowe had no place in the 70s. Now it seems the 70s would rather be in the 40s themselves, and the period piece is very much alive. Especially one as good as Chandler.

If you've ever encountered Chandler before, you know how good he is. It is a shame that that quality has never been fully transferred to the screen, but, as I suggest above, that may well be impossible. In the meantime here is what Chandler said:

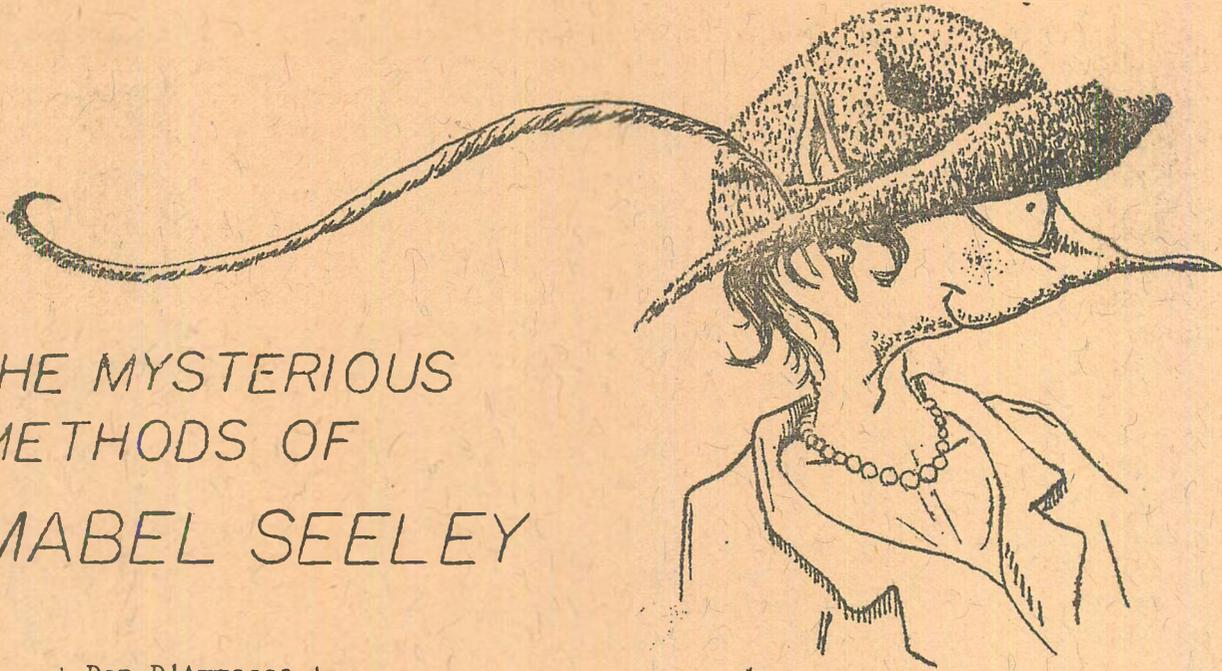
There are no vital and significant forms of art; there is only art, and precious little of that. The growth of populations has in no way increased the amount; it has only increased the adeptness with which substitutes can be produced and packaged.

(from The Simple Art of Murder)

This film may not be art, but it is well produced, well packaged. And its source is art, so at least by association, it makes it.



THE MYSTERIOUS METHODS OF MABEL SEELEY



+ Don D'Amassa +

Long before I discovered science fiction, I was a mystery fan. I was following the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Thorndyke, Max Carrados, Gideon Fell, Henry Merrivale, Hercule Poirot, Arsene Lupin, Fleming Stone, Kenneth Carlisle, and Anthony Gethryn years before I knew the difference between a blaster and a neuron whip. When I first began reading SF, my mystery library suffered from lack of support, and for the next few years, only the occasional John Dickson Carr found its way into my possession. But as the first flush of enthusiasm for my new discovery paled, mysteries began to accumulate once again.

In the two decades that have passed since I bought my first mystery -- THE BAT by Mary Roberts Rinehart -- there have been some changes. The field of mystery suspense fiction has begun to schism into more or less distinct sub-genres, just as has science fiction. Where the latter has spawned such entities as the HPL circle, Perry Rhodan fandom, and the Burroughs fans, so now does the mystery field have its distinct schools of writing. They are not radical new departures, but polarizations of tendencies that existed in some form throughout the history of the genre. The classic traditional detective story, practiced and popularized by Arthur Conan Doyle, R. Austin Freeman, Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, John Dickson Carr, Rex Stout, Philip MacDonald, and others still persists, but it is no longer unchallenged as the dominant school of mystery writing.

Dashiell Hammett did a great deal to separate the tough detective story from the rest of the field, but Sam Spade was only the first of many cast in similar molds -- Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, Ross MacDonald's Lew Archer, and John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee, to name just a few. In the last couple of years we've seen the emergence -- in fact, a flood -- of the tough non-detective, the series hero, acting outside the law, the new pulp heroes, such as Don Pendleton's Executioner, and others like Paul Edward's The Expediter, Paul Kenyon's The Baroness, Sapir and Murphy's The Destroyer, Andrew Sugar's The Enforcer, and many others. Somewhere between the two sides of this coin lies the spy novel, as practiced by Ian Fleming and Edward S. Aarons.

Police procedural novels have been with us for some time. Evan Hunter continues to write 87th Precinct stories as Ed McBain, and the late John Creasey created a memorable series about Inspector Gideon under the name J.J. Marric. I'd be tempted to include Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason books in this category as well. And then there are the gothics.

Neogothics, really, for they fail to carry on the true gothic tradition in most cases. The craze for gothic romances has produced everything from the quality work of Mary Stewart, Victoria Holt and Dorothy Eden to the pedestrian trivialities of Dorothy Daniels, and Michael Avallone (under his dozen or so pennames). Possibly the only good thing to come out of the overwhelming popularity of this last group is that it has inadvertently brought back into print many novels not properly a part of the sub-genre, but which can be marketed as such. Many of these have been true supernatural novels, usually long out of print, such as LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM and LADY OF THE SHROUD by Bram Stoker, RAVENS' BROOD by E.F. Benson, and THE UNINVITED by Dorothy MacArdle; others have been top quality murder mysteries, such as THE UNFORESEEN by Dorothy MacArdle, THE ANGELIC AVENGERS by Pierre Androzal, and many novels by Mary Roberts Rinehart, Ethel Lina White, Norah Lofts and Mabel Seeley.

Mabel who? Seeley is not among the best known mystery writers. She wrote only seven mystery novels, scattered over nearly twenty years of writing. No two books share a common character, so there is no detective's name to hang a memory tag upon. Seeley wrote traditional whodunits, but never with detectives in them. Her central characters were usually competent, intelligent women -- usually curious beyond the bounds of caution or common sense. The seven mysteries were, in order of appearance, THE LISTENING HOUSE, THE CRYING SISTERS, THE WHISPERING CUP, THE CHUCKLING FINGERS, ELEVEN CAME BACK, THE BECKONING DOOR, and THE WHISTLING SHADOW. Of these, all have appeared in paperback except -- so far as I have been able to determine -- for the third and sixth. She has also written several contemporary and historical novels, including WOMAN OF PROPERTY and THE STRANGER BESIDE ME.

The lack of a detective in Seeley's work is not the only unusual point. She was not enamoured of the locked room mystery, and there is never any indication of possible supernatural agencies at work. Her menaces are all flesh and blood menaces, people motivated through greed, hate, revenge, or other reasons. Her murderers always lurk in the wings, waiting to kill again if necessary for the furtherance of their ends or the protection of their identity. So how does Mabel Seeley infuse each of her novels with suspense? They are indeed suspenseful. She uses a combination of several methods, all extracted from the mystery writers' arsenal; foreshadowing, both overt and covert, actual narrative event, grotesques, and theory shaping.

Foreshadowing is a common ploy in mystery fiction of the traditional school, done to absurd lengths in the gothic school. Each of Seeley's novels literally opens with a dose of overt foreshadowing, with the heroine musing something similar to: "Had I but known at the beginning of my visit the significance of Mrs. Tuttle's lisp, the rust colored stain on the front step, and the intact mummified human hand in the refrigerator, I would have fled straightaway from the house." Periodically, the narrator stops the action for similar brief asides during the novel, at points where the author suspects our interest might be lagging a bit.

There is covert foreshadowing as well. These are subtler hints, but ones that should be picked up immediately by experienced mystery readers. The seemingly unrelated murder of a neighbor or the mysterious closet in THE LISTENING HOUSE, for example, or the handful of spent cartridges on the island in THE CRYING SISTERS. Seeley makes extensive use of covert foreshadowing as well as the more overt sort.

All but the most purely intellectual mystery novels (Duerrenmart's TRAPS comes to mind) build suspense through narrative incident. With the exception of her last mystery -- which I shall discuss a bit further on -- Seeley uses the traditional plot structure:

1. Gathering of the characters
2. Hints of conflict and interpersonal relations
3. The first murder
4. Alibis or lack thereof
5. Motivations revealed
6. Onset of the detection phase
7. At least one additional murder or attempted murder
8. Apprehension of the criminal and explanation of loose ends

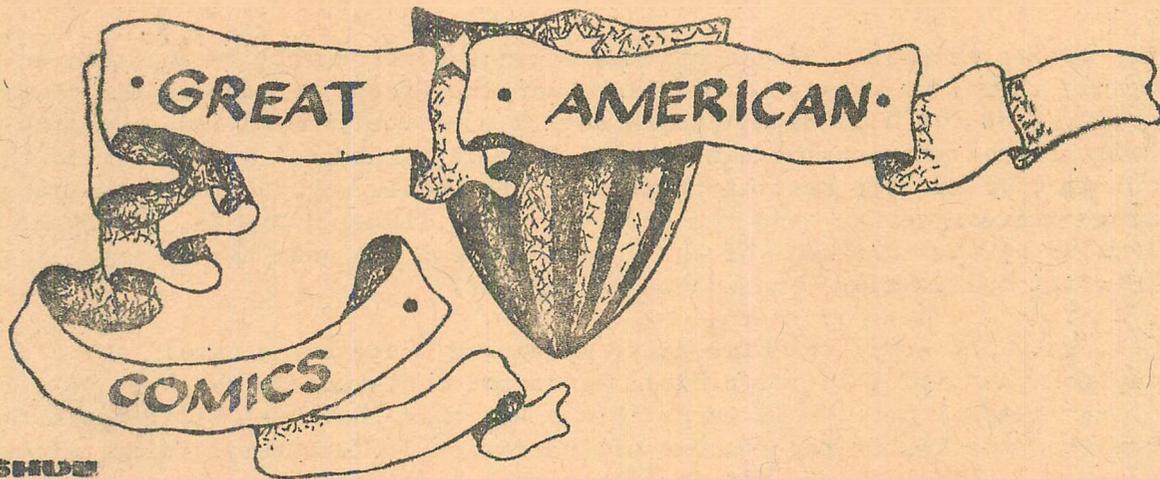
Seeley does, however, enhance the effect of narrative incidents by adding a touch of the grotesque. In THE LISTENING HOUSE, for example, the corpse of the nasty landlady is eaten by her hungry pets. The first victim in THE CRYING SISTERS is concealed inside a tackling dummy. A ventriloquist's dummy is hanged in THE WHISTLING SHADOW.

And finally there is what I call theory shaping. This is a technique which John Dickson Carr used to perfection in THE READER IS WARNED and THE NINE WRONG ANSWERS. Carr leads the reader along the garden path, dropping hints cumulatively until the unwary are convinced they have detected the underlying pattern of motivations. But where Carr makes use of misdirection for purposes of confusion, Seeley drops valid hints so that one begins to detect the actual pattern, and the progressive dropping into place of various hints, suspicions, and clues gives an effect of mounting tension and headlong travel towards the climax. But while it is possible to figure out her mysteries in advance, it is not easy. For those keeping score, I correctly guessed the identity of the murderer in four of the seven novels.

As mentioned above, THE WHISTLING SHADOW is a bit of an anomaly, written more as a suspense novel than a traditional murder mystery. There are two murders, but both take place before the action of the book begins, and we don't learn of one of them until the final chapters. The novel is replete with mysterious figures as a man eludes every effort of the police to apprehend him in his campaign of terror and intimidation against two women. Although it breaks the pattern of her earlier books, this is the only one of the last five to compare favorably with her first two novels. The middle four, while adequate and entertaining, seem more strictly written to a formula than the others.

There is one aspect of Seeley's work that does disturb me though. Occasionally, she expresses an implicit disdain for the law, preferring what she apparently sees as moral justice. I first encountered this position year's ago in Carr's THE DEAD MAN'S KNOCK. When the police arrest the murderer in Carr's novel they know they will convict him of a murder he did not commit rather than the one he did. Their justification, the final line of the novel, is: "We're a peculiar lot here. We believe in justice." This attitude bothered me then, and it bothers me even more in Seeley's novels. At the conclusion of THE LISTENING HOUSE, the heroine discovers a cache of money that formerly belonged to the murdered landlady. She keeps it herself rather than surrender it to Mrs. Garr's repulsive heiress. Worse, in ELEVEN CAME BACK, the police coldbloodedly shoot to death the unarmed, bound villain to prevent him from using the trial to expose the identity of a refugee from Nazi occupied Europe, in order to protect his family.

My reservations are, however, value judgments, and I wouldn't want them to deter anyone from reading her novels. THE LISTENING HOUSE in particular is a classic, with one of the most intricately wound plots I've found in the genre. THE CRYING SISTERS is nearly as good, though Seeley does cheat a bit at the end. As you may have noticed, I've said very little about the plots in these novels. If there's one thing that reading mysteries has taught me, it's that one must never, never tell the potential reader any details in advance.



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Part VII: Christmas with Carl Barks

+ Richard West +

American comic books are often tied to the seasons with special stories or even whole issues designed around Halloween, Easter or some other seasonal holiday. This aspect of the medium has perhaps been associated with the fashion (now waning, it happily appears) of seeing the form as necessarily ephemeral literature, but it has its charm. For me the seasonal mood is enhanced by reading, during the latter part of October, one of John Stanley's stories of *Wich Hazel's* Halloween shenanigans, or, at Christmas-tide, a Walt Kelly or Carl Barks yarn about Pogo or Donald Duck at yule.

Let's take the case of Barks. For Kelly's name is already closely linked to Christmas by many stories, and his main (though not exclusive) uses of the season are familiar enough: Twenty-some variations on Porkypine gruffly presenting Pogo with a dehydrated blossom, and a dozen versions of Albert or Mr. Bear or someone playing Santa Claus at a party so as not to disappoint the swamp critter chillun--and all somehow made fresh and entertaining each time. But Carl Barks either illustrated, or both wrote and drew, some twenty-five Christmas stories in the course of his long career, and the theme proved a fruitful one for him. He spun some very good yarns around such times as Easter, April Fool's Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and New Year's, too, but, just as something in All Hallows Eve called forth from John Stanley some of his richest work about Hazel and Lulu and Tubby, so something in the chemistry between Christmas and Barks' imagination elicited from him an astonishing group of stories, including the creation of perhaps his most memorable character and some of his very finest pieces.

There are also, it must be admitted, three pieces which, while quite good of their kind, make hardly any use of their Christmas setting; and we might as well skip merrily across those to start with.

One such is a 1952/3 story in which Donald Duck, having overspent on gifts and donations and the other concomitants of the Christmas rush (beautifully parodied in the opening panels showing Donald dashing about wallet in hand taking care of such matters), finds that he has been so busy attending to the needs of others that he himself will go hungry on the jolly day. So he poses as a tycoon in a scheme to beguile rich Uncle Scrooge McDuck into buying him Christmas dinner in a fancy restaurant as a client in a business deal. It is a delicious story, and the scene where Scrooge and the ostensible Duke of Baloni pass the bill and the buck back and forth between each other never fails to draw laughs. I cannot say it could just as easily be set at another time, for the frenzy of spending that causes Donald's predicament is associated in the U.S. with the one holiday; but with some tinkering it could be done, for the feeling of the story as a whole is not very Christmasy. Compare "The Thrifty Spendthrift" (1963), where the poor relation uses a hypnotic ray to induce the old miser to feel generous toward a creature

whose photograph he is shown, expecting that expensive gifts will be showered on him. Such dishonesty always backfires in the Barks world: first, Scrooge is accidentally shown the picture of the Duchess of Duckshire's dog, and then he decided to give to his true love all the presents of the "Twelve Days of Christmas" right down to the pear tree and the partridge. The rest of the story hilariously works out Scrooge's acquisition of the appropriate gifts, and the efforts of the dismayed Donald, mistakenly believing he is to be the recipient of the unwanted items, to undo his scheme. The comedy has Christmas over, under, around and through it.

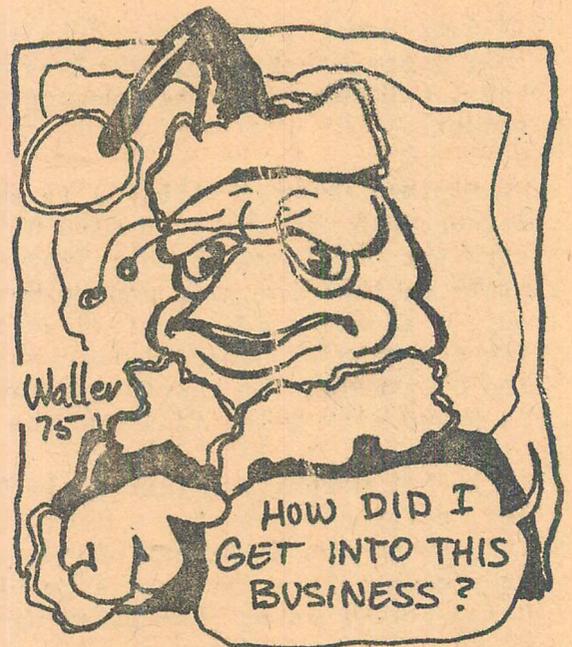
Consider next a 1953/4 story in which Huey, Dewey and Louie buy a camel from a bankrupt circus, and give Abdul to their Uncle Donald at Christmas in the hope he will let them keep their unusual pet. This turns into a bet that the camel will enable them to locate a uranium mine in the far reaches of the desert. The Attempt fails, after various misadventures (it develops, for instance, that Abdul drinks not water but only soda pop), but the camel, accidentally sprayed with phosphorescent paint, does earn money for the ducks in a ghost act on television. It is an amusing piece, though it must be noted that the connection with Christmas is even more tenuous than in the affair of the Duke of Baloni, for the seasonal justification for the gift could easily be eliminated (as it is in some other stories involving parrots and falcons and suchlike) in favor of a simple desire of the nephews for an exotic pet. Compare, this time, the tale of Roscoe (1957/8), a reindeer which the boys acquire to pull their sled uphill, and must give to their uncle if they are to keep him, since the Code of Duckburg (we are now told) demands that any Christmas present must be kept at least until the next Christmas. The domestic comedy here centers around the problem of concealing Roscoe from Donald until the beast can be officially bestowed. Where, in suburbia, do you hide a reindeer? Why, in a closet, with his head through the door as if it were a stuffed wall mount--and then try to keep unk from catching on. The complications are funny, and in the end the boys both succeed and are poetically punished, making for a well-crafted story.

Lastly, take a 1958/9 piece in which the turkey for the ducks' Christmas dinner is stuck on the nose of a rocket and baked by friction. This is one of Barks' frame stories, in which Donald and his nephews relate a past mishap of some kind to Daisy, and also one of his tales of Donald's inventions (in this case, his new rocket fuel, weemite) getting him into trouble. It is such a neat little yarn that it seems like cavilling to complain that it has only the weakest link to Christmas: The rocket-roasted turkey might just as well have been intended for some other festive occasion such as Thanksgiving. Indeed, if I have seemed unappreciative of these three stories--all of which delight me--it is on the principle that a story shows superior craftsmanship when every element in it, including the setting, is used to fullest effect. Barks, at the top of his form, is a consummate craftsman, and he is at the top of his form so often that any lesser effort therefore appears in a bad light, even though usually it is still better than a tale in the same vein by practically anybody else. Anyway, in the other stories we shall consider, whatever defects they may have do not include a failure to integrate the Christmas scene with the main thrust of the tale. And, good as the stories we have looked at so far have been, the best are yet to come.

Of the many recountings of squabbles between Donald and the boys, one of the nicest is a 1955/6 piece in which Huey, Dewey and Louie vow never again to take a bath. Donald is equally determined that they shall be clean for Christmas dinner with Grandma Duck, but they lead him a truly merry chase through the house and give him an even merrier siege of their snow fort. His ultimate victory is neatly tied to the holiday: he leaves a pinata in their fort, and, after they unsuspectingly break it open, the unwelcome bath of the cod liver oil inside forces them to accept a normal bath with soap and water and, for good measure, a sprinkle of perfumed crystals.

Let us continue to examine the domestic situation of the ducks, for this was a rich vein of comedy which Barks mined in many stories, and there are some which take on an added

dimension from being set round about the 25th of December. "Donald Duck's Best Christmas", a Firestone giveaway of 1945 vintage, involves a sleigh ride across the river and through the woods to Grandma's house. Donald of the notoriously hot temper soon gets himself manhandled, in alapstick fashion, by a farmer he irritates, and the ducks are given needed shelter by a poor widow and her small children. Huey, Louie and Dewey leave their own presents and food with the underprivileged family (who otherwise would have had nothing for their Christmas celebration but a can of squash), but receive poetic justice when Grandma provides a feast and gifts for all. This contrast between petty nastiness and altruism is often used in Christmas stories, for these aspects of the human condition are thrown into relief when set at a time supposed to be consecrated to peace and good will, so perhaps it is natural that Barks should turn to them in this his first published effort in that genre. But it should be borne in mind that these motifs occur throughout his work.



Another story written in 1945 was rejected and has never been published. In this Donald, imbued with the Christmas spirit by such books as "Pickin's from Dickens", takes the boys carolling, but their songs are greeted with grouchy hostility, particularly by Neighbor Jones. The long-standing feud between the two characters is vicious here--it includes Donald blasting "Silent Night" at full volume over loudspeakers hidden throughout his neighbor's house, and Jones jabbing the duck repeatedly with an electric prod--but no more so than other forties comics, and the censorship of the story seems rather to be an overreaction to its irreverence. But Barks was aware that people are not necessarily nicer at Christmas.

"Three Good Little Ducks", the 1947 Firestone giveaway, takes a cuter tack. Huey, Dewey and Louie exert themselves to be specially good boys in the hope of being rewarded on Christmas Day. All their efforts backfire and only cause trouble for their uncle, so they run away from home rather than cause him more hardship. But Donald brings them back with assurances that he loves them in spite of their mischief.

This is a pleasant, but relatively lightweight tale by Barks' standards. Another such is "New Toys" (Firestone giveaway, 1949), in which Donald rebukes the boys for their greed in asking for a new scooter, wagon, and tricycle when their old ones are still in excellent shape. The nephews then seek to earn money to buy replacements on their own, but destroy their old toys in the attempt. In the meantime Donald relents and gets them the new toys they had asked for. But they present these to some other children in the neighborhood whose families are too poor to afford such things, and the duck family happily spends Christmas using Donald's own gift of tools to repair the broken old toys. The story is sentimental but not without appeal. The page, for instance, in which Huey, Louie and Dewey play delightedly with their new toys, but gradually become aware of theurchins watching them forlornly, is masterfully done.

Barks can take that hoary situation of longing for some special gift for Christmas and work it into a blockbuster. "You Can't Guess" (1950) is a fine example of this. The plot turns on Donald's agreement to buy the boys the building set they want for Christmas if they can correctly guess the one thing he himself really wants. The nephews' lengthy efforts to discover that their uncle needs and wants a new automobile, which

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is late dawning on them though the old clunk is seen wheezing and breaking down on about every other page, involves Daisy, Grandma, Scrooge, and Gladstone in comic mishaps, and ends with each member of the duck family receiving his heart's desire in spades.

"Christmas Cheers" (1962/3) is shorter, but is also an outstanding comedy of gifts. Scrooge can get the gold mine he wants if he purchases Huey, Dewey and Louie the Chemistry set they want so that they can assay their discovery, buys Donald the truck he wants so that the gold can be hauled secretly, and pays for paving a street when Duckburg's treasury can't afford so that Donald's truck will have smooth travelling. A fierce reindeer named Blitzen which guards Scrooge's property, and an accidental switching of some of the precious metal with stone from the McDuck quarry so that the street is paved with gold, fill out the comedy.

It is not surprising that Uncle Scrooge comes into so many of Barks' Christmas stories, for, after all, he came out of one to begin with. "Christmas on Bear Mountain" (1947) introduced the crotchety old miser, who is Barks' best-known character, and, even among many memorable creations, arguably his best one. Never was Barks' talent for clever names better used: the first name from the famous Charles Dickens character, that peccunious Ebenezer Scrooge who was rehabilitated by the ghosts and the spirit of Christmas; "McDuck" to link him both with the duck family and with the folklore of the Scottish pinchpenny; and "Uncle" to relate him both to Donald and to the mystique of the rich uncle. This initial appearance is mostly concerned, as was usual up until that time, with Donald and the boys, and their entretents with bears aroused from hibernation inside the Christmas tree brought into a mountain lodge, but the story is shaped by the idea of mellowing the grumpy skinflint, a theme to which Barks often returns.

It is used in DONALD DUCK AND THE CHRISTMAS CAROL (Little Golden Book, 1960), where, in a not very imaginative reworking of Dickens, Huey, Dewey and Louie appear as the ghosts of you-know-what in a successful but saccharine effort to de-grump Scrooge. The story was illustrated but not written by Barks, who had already borrowed from Dickens far more creatively in "Bear Mountain", and its chief importance is that it was the first (and for many years the only) time that "the good artist" was credited in print for his work.

You may have noticed by now that we can discuss scads of Barks' Christmas stories without any mention of Santa Claus, who figures so prominently in this genre that he crossed the path of virtually every comics protagonist from Bugs Bunny to Batman. He appears only twice in the Barks oeuvre, however, and once in a studio script which Barks was given to illustrate. This is "Toyland", the Firestone giveaway for 1948, in which Santa asks Huey, Louie and Dewey to test his toys so that he may determine what modern children like. The upshot is that "kids haven't changed"; even the adult as represented by Donald delights in old favorites. The story is pleasant enough, but run-of-the-mill. Barks did revise the script, but nobody could be expected to raise that plot to greatness.

It is another story with "Letter to Santa" (1949), in which the appearance of Santa provides the punch line. Donald, who has forgotten (as he often does) to mail his nephews' letter to Santa Claus, must himself get them the steam shovel they want for Christmas. His attempt ends in a colossal dogfight with Scrooge, in which their respective steam shovels slug it out, and McDuck cynically buys them out of disturbing-the-peace rap with a fantastic one million dollar fine by casually paying it twice over out of his pocket money. Donald then comes down his own chimney in a Santa Claus costume in a scheme to explain to the boys why their present will be late in coming, and, when his disguise begins to deteriorate, is replaced by Scrooge. The denouement brings the authentic Santa on the scene, and with a merry ho-ho-ho he produces from his sack, not the monstrous earth mover that Donald and Scrooge had tried to get, but a toy steam

shovel: "A two-teaspoonful scooper, with a one candle-power firebox." This is another ³² Barks classic, with some of his most attractive illustrations in variously-shaped panels hung with Christmas decorations.

If Santa is often written to but seldom seen in the Barks world as in our primary world, there are substitute Santas in plenty. The earliest story of this type is also one of the best. "Santa's Stormy Visit", the 1945 Firestone giveaway, finds the ducks isolated at a lighthouse on Christmas Eve by a storm which will prevent them from acquiring any of the wherewithal for a Christmas celebration. The boys tie a letter to Santa to an albatross and wait confidently. The bird of good omen for sailors makes a heroic flight through: the tempest to a passing luxury liner, whose captain and crew fill the nephews' requests from their stores and shoot a crate on a line to the top of the lighthouse, where the ducks find it to Donald's bewilderment but the delight of Huey, Dewey Louie and the reader.

A 1954/5 variation on this theme is also excellent. Scrooge takes his four nephews on a submarine in a race against other would-be salvagers to locate the sunken ship Cuspidoria, with a fortune in his gold sealed in its vaults. He relents at spoiling the boys' Christmas, however, and goes miles from the sea lanes where the ship is believed to be in order to pick up a tree and presents dropped by his planes. Such gestures are not always rewarded in the Barks world, where those too dewy-eyed may be satirically brought up short by a harsh reality, but this one is: Scrooge finds that his detour has accidentally brought him to the Cuspidoria.

The nature of this tale dictates that we see mostly water, and snow, not needed anywhere else, with artistic economy is absent also from the opening panels aboveground before the ducks enter the submarine. This is worth noting because it is unusual. It has been observed that Barks' Duckburg has the climate of southern California, except at Christmas. The spirit of this is right, though it is not literally true. Winter does come to Duckburg other than at Christmas whenever the plot demands this type of setting; when there is ice skating or ice fishing to be done, for example. For the most part, however, it really is Christmas that provides the aesthetic need for hibernal trappings, since snow and cold are part of the mood and the myth of that season and the story would seem strange without them. Yet not even Duckburg always enjoys a white Christmas. The tale of the rocket-roasted turkey, discussed earlier, mentions fallen leaves but provides no snow nor even overcoats for its characters--part of its tenuous connection with the season. The story of Abdul the camel is likewise snowless, but there we can see the justification: that is set on a desert, and, the arctic deserts notwithstanding, the mood and myth of the desert call aesthetically for sand, not snow. The climate is also warm in "Grandma's Present" (1956), and here again the plot dictates this. Gyro Gearloose, as a surprise for Grandma Duck, invents a machine which produces food directly from dirt, without such "middlemen" as cows to give milk, etc.; and even on Grandma's farm we cannot expect anything to grow in frozen ground.



SHUN
WITH APOLOGIES
TO CARL BARKS

Of all his Christmases without winter, Barks shows the greatest artistry in a story from 1957 in which Scrooge sails with the ducks to an island in the South Seas reputed to be rich in black pearls. Tabu Yama (as the name indicates, it is one of those places of ill omen, so common in fiction, which the natives shun and foreigners invade at their peril) is girdled by a reef passable only at high tide. At these times the volcano that comprises most of the island always erupts, so that legend has it that the mountain is angry at the sea's encroachment. The tide carries our heroes over the reef with no difficulty, but once inside the seemingly peaceful lagoon their boat is caught in a powerful current and is swallowed inside a tunnel in the mountain. The ducks prepare to spend a cheerless Christmas (and maybe much longer, for no-one ever comes to the island) marooned among coconuts and palm trees and Scrooge's growing pile of black pearls. But low tide exposes the tunnel in which their boat is narrowly wedged, and, though they cannot budge it, they can at least recover their gear, including a box of something about which Scrooge is very secretive. They then discover the secret of Tabu Yama: when the rising tide sends water through the tunnel it flows into a pool of molten lava (this panel makes a spectacular picture) and brings about an eruption. The spout of the volcano is narrow enough at one point that the ducks are able to plug it with a boulder heavier than the boat, so that at the next eruption their vessel is forced out and Donald lassos it before it can vanish into the open sea. But the pressure that builds up is so enormous that the mountain cannot contain it, and in the resulting upheaval vast beds of pearl oysters are thrown up as Scrooge's Christmas present, and a white volcanic ash comes down to serve as a substitute snowfall. Huey, Dewey and Louie had constructed a Christmas "tree" out of palm fronds, and the mysterious box is opened to reveal gifts brought by Scrooge in anticipation of having to spend the holiday away from home. This tale is very appealing in its simplicity--there are no characters other than the five ducks and no adversaries except the reef and the volcano--and in the ingenuity with which the problems arising from the environment are overcome and a white Christmas comes to a South Sea island.

There are more personal antagonists in other stories. The witch from Disney's SNOW WHITE is borrowed for "The Golden Christmas Tree" (1948), in which she kidnaps Huey, Dewey and Louie, meaning to use their little boys' tears of disappointment in a magic potion with which she can destroy all the world's Christmas trees. She does this without any selfish motive: she is the embodiment of evil, and so naturally she wishes to ruin the season of happiness and goodness. This is one of the stories in which Donald appears with heroic attributes, and after a good deal of fierce fighting the witch plummets to her doom and the Golden Christmas Tree (the Spirit of Christmas, whom the witch had imprisoned) commends the ducks for a job well done. It is not unusual for a Barks plot to be as loosely constructed as this one. When the witch magically summons a sawmill to deal with the battering-ram with which Donald attacks her shanty and the pulp comes out the other end as newspapers with the headline, "Witch Foils Housebreaker", it seems like a gag dragged in from a Warner Bros. cartoon, aloof from the style of comedy adventure of the rest of the piece and of other Barks works. The accident whereby Donald, in a tantrum, kicks the witch over a precipice may have been contrived to free him of blood-guilt, but it is awkward, as if no way to get rid of her could be found that would arise more naturally out of the plot. And the Spirit of Christmas appears very much ex machina at the end. Still, this is an exciting enough adventure.

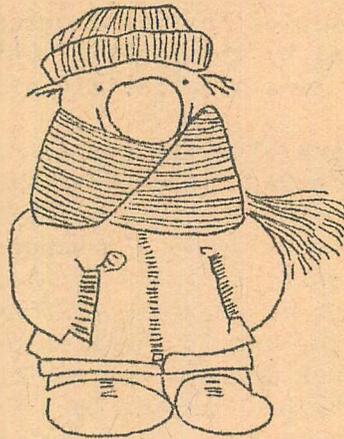
"Northeaster on Cape Quack" (1961/2) is more tightly constructed. The villain here is the evil pig character whom Barks used under various names in several stories; in this one the swine (in both senses) is an anonymous "big operator" who wants to tear down a historic old lighthouse and build a gun club on the site. He vandalizes the machinery in the lighthouse in the belief that no-one will miss the light after it is gone enough to prevent him from acquiring the then useless land. But the radar on the Dauntless, the ship carrying Duckburg's official Christmas tree and other necessities for the annual party in the city square, has conked out, and the ship needs the shore

light to keep from being sunk in the Cape Quack narrows by a terrible northeaster ³⁴ which sends waves over the very top of the lighthouse. Donald climbs to this pinnacle with a string of old oil lanterns, by the light of which Dauntless steers to safety. And Duckburg learns the value of fine old traditions like Christmas and the lighthouse.

The annual party in the town square also figures in "Christmas in Duckburg" (1958). Embarrassed by jolly Ollie Eiderduck's jokes about his stinginess, Scrooge vows to donate a Christmas tree taller than the clock tower of the town hall, and sends Donald and the boys to the north woods to bring back a hundred-foot pine. Ollie, who had said he would eat Scrooge's spats if he really donated such a colossus, hires the Beagle Boys to cut twenty feet out of the tree. However, the pine still stands higher than the tower when placed atop the Ferris wheel which Scrooge bought the nephews as payment for their help, and, though Scrooge was too cheap to buy a Ferris wheel with a motor, two moose which the ducks had brought back on their trip turn the wheel and save the day. The Beagle Boys go to jail for moose rustling and Ollie eats Scrooge's spats at the buffet. There is debate as to whether Barks scripted the story or only illustrated it, but either way it is an amusing piece, though not a first-rate one.

"The Christmas Cha-Cha" (1954) is another of the domestic comedies, centering on a dance contest at the Christmas ball with the prize a solid silver punch bowl. Donald has been practicing and hopes to win the contest with Daisy as his partner. He almost does not get to the ball, since, for once, it is the boys who forget to mail an important letter, one with the orders for the Christmas cards Donald has been selling, and he fears the wrath of his disappointed customers if he appears in public. But Huey, Dewey and Louie solve both this and their own problem of decorating the downtown stores for the Junior Woodchucks by displaying the cards in the store windows, so that the Christmas greetings do reach everybody in town. Another complication is that Scrooge had been finessed into donating the prize, and, unable to prevent the dance contest, he enters it himself with a cha-cha teacher as his partner. But a Woodchuck trick leads to a happy ending. The story very pleasingly interweaves these various plot threads, and has many funny moments. A favorite of mine is Donald slinking through a dark alley past a "Wanted--For Being Bad" poster with a self-caricature of Barks.

I have been saving the best one for last. "A Christmas for Shacktown" (1951/2) opens with Huey, Dewey and Louie glumly taking a short cut home down the mean streets and past the dilapidated shanties of Duckburg's slums, and feeling that their own Christmas will be spoiled unless they can somehow enable these "people that are down on their luck" to share the joy of the season. Daisy and her women's club determine to provide a Christmas party for Shacktown, with the piece de resistance a toy train which the underprivileged children specially want. They hope to persuade Scrooge to donate to this worthy cause, but he balks at the notion of "a silly, useless toy train", and agrees only that, if they can produce fifty dollars to buy the train, he will provide matching funds for the party. Much of the story details the efforts of the ducks to raise the money, which by various means they eventually do. In one of these incidents, however, a dime had brought good fortune to Gladstone Gander (who appears at this season in a kinder mood than usual), and Donald jokingly gives the coin to Scrooge, sitting on a park bench trying to look like a beggar, with the collar of his elegant coat turned up and his silk hat on the ground to receive gratuities. This dime adds just too much weight to the famous three cubic acres of money in Scrooge's money bin, and the McDuck fortune collapses into an abyss from which it cannot be rescued, since any heavy machinery brought into play would break the thin crust still under it and precipitate it into quicksand. But Huey, Louie and Dewey back the engine and coal car of a toy train (the humble item which Scrooge had scorned earlier now becomes of vital importance to him) through a tiny tunnel reaching to the money and so can gently haul it out. Scrooge had promised the first trainload of money to the boys as a reward, and since this chances to consist of a wad of thousand dollar bills (a hundred of them),



Shacktown has a gala party with dozens of toy trains. Here the Christmas season is perfectly suited to the theme, which as we have seen is essentially serious though many wonderfully comic situations arise from it. These are of a type familiar in the domestic comedy about the ducks (Donald trying to trick money from Scrooge; Gladstone's good luck causing bad luck for others) but neatly interwoven into the quest for the party money, and the effect is that the whole Barks world is united behind this great, charitable undertaking. The illustrations are among Barks' most beautiful. This rich use and coherent patterning of its many constituents place "Shacktown" at the pinnacle of Barks' Christmas stories, and it ranks with his very finest work.

Quite unlike Walt Kelly, for whom theme and variations was a normal method of composition and one he handled with superlative skill, it is characteristic of Barks that he only occasionally repeats himself, and then (like Kelly, this time) with a good deal of variation. It is quite a different thing to observe that similar concerns shape his stories throughout his career, for that is only to say that one man's vision will produce a reasonably consistent oeuvre. He wrote comedies about duck family squabbles; adventures about travel to exotic locales in search of monetary or other treasure; biting satires on inhumanity; heartwarming tales of human love triumphant. And all such stories could be given an added fillip by being set in the yuletide season. Perhaps this is why it is so worthwhile to spend Christmas with Carl Barks.

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THE CHRISTMAS STORIES OF CARL BARKS: A CHECKLIST

This list should be complete, except for a number of short gags occupying one page or less. Please remember that an issue dated for January of one year would really have appeared one or two months previously, so that such a Christmas story would have been for the year before the cover date. Titles in quotation marks are the published titles; those in parentheses are mine, used as notes to identify a story not given a title.

1945

(Carol Singing) Sent August 21, 1945 but censored.
 "Donald Duck's Best Christmas" Firestone giveaway.

1946

"Santa's Stormy Visit" Firestone giveaway.

1947

"Three Good Little Ducks" Firestone giveaway.

"Christmas on Bear Mountain" Donald Duck Color #178; reprinted in Christmas Parade #3 (October, 1964) and in The Best of Walt Disney's Comics from the Year 1947.

1948

"Toyland" Firestone giveaway.

"The Golden Christmas Tree" Donald Duck Color #203; reprinted in Christmas Parade #4 (October, 1965).

1949

"New Toys" Firestone giveaway.

"Letter to Santa" Christmas Parade #1 (November, 1949); reprinted in Christmas Parade #5 (November, 1966).

1950

"You Can't Guess" Christmas Parade #2; reprinted in Christmas Parade #6 (1967).

1952

"A Christmas for Shacktown" Donald Duck Color #367 (January-February, 1952); reprinted in Christmas Parade #2 (October, 1963) and again in Christmas Parade #8 (1970).
(Duke of Baloni) Walt Disney's Comics & Stories #148, Vol. 13, No. 4, January, 1953; reprinted in WDC&S #328, Vol. 28, No. 4, January, 1968.

1953

(Abdul the glowing camel) WDC&S #160, Vol. 14, No. 4, January, 1954; reprinted in WDC&S #352, Vol. 30, No. 4, January, 1970.

1954

(Submarine Christmas) WDC&S #172, Vol. 15, No. 4, January, 1955; reprinted in WDC&S #364, Vol. 31, No. 4, January, 1971.

1955

(Clean for Christmas) WDC&S #184, Vol. 16, No. 4, January, 1956.

1956

"Grandma's Present" Christmas Parade #8 (December, 1956).

1957

(Tabu Yama) Christmas in Disneyland #1 (December, 1957).
 (Rosco the sled-pulling Reindeer) WDC&S #208, Vol. 18, No. 4,
 January, 1958; reprinted in WDC&S #376, Vol. 32, No. 4,
 January, 1972.

1958

"Christmas in Duckburg" Christmas Parade #9 (December, 1958).
 (Rocket-roasted turkey) WDC&S #220, Vol. 19, No. 4, January, 1959;
 reprinted in WDC&S #412, Vol. 35, No. 4, January, 1975.

1959

"The Christmas Cha-Cha" Christmas Parade #26 (December, 1959).

1960

DONALD DUCK AND THE CHRISTMAS CAROL, Little Golden Book, Golden Press.

1961

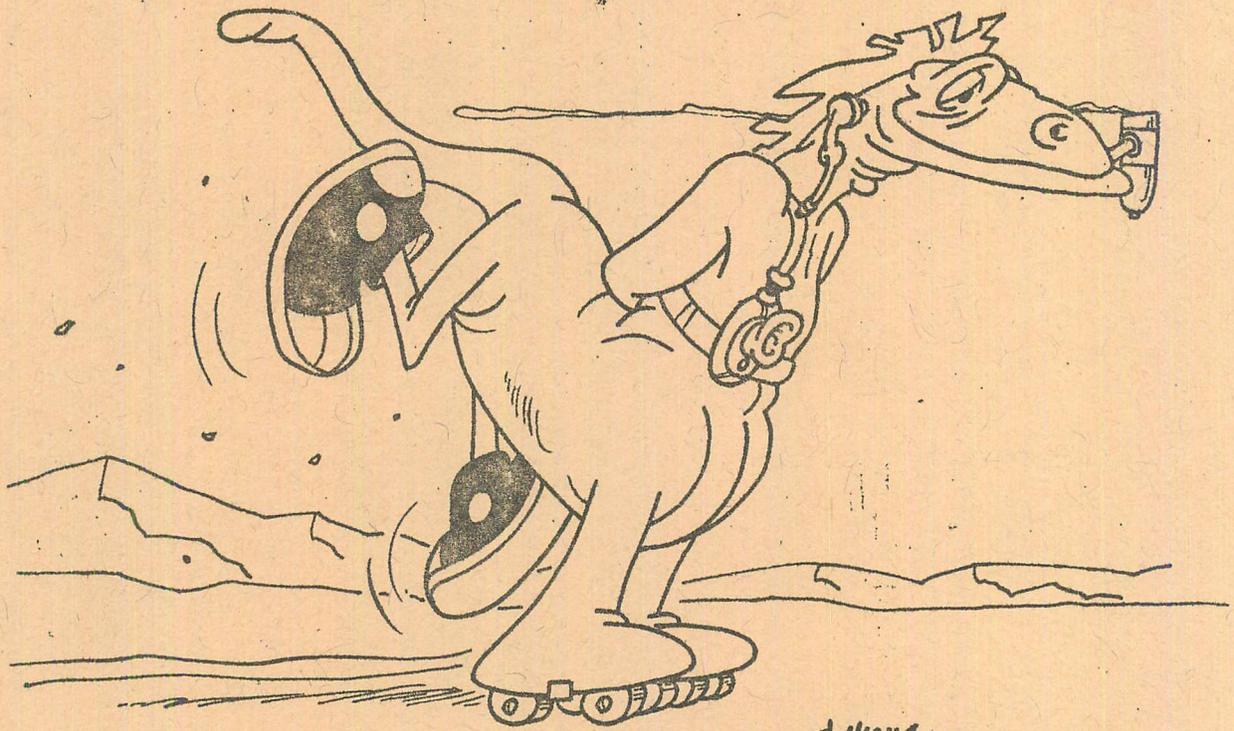
"Northeaster on Cape Quack" WDC&S #256, Vol. 22, No. 4, January, 1962;
 reprinted in WDC&S #424, Vol. 36, No. 4, January, 1976.

1962

"Christmas Cheers" WDC&S #268, Vol. 23, No. 4, January, 1963.

1963

"The Thrifty Spendthrift" Uncle Scrooge #47 (February, 1964); reprinted
 in Uncle Scrooge #96 (December, 1971).



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