

FANZINE



THE CRYPT OF

THE USUAL

STARLING

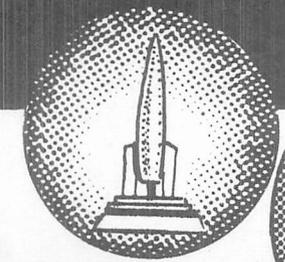
FEATURING



THE BIRD



THE LUTTRELLS



THE PHALLIC SYMBOL

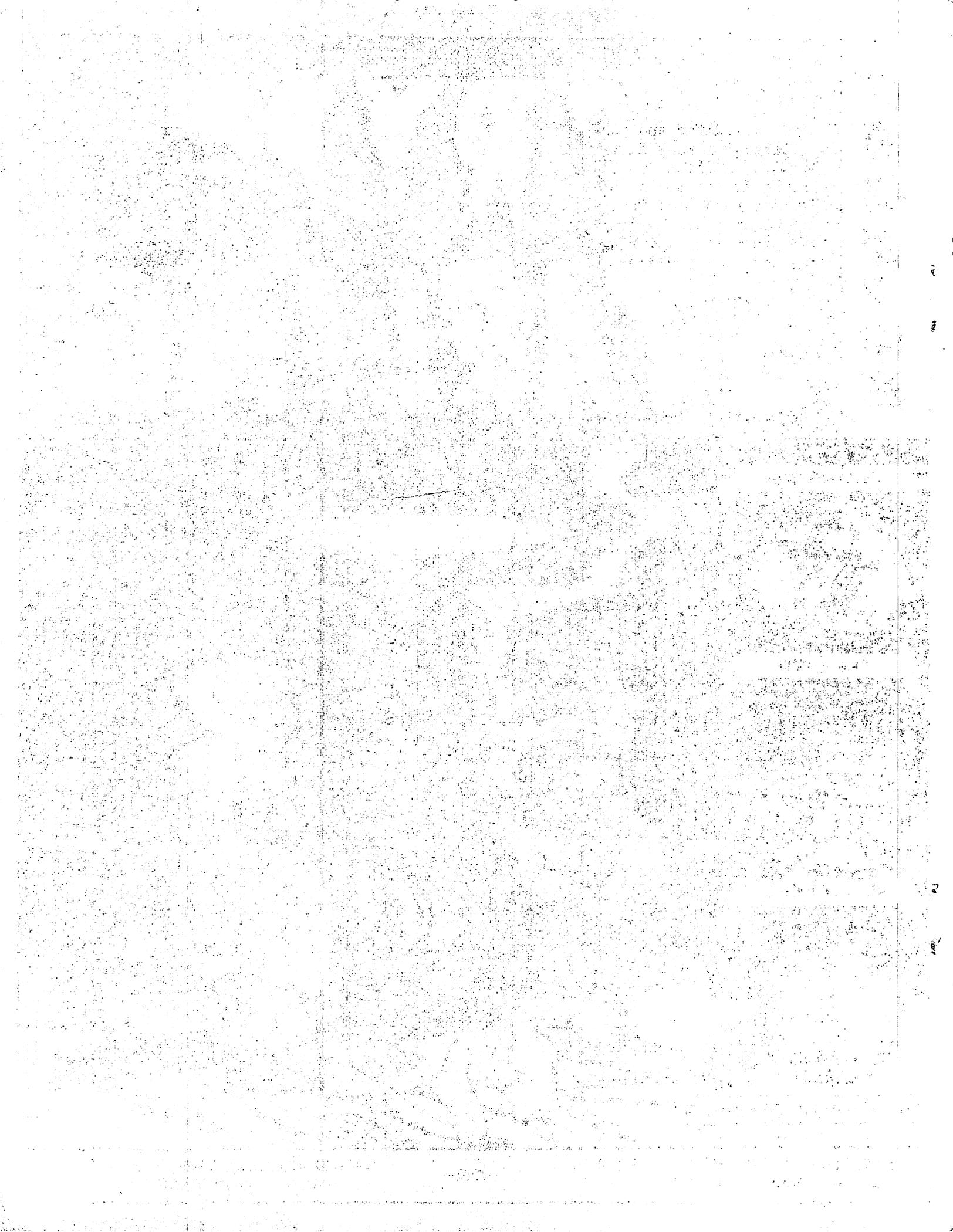


FOR JOE STATON

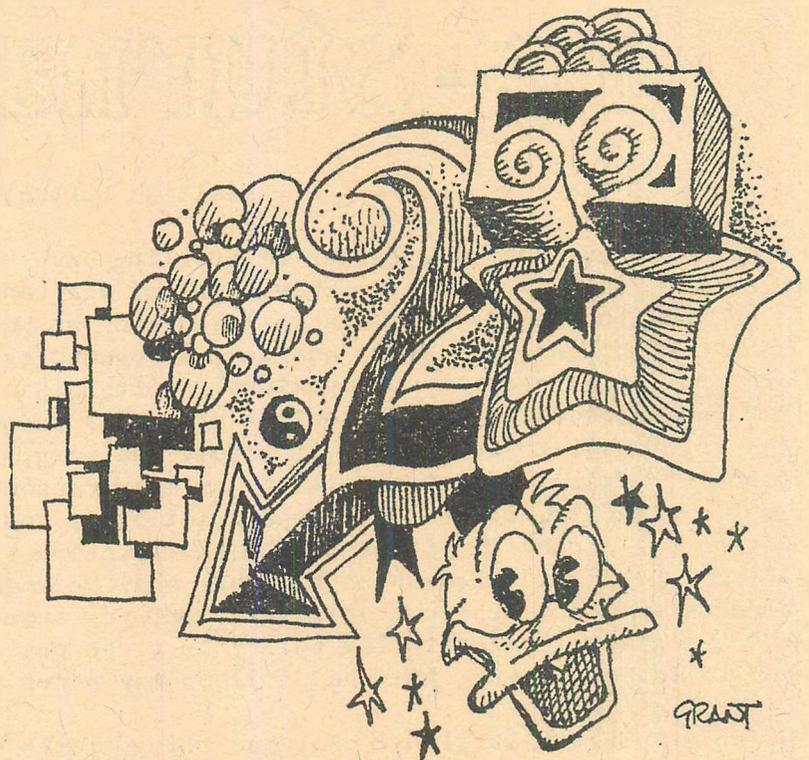
SPECIAL "SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE" ISSUE!

-OR-

"WHO KILLED THE FUNNY ANIMAL MUSICIAN?"



STARLING #36 was edited and published by Lesleigh & Hank Luttrell, 525 W. Main St., Madison, WI 53703 USA. Starling is available for fanzines or other publications in trade, with contributions of art, letters of comment, or anything else you can convince us is worth publishing. You can also get it for 50¢ a copy; subscriptions are 5 issues for \$2 in the USA. AUSTRALIAN AGENT: Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 103, Brunswick, Victoria 3056 AUSTRALIA 3 issues/\$1(Aus.) Back issues: 19, 27, 29, 33 \$2 each; 30, 32, 34, 35 \$1 each. You can trade back issues of Starling to extend your subscription -- we pay \$3 each for #5 and 7, and \$1 each for any issue which is out of stock above.



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Weltanshauung Publication #214

May, 1977

cover -- Al Sirois

Pre-Sturnal Niche (editorial) -- Lesleigh Luttrell 3

Editorship -- Tom Perry. 6

Words from Readers (letter column). 12

Fourth Annual Jelly Troll Awards (1976) -- Michael Carlson 20

Have You Read Them All? -- John J. Alderson. 24

The Lurker Behind the Locked Pen Name -- Bob Vardeman. 27

With Malice Toward All: A Column about Books -- Joe Sanders. 31

Blah Book Service (Notebooklings) -- Hank Luttrell 33

Uniphants and Elecycle, Part One: In Da House O'Mirth -- Freff. 36

backcover -- James Shull

INTERIOR ARTWORK

Larry Brommer 4
 Grant Canfield 2, 12, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30
 Ken Fletcher 5
 Ken Fletcher/Larry Brommer 17
 Alexis Gilliland 24

Jeanne Gomoll 14, 20, 26, 31
 Bill Rotsler 16
 James Shull 34
 Dan Steffan 36, 37, 38, 39, 40
 Steve Stiles 6, 8, 9

Pre-Sturnal Niche

+ Lesleigh Luttrell +

As you may have noticed, issues of Starling have been getting fewer and further between in recent years. One of the privileges of age (and 13 years is old for a fanzine) is to be able to slow down. We aren't as young as we were during the Columbia years, when Starling came out every quarter, as predictably as the FAPA mailing. In addition, Hank and I have recently become involved in lots of projects, as you've read in the last few Notebooklings. While I've gradually been cutting back on my "schoolac" and may gaffiate all together from it before too long, there have been other things to occupy that time. However, one of the main reasons it takes us so long to do an issue of Starling is that I expend a lot of my energy in trying to justify, to myself, putting out a genzine; in fact, the same genzine I became co-editor of 10 years ago. So far I have inflicted these thoughts only on Madison fans and friends with whom I share anapa, but it seems only fair that you should hear them too. You've never seen a statement of editorial policy in these pages, because we've never felt the need to formulate one, but what follows may serve the same purpose.

Why do we publish Starling? For one thing, it is a creative outlet. Some people make pots, some knit or build radios -- we make fanzines. I've heard of editors who have their fanzine collections bound, so they can sit around admiring them. (Binding does make writing more impressive and seemingly significant -- as I discover everytime I leaf through the bound copy of my Masters thesis which Hank gave me for my last birthday.) It may even help preserve the fragile twiltone. However, I think it must detract from the feel of the fanzine, so our Starling file sits in journal boxes (retrieved from various trash piles around campus) to be taken out and admired as a piece of handicraft every now and again. It's not that I can't see the mistakes in those old issues, the errors in layout, less-than-perfect repro, my own writing which could always use another draft. Still, it's something we put together ourselves, and it's not half bad.

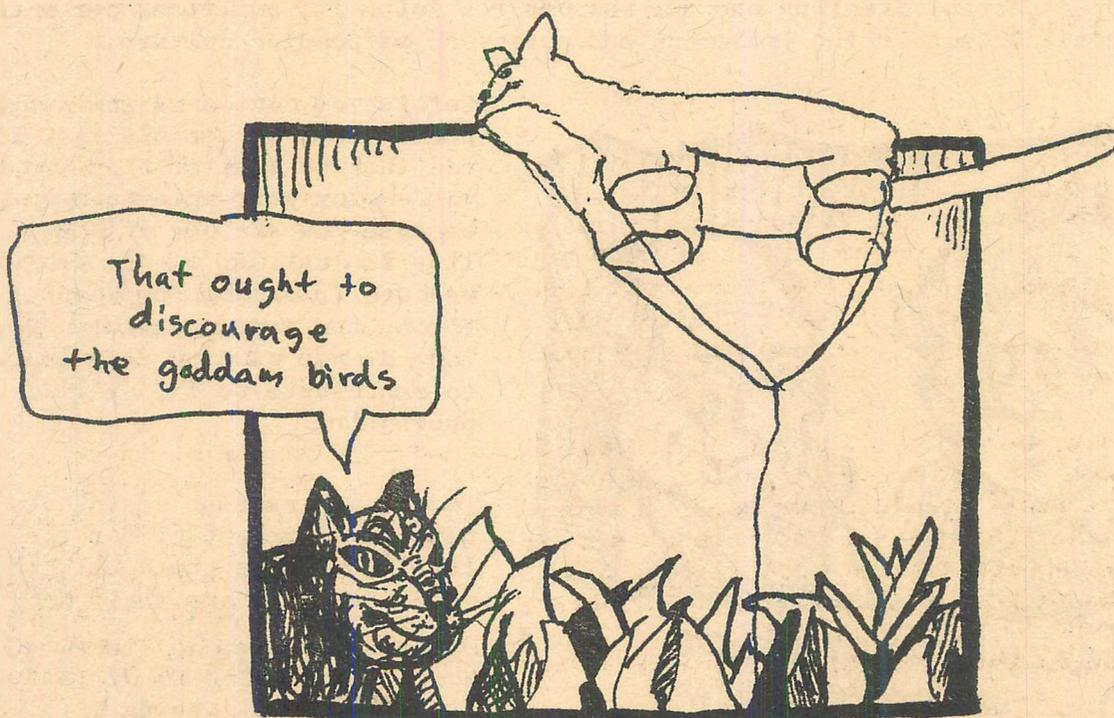
The fact is, I enjoy the actual work of putting together a fanzine. (Remember that when I turn up in your town this summer -- I love to collate.) I like doing the layout for Starling, trying to fit art with text (though you'll notice I've 'cheated' this time and sent our two feature articles out to be illustrated -- by Steve Stiles and Dan Staffan, two of the finest fan artists working today.) I like putting our contributions in an order that makes sense, imagining how things will look on the mimeographed page. I admit, Starling would look better if I had the time, and energy, to do everything twice, instead of just estimating. But that would turn it into a job, not a hobby. (Or, as Tom Perry quotes Peter Roberts as saying "that's one more thing to do, isn't it.")

Starling remains our hobby; we have never felt the desire to become a semi-professional zine, or even to put our publication in bookstores, other than the Madison Book Co-op. That doesn't preclude our hoping to someday expand the Starling publishing empire into other things, but not in the same directions as Andy Porter has gone with Algol or Carl Bennett with his Scintillation or even Bruce Gillespie with SF Commentary (subscriptions to that last are still available from us, 5 issues/\$6US.) Our goals are different from theirs. When it comes right down to it, the thing that makes fan editors unique is that each of us can have a different goal; all we have in common is

a desire to communicate not, thank god, a desire to make money. We aren't in competition with each other, at least not for anything more tangible than egoboo (and there is more than enough of that to go around since it, is one natural resource which can increase geometrically rather than arithmetically.)

One of the main reasons we keep publishing Starling is that no one else does anything quite like it. We have gradually acquired the label of 'popular culture fanzine.' This probably crystallized around issue 25 (4 years ago) when Jay Kinney's cover proclaimed our esoteric interests to all the world, and Joe Sanders decided he could write about things other than stf. Actually Starling started out as a quite ordinary science fiction fanzine, and I'm sure it would have died a natural death many years ago if we hadn't expanded it to reflect our other interests. That expansion started in issue 12 (summer of '68) when Hank wrote Pangaea, a column on pop music. The response to it was gratifying, not simply the LoCs on that issue, but also the contributions we began to receive as people realized Starling was a place that would publish writings on any aspect of popular culture. Greg Shaw almost single-handedly revived the practically moribund, post-St. Louiscon Starling when he sent us "The Polymorphous Prevert" his three part story of some of the incredible doings of Chester Anderson, sometimes science fiction writer and full time participant in the popular culture of the times. (I recently learned that Chester had somehow gotten copies of those 3 issues of Starling and they are among the few fanzines he'd ever seen. I suspect single copies of Starling lurk, unclassified, in all sorts of odd places.) We've evolved from those beginnings to what we are today -- a fanzine often reviewed as "unpredictable. This issue featured articles on subjects I'm not usually interested in, but they held my interest none-the-less." Sometimes I get the feeling that Starling doesn't quite fit in science fiction fandom (but then I remember most of our reviews end with "Recommended" and there was our Hugo nomination.)

We're happy with our label of 'popular culture fanzine' and happy to be a part of this fandom. There are other journals, some scholarly and some not, which feature articles about many aspects of popular culture. Most are not associated with fandom,



Bronner-75

and yet our fandom seems to be the breeding grounds for some of the finest writers (and artists) in the field. I see Starling as having two purposes. First, to acquaint our readers with aspects of our culture they might not have become aware of otherwise. While I don't underestimate the importance of that function (I owe Susan Wood a great debt for introducing me to Dorothy Sayers and that was via a fanzine piece), the more important role of Starling is to provide a place for people to talk about their personal involvement in popular culture. Not just for the creators of that culture (as Jay Kinney's retrospective on underground comix last issue) but also to give some of the 'consumers' a chance to talk about their experiences. Starling gives the audience a place to talk back, or at least to talk to each other (isn't that how science fiction fandom got started?)

Popular culture has become, in our society, something which is supposed to be dished out to an accepting, uncritical audience. Pap for the masses. Yet one or the other aspect of popular culture has been important to all of us, has touched our life in a special way: Bark's duck stories, Thorne Smith, Maria Montez movies, the Beatles. Fans share a common malady -- we have this almost uncontrollable urge to write about such things, influences of importance in our lives. In a very real way, popular culture is what holds a large scale society together, for better or worse, and exploring our relationship to it is a fascinating pursuit.

More than that, in writing about popular culture we become part of it. No longer the passive consumer, we are active audience interacting, if not directly with the producers (though this often happens in science fiction and comix fandom), at least with the other active members of the audience. Couldn't this time we all spend on fanzines be better spent on other things, isn't it a dead end? Obviously I think not -- sharing our thoughts and experiences helps us make sense of them, put them in perspective. We have lost, in our rapidly changing culture, a sense of continuity that makes us a part of the ongoing society (and gives us a solid basis from which to consider changes.) Yet, continuity remains an important part of the small-scale society which is science fiction fandom. In a small way, Starling helps me find a more general sense of cultural continuity, for example in such articles as Bob Tucker's "A Thousand and One Nights at the Bijou" and Leigh Couch's "I Was a Big Band Groupie." And, while this isn't a major aspect of Starling and our reasons for doing it, sometimes our articles have their small effect on the producers and purveyors of popular culture.

Before you decide we are getting pretentious in our old age, I'll add that we publish Starling for you -- for your entertainment, because you are our friends. Starling is just one of the many ways we have in fandom for keeping in touch, for communicating. So, as long as you want to read it, and to contribute to it, we'll keep publishing.

* * *

Two of our regular contributors have moved recently; for those who like to keep in touch with them directly, here are their COAs:

Michael Carlson; 34 Blenheim Terrace, London W2 ENGLAND
Jim Turner; 531 Nevada Dr., Longview, WA 98632 USA



"A fanzine today keeps
the samizdat away."



Aside from the fannish football game, the only fannish item on the program at Mancon was a secret panel of fanzine editors. It was in a dark room not far from the art show (which was also secret) and the best part of it consisted of a group of faneds present and past sitting quietly not looking at each other while Greg Pickersgill and a couple of other Rats urged Peter Roberts to chair the panel and Peter Roberts replied "Not me!" Later on someone from the concom arrived to take over. The room settled down. Now, surely, crisp statements of the Problems of Current Fanzine Editing would emerge, trends would be discerned and analyzed, conflicting theories would come forth, and finally the chair would announce that time was exhausted and offer a summary.

Nothing of the sort. You couldn't stir up that lot with a stick. Walt Willis, duly prodded, offered a couple of hundred coughs, interrupted occasionally by words, comparing esoteric fanzine humor with office jokes. Bob Shaw's contribution was to announce that he had forgotten to bring a pint and disappear amid assurances of his imminent return. After waving my hand for five minutes I was recognized, though not by many, and attempted with sign language and frequent references to my British-American/American-British dictionary to draw a comparison between thick fanzines and the Titanic. Pickersgill said Harry Warner had sent him a boring letter, which he hadn't printed. Someone said faneds should try to get artwork illustrating the printed matter and Peter Roberts cocked an intimidating eyebrow at him and said, "Yes, but that's one more thing to do, isn't it." I made a note about the British use of the emphatic uninflected interrogative.

You can see why it was a secret panel, can't you? And yet most secret panels open the way to something interesting, like the Batcave or the symbolic giant toilet bowl in Cthulu stories. Follow me down this dark passage way by the flickering light of this candle, and as we brush the cobwebs from our faces we can talk in quavering voices just to reassure each other we're not alone.

7
What brought the memory of that Mancon panel out of the deep recesses of my mind was a letter this morning from a faned. I read this letter with my breakfast coffee. There were a few lines I read over and over, with reactions swinging between guilt and disbelief: "...you asked me if I'd let you know my deadline when you agreed to do me an article...Well, looking through my file I find I did send you a letter, which said 'I'm hoping to get this issue out fairly soon, say in two months or so...' Perhaps our brilliant postal service managed to lose the letter, but when you didn't reply I thought you'd changed your mind."

At the Mancon panel one of the chief complaints had been the dearth of good fanwriting. No one seemed to know what to do about it. If he had even suspected the sloppy practices that the modern faned has picked up, Willis could have offered the solution. He's not likely to find out, though, having long since perfected his techniques for evading promises of material. So it's up to me to pass on the accumulated fannish wisdom which somehow has been lost, probably in the undertow of the new wave of the mid-sixties.

I had to read that letter several times before understanding that the faned actually thought he had given me a deadline, in the words "fairly soon, say in two months or so." I remembered the letter all right. It had come six months before. I had put it aside, expecting some further warning as publication date approached. In the meantime there were letters to write, cons to go to, trips to take, newspapers to read, fanzines to digest, and a little girl to play with who wouldn't be three forever. I even did some work now and then.

England's California summer yielded to its rainy season, and still there was no word. Leaves fell, Novacon came and went, Christmas approached. Occasionally I thought of sending a postcard but it didn't seem the thing to do. He owed me a letter, and undoubtedly would get around to writing it and mentioning his deadline when the time came. And then the letter. "... fairly soon, say in two months or so ..."

Intermittent stabbing pains came from my conscience, which insisted that I had promised and I knew quite well that it had been more than two months and I could have at least sent that postcard and why hadn't I given that postal piece to this faned instead of Eric. "Quiet down there, conscience," I drawled, and it did. My superego has long since covered its big red 'S' and changed back into mild-mannered Clark Kent.

Deadlines mean something to me, though. I used to work in the newspaper game (only outsiders consider it a business) where the deadlines are intimately related to the times trains leave and if your copy missed a deadline it also missed several thousand readers. A real deadline is dead; you can tell because it doesn't move. Since then I've moved into software, where the word deadline has a more metaphorical meaning, almost as it does in fandom. The deadline is the date after which the product will be behind schedule. In software the phrase is "the schedule slipped" and it's used so frequently that jokes are common. Just today, for instance, one of my colleagues slipped into a meeting a few minutes after it had started and when the man holding the meeting commented, "Late as usual," the latecomer replied easily: "But much more reliable."

He got a good laugh for his quick wit but I can appreciate that to anyone not hardened by years of having software slip out from underneath you, the remark may seem, not only not funny, but pointless as well. The world of computers is another one of those alternate fandoms, with its own lore and in-group jokes, quite incomprehensible to your typical TV viewer to whom the computer is a large box with flashing colored lights and, often as not, two tape reels on the front of it--in fact not a computer at all, just a tape drive--which never makes a mistake, except perhaps when it tries to take over the world. (They should only know how hard it is to get a computer to take over anything.) Even the image one gets of a computer from most science fiction is distorted. A fan who got a knowledge of computers solely from sf could be excused for thinking that they

have emotions, like HAL 9000, or can make up jokes, like Mike Holmes. But if you think I'm above explaining humor then you don't know me very well. To understand my colleague's joke you have to first understand the reliability is an attribute of computer hardware and software--in other words, that computers can make mistakes--and that eliminating program errors or bugs is the most common reason given for late software.

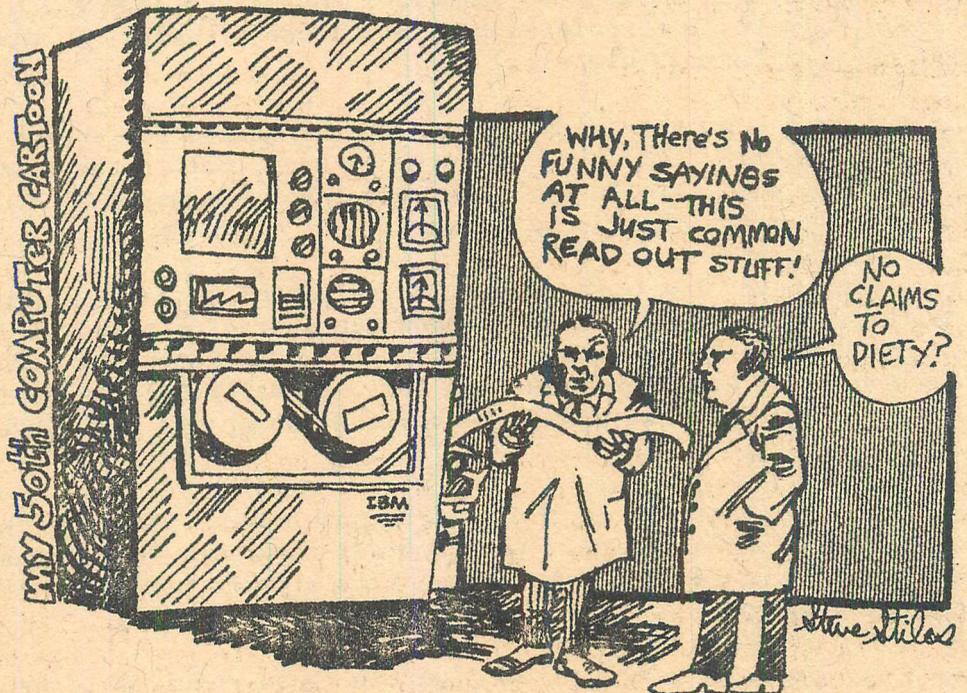
I doubt that the explanation will make the joke funny for readers who didn't laugh the first time they read it, but fortunately that wasn't my intention. I had two points to make: first, to remind you that alternate fandoms do exist, and second, to establish that certain basic concepts are necessary to full communication. I could be ill informed about certain aspects of modern fandom's general knowledge of its history, since I returned from the Glades of Gafia only eight months ago as I write this, but in this case I think a brief explanation will serve better than an obscure allusion for at least some readers. I hope it is clear that this decision is prompted purely by altruism and is absolutely uninfluenced in any way by ambition on my part to gain a reputation as a scholar of fanhistory or the fact that I've just paid out a goodly sum for the old fanzines that I'm going to quote from.

Bob Shaw was the Machiavelli of fandom. Not in the sense that he was an evil plotter--he's not--but in the truer sense that he wrote the fannish equivalent of THE PRINCE, revealing for the first time fannish practices that had previously not been mentioned openly. Or perhaps even privately. When I first read "The Fansmanship Lectures" as reprinted in HYPHEN in the fifties, I immediately recognized the sorts of things Shaw was talking about. I wasn't a BNF so I hadn't practiced them myself, except perhaps in my small circle of correspondents, but certainly I felt that I had seen others use them on me.

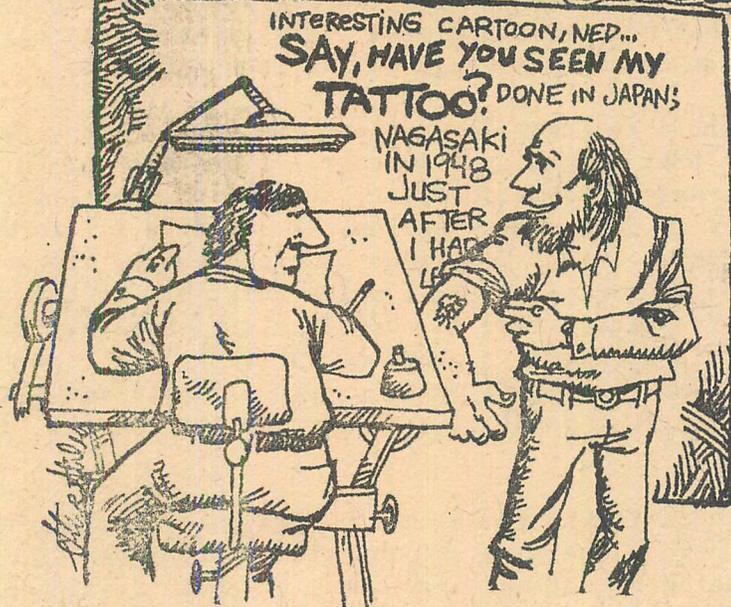
I hasten to add that what Shaw documented bore no relationship to the raw sort of fan politics epitomized by second fandom, with its exclusions and manifestos and denunciations--which might be characterized as pseudo-Stalinism. No, Shaw's subject was much more subtle, less crude, and infinitely more fannish. But let's let Bob speak for himself. An excerpt from "The Fansmanship Lectures (I)" from SLANT No. 5, Spring 1951:

"Fansmanship is the art of convincing other fans that you are a much bigger fan than they: and as a branch of S. Potter's "Lifemanship" it will help to relieve fandom of some of that disgustingly genuine good fellowship of which there is at present far too much.

"...The more advanced student may then proceed to LETTERMANSHIP. This does NOT consist merely of ignoring all letters from fans less important than yourself. The true fansman answers all such letters, but in such a way that the victim will NEVER WRITE TO



CARTOONMANSHIP



FANZINE. -- w.a.w.)

"In future lectures I hope to discuss other aspects of fansmanship, including EDITERSMANSHIP, SUBSCRIBERSMANSHIP, REVIEWMANSHIP, COLUMNCRAFT, FEUDWORK, and BNFmanship itself, including the deadly Indirect Glance Ploy, Teehee Ploy, the Great Big Man Gambit, Infant Prodigy Ploy, and counterploys such as Dimsworthy's Defence."

(That's quoted exactly, by the way, despite a suspicion on my part the the punctuation mark after "wanly" should probably have been either a comma or a colon, and that the two occurrences of the word "play" in the final paragraph should have been "ploy" instead. SLANT was a hand-printed fanzine till its last issue or two, and typos in hand-set type are not as easy to detect or correct as they are on stencils. The initials "w.a.w." in the interpolated note are those of Walter A. Willis, the editor of SLANT and no mean fansman himself.)

As far as I know Shaw didn't carry on the series far enough: to encompass Editorsmanship. If he did then that lecture has been lost in the mists of time, which is to say I've never seen it. In any case, since Bob has moved on to prodom, it's left to fans like me to carry on this vital work.

I've mentioned that owing to an abberation of my early employment I still possess a conditioned reflex by which a faned can extract a piece of fanwriting out of me just by invoking that magic word deadline and associating it with a definite date. Up till now I haven't had a problem with this, probably because of the quality of the fanwriting so elicited, but should this situation change I'll have to develop evasive tactics like Willis's.

But let's concentrate on the typical fanwriter. Simply dropping the word deadline and a date is of no use here. Your typical fanwriter has a conscience which is far outweighed by his id. As for the ego it's strange how often the capital "I" on his typer needs replacing.

Such key facts give the vital clue the faned requires to handle the situation. An enormous ego needs constant feeding simply to maintain itself. To this end fannish scien-

HIM AGAIN -- lettersmanship at its best. Standard ploys include misspelling his name, inordinate delay, and mention of piles of unanswered letters. . .

'An allied field is ZINESMANSHIP--convincing the other fan that his mag is so much wasted paper. With a neat mag it is usual to remark tolerantly that it must take (i.e. waste) a lot of time. With others, saying wanly; 'of course appearance isn't everything' is usually enough to suggest that the contents aren't up to much either. (Note: For postal play fansman R. Ostler advises (a) regretting that you have not had the time (i.e. inclination) to actually READ the mag yet, or (b) singling out for praise the most insignificant filler, preferably something quoted from ANOTHER

ists back in the days of first fandom developed the substance known as egoboo. ¹⁰ Ego-boo is not, as is commonly supposed, just an abbreviation for the mundane noun egoboosting. If you look at the two words closely you'll see that the fannish one has had the sting removed. This sting was an unfortunate side effect of the mundane product, which taken in excess produces a reaction comprising humility, modesty and humbleness. This was all very well in the mundane world, where writers are paid with money and an outside ego might lead to demands for more. In fandom however writers are rewarded solely with praise, which, thanks to the development of egoboo without sting, can be applied in great generous gobs with no ill effects.

So the wise faned makes the most of fannish technology by sending contributors quotes from letters of comment praising the contribution, with a leavening of adverse criticism to taste. When the faned or his employer can afford it, actual copies of the locs may be sent. Suitable excerpts should get into the local of the next issue. (The temptation to make up suitable comments when none are forthcoming from the readers is a matter between the faned and his creator; from the point of view of fansmanship the only relevant point is can you get away with it.)

The problem with all this is that it restricts the faned to payment upon publication. The solution is a sort of advance by the editor himself, non-repayable of course, which depends very much on the faned's own skills at writing and dissembling, not to mention how much nauseating flattery his stomach will allow him to write before it turns. Traces of vomit on the words of praise will of course dampen their effect.

Care must also be taken not to overdo this advance payment. Too much in advance and the fanwriter has no need to ever write at all. Satiation also results in a lowering of the emotional response--a fact which psychologists refer to as flattery of affect.

All very well. Such basic facts seem to be known, empirically at least, to most modern faneds. But how if these methods do not work? How then?

Applying modern physics to our theory it's easy to see that there must be another substance, the opposite of egoboo, in which all of the particles are reversed. This negative egoboo, or negoboo, does not consist as the neophyte fansman might suppose, in adverse comments or criticism of the subject. Rather it is generated when the subject reads a fanzine which has NO MENTION OF HIM AT ALL. The more frequently such a fanzine arrives the greater the negative charge induced. Dr. G. Benford on his recent visit to Cambridge has calculated that receipt of three monthly issues full of negoboo will drive the biggest of BNFs to his typer, lest he become one with Ninevah and Tyre. This is only the solution for the two-body problem; the three-body problem defies formal analysis and can be solved only approximately. However it's intuitively obvious to the most casual observer that the effect of three monthly issues of a fanzine filled with negoboo can be precisely canceled by the arrival of three monthly issues of a similar fanzine (same size, circulation, etc.) crammed with egoboo. If the frequencies differ the interference effect varies accordingly.

Notice that I spoke of the monthly fanzine. You probably think that such a thing is an unrealizable ideal, like the perfect circle. No such thing. Monthly fanzines used to appear, back in the early days of fandom. The dangers of monthly fanpubbing were demonstrated for all to see around 1953 when Joel Nydahl put out twelve monthly issues of VEGA culminating in a hundred-page annish. The gravitational stresses imposed by this huge expenditure of fannish energy by a teenage boy caused VEGA to collapse inward upon itself, forming what we now think of as a Black Hole, from which no information of any kind can escape. Phannish physicists are divided on the issue of VEGA, some claiming that the collapse would not have occurred if the fanzine hadn't been

¹¹
named for a star, while others theorize that under the same circumstances any fanzine would have endured the same fate. The case of Lee Hoffman and QUANDRY is cited by both sides as evidence, some pointing to the obvious similarities and some to the equally obvious differences. Clearly nothing concrete can be decided until some fool repeats the experiment.

The final weapon in the faned's arsenal is appeal to the fanwriter's conscience. Obviously this is a last resort, or a measure to be coordinated with other parallel efforts, but even the atrophied conscience of a fanwriter can produce a few twinges of guilt -- it just needs a lot more input for the same quantity of output. This means that a faned cannot have a normal conscience either -- preferably his should resemble that of an obnoxious mother-in-law or a shrewish wife or a tyrannical boss. A totally unrealistic deadline has to be set, and barbed reminders sent out both before and after the fanwriter has missed it. "YUQ is nearly all stencilled and partly run off," the faned may write, "but I have to visit my family this weekend so if you rush you might still get your contrib in on time." Needless to say the fanzine in question is an issue of fabrications. No stencils have been cut, no artwork gathered in; in fact the faned's typer may well be in hock and he may be a month away from the paycheck that will purchase the stencils. Nevertheless he prods away mercilessly at the potential contributors (he has of course overbooked) and generally one or more of them eventually come through, probably long before he had intended to publish anyway. It's true this is a lot of trouble, and keeps you alert at cons watching out for contributors who submitted "at the last moment" three months ago, but some faneds, finding this technique suited to their personality, use it constantly and forswear all others.

Okay, that covers Editorship, unless any of you has something to add. Now I'm going to start research on Fanwritersmanship. Obviously there is a secret method of keeping one's name in fanzines without ever contributing to any, and if you think about it you'll probably know which BNF's I plan to approach. Some are friends and I'm sure they'll tell me what I need to know. It's just occurred to me though that I may run into some trouble getting that piece published. Assuming of course that I ever write it.

* * * * *

Uniphants and Elecycle (CONTINUED from p. 41)

At last, the epic morning--a sunday--came. Armed with suitcase and backpack, plus a notebook with several quotes from Ecclesiastes, I subwaysed to Kennedy at dawn. It was pleasantly quiet. I was very alone in myself, all the other voices stilled. The flight I ended up on was dominated by Ringling staff and publicity people and a troop of black girls who played basketball on unicycles.

Through the magic of modern aerotechnology, cold sunny New York, New York, gave way to fiercely hot sunny Sarasota, Florida. Ballantine was there to pick me up, along with an instructor from South America who lasted all of a week before he got sent home for sneaking about in the bushes and accosting the girls in class and staring through windows and such; so much for the New World's Old World charm. All through the ride to Venice, where the motel and arena was, I felt good. I liked this part; and I even wondered if I might get the girl. (There remained the possibility of having to share with an elephant, but that was okay--this was the circus after all.) And then we pulled into the motel parking lot. It was page 27 of "Mischievous Harlequin" all over again. There were forty-odd youngsters around the pool, riding unicycles, and juggling and doing magic tricks and acrobatics. . . .

Juggling? Riding Unicycles? I was a classic demonstration of the difference between head knowledge and gut knowledge. That night I watched the orange sun set into the Gulf waters from our motel beach; watched a bunch of magicians trading routines; watched my soul. I had bought some colorful rubber balls at the local 7-11 shortly after arrival, and I stayed up late trying my damndest to keep them off the ground. I may or may not have been funny, but my situation sure as hell was. Maybe I could wrap a bit of it around me like a mantle. Echoes of Donald O'Conner singing "Make 'Em Laugh" in my head, I went to sleep, and the next day we began.

Words from Readers

Jay Lynch

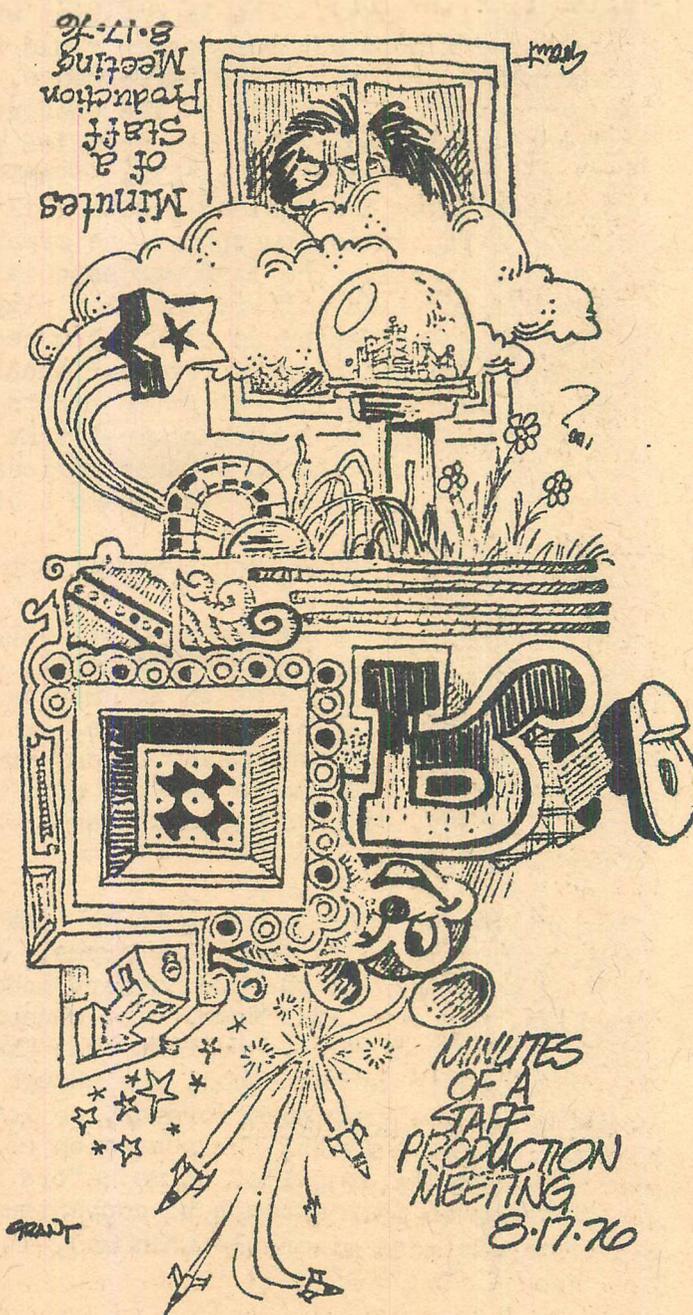
The Jay Kinney piece on the status of underground comix today and how this evolution -- or degeneration -- or whatever you want to call it took place is without doubt the best and most accurate exploration of the topic I've ever read. Objectively written, Kinney relays to the reader all pertinent info without taking sides -- allowing the reader to draw his own conclusions. The thing should be required reading in History of Underground Comix courses -- if there are such courses.

Al Sirosis, 550 Dixwell Ave., New Haven, CT 06511

Great Schirmeister cartoon in the last Starling! The man is truly an excellent cartoonist, and it's too bad that more people don't notice. He has such a clean crisp style.

Poor Bob Crumb -- he used to be fucking brilliant, but these days he has degenerated into a cranky old fart. His artwork is still great, but the sparkle and knife-edges are gone from his writing.

Being a quasi-underground artist myself, I read Jay's article with considerable interest. The problem with the underground comics was that they paraded great stuff and crap together. Corben could show up in the same book with (yech) Rory Hayes. The people who truly deserved to be seen, like Corben, Sheridan, Schrier, Jaxon, etc., got dragged down by crude primitive hackwork, like S. Clay Wilson, Hayes and other no-talents. The only thing Wilson ever seemed to learn was how to draw a heavier line than anyone else, and how to make his panels models of utter incomprehensibility. The only reasonably funny thing he ever did was "Angels and Devils" in one of the later issues of ZAP.



Griffith and Spiegelman, two of the most overrated artists are now peddling their own brand of primitive ugliness in ARCADE, which is probably the worst thing to happen to the undergrounds since they began.

If I was older, I would've gotten my ass out to California and participated in the Underground scene back in the sixties, but unfortunately I couldn't. But the main point is this: underground work is flourishes today, but not in ARCADE or COMIX BOOK or whatever. . .you have to check out books like NATIONAL SCREW, NatLamp, etc etc. The undergrounds don't stand a chance against high-pressure outfits like this, and that's as it should be -- far from being separate from the "mainstream" of comic art and magazines, the Underground must and will be integrated into this "mainstream."

Dave Cockfield, 31 Durham Ct., Heburn, Tyne & Wear NE3 1JK United Kingdom

I wish I'd seen Frank Denton's look at British folk and rock. I agree, how could he neglect the Incredibles and the Chieftens? I wonder if he missed out the best Irish group ever, Planxty. The Incredibles were for years my favorite live group. Their records were good but they never could recapture the fun, vitality, and sheer abandonment of their stage performance. I remember about 71 when they gave a concert at Newcastle old Town Hall. The concert room was devoid of chairs and full of long haired, denim clad, layabouts sprawled around clutching assorted numbers of full, half full and empty Brown Ale bottles. The whole affair was so badly managed that onstage the Incredibles had decided, with full approval of the audience, to do whatever felt right. A fantastic atmosphere was created as they varied from folk, to dirty dittys, to rock and roll. The last was especially memorable, with Robin Williamson and Mike Heron playing lead guitar, Licorice playing bass and Rose the drums. Rose was wearing a long green-velvet dress with a low neckline. She kept getting so absorbed in her drumming that kit slipped from her shoulders. Everytime whistles came from the audience she'd hastily put it to rights but in the end just said to hell with it. Everyone was having a such a great time that the show ran well over time and the police had to get the up because various laws were being well and truly broken. It's a pity that their music became a bit too studied and serious in later years.

Doug Barbour, 10808 - 75th avenue, edmonton, alberta, t6e 1k2

Dan Steffan's cover is simply brilliant, & a wee bit more, a piece that should warm the cockles of Barry Malzberg's heart, asserting as it does, the essential traumatic experience of Our Generation in America (& strangely enough, due to the fact that Your airspace is also our airspace, or do i mean air Waves, this generation in Canada, too). the conspiracy theory expands apace, & when even poor old DD himself is implicated, the end is not far off. i loved it. then, there is Jim Turner. all i want to say, Jim, is you succeeded. hope it makes you happy. i did read the damned thing thru

Tonight (a few moments ago, to be exact), i was driving home from my late class & listening to CBS's top 40 programs. An announcer was discussing Kiss's latest hit, a song very much in the Rod Stewart mode. In case youre wondering, i dont listen to Kiss, and dont like them. The announcer had a point to make, & I found it both interesting and valid. He felt that Kiss was making a mistake in copping Stewart's licks as their latest steal, for though a true superstar like Stewart could keep singing in the same mode forever, so long as he kept coming up with good songs, copycats would not be able to; their version would soon pall. After hearing the record, I can believe it; it palled on me before the first verse was finished. However, while i listened to them attempt to copy Stewart's great vocal moves and fail miserably (no one was more miserable than me), it ocured to me that it is both very difficult

& possibly a bit of challenging fun, to try to articulate what it is that makes Stewart, & a few other singers, such great rock & roll voices. ¹⁴

Indeed. I love Rod Stewart. Mike Jagger. Van Morrison. (In a very different fashion, Bob Dylan & Canada's Murray McLaughlin; these two have rocknroll deep in them, but they play with its nuances in ways the others don't: the others play with those nuances & the whole rocknroll context from an utterly committed position deep in the centre). Bruce Springsteen. & a late addition for me, because ive just recently discovered him: Bob Seger.

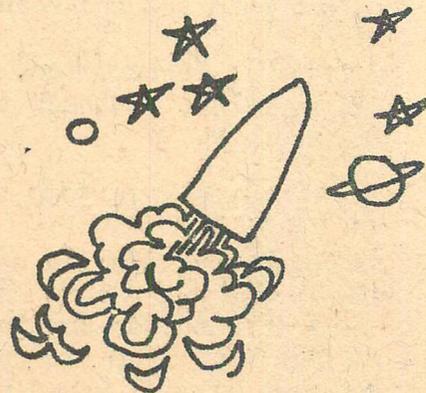
For the purpose of these 'notes,' im going to stick mostly with Rod Stewart, with a few asides on some of the others. Stewart, as has been pointed out a number of times by such writers as Griel Marcus & Dave Marsh among others, is possessed of one of the great rocknroll voices; over the years he has trained -- whether he has done so consciously or not is neither here nor there -- that voice until it is an instrument of awesome power. The greatest rocknroll singers, like the greatest jazz singers, use their voices like instruments, part of the total band sound they seek to create. Stewart does this magnificently, as a listen to any of his solo albums will testify. He's a testifier, which is only proper in one who learned so much from Sam Cooke. What exactly are the qualities which distinguish a great rocknroll voice from an ordinary one? They are not that easily stated, but central to everything is the ability to project emotion. A faultless sense of rhythm helps. Another quality, one that is not so much learned as discovered by the singer in his committment to the music, has to do with 'fills.' i mean, for example, that utterly marvelous moment in the 'The First Cut is the Deepest' when in the midst of the despair plus putative hope the song expresses, Stewart, in a moment of lyrical silence suddenly throws out a yip of pure musical joy, no words could express it, but the spirit of rocknroll is speaking: through him at that moment, because he is so utterly in the music, the song.

& what, finally, does a great rocknroll voice offer us? It offers us what great rocknroll offers us: something to sink into, & like the ocean, swim in, awash in the overwhelming sound. This can be accomplished by instruments alone, perhaps, but im more and more led to believe that there is no such thing as purely instrumental rocknroll. Rock, yes (indeed: Yes). Rocknroll centers, always, on a singer or singers. The singers i mentioned at the beginning of this section all know this.

Freff, 211 Highland Drive, Enterprise, AL 36330

In a late comment on Starling #34, I feel like leaping on Leigh Edmonds with hobnail boots, tender mercy thrown to the winds, for his incredible gall. Here are the quotes that throw me. "Beethoven...you can listen to escapist music if you want to, let's not claim that the activity is something that makes us really alive." And "What have Bach, Beethoven and Brahms to do with you?" The answer is that they were human beings. Musical sound draws on our sonic experience, but the meat of music is what that sound is used to represent and those emotions were always present in human beings.

Lest Leigh think I am a traditionalist in the extreme, I love Ilham Mimaroglu's work; Charles Wuorinen, and even Walter Carlos; snipe if you will. I also like elizabethan folk music, african drums, javanese gamelan music, Barry Partch, and the sound of a Saturn Five Launch. The night launch of a Saturn Five could be viewed as the Ultimate in avant garde multi-media Statements...



Harry Warner, Jr., 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland, 21740

Rick Dey's article about Thorne Smith was a big surprise to me. The surprise consisted of the way it interested me. I must have read a couple of dozen long fanzine articles over the years about the works of this writer, and I've never been fond of his fiction as his most ardent supporters in fandom. But somehow, Rich made my interest perk up in a lively manner. Now I feel as if I'd better read some of the Smith novels again, to see if my reaction to them has changed. (I never liked the Marx Brothers, W. C. Fields or Mae West when they were making movies, for instance, so I've had lots of practice in admitting to myself wrong early judgments.) Incidentally, I wonder if Bob Tucker remembers how he used to be the most persistent booster of Thorne Smith in fanzines, back in the first years I was in fandom. One thing I can't remember any fanzine writer about Thorne Smith: . . . the question of whether those novels influenced the creation of Street & Smith's Unknown. I wonder if Campbell had read and enjoyed the Smith books, and if some of the longer stories in early issues of Unknown were directly influenced by Smith? But I don't remember Campbell ever mentioning Smith when he was trying to explain the kind of fiction he wanted for his new publishing venture, when those preliminaries were narrated in this and that place later on.

In response to Jim Turner's column, I wonder if Seabury Quinn's success with writing about the undressing of females had anything to do with his practical experience in the mortician's trade? Even if Roads wasn't completely original, it was probably his most famous one in Weird Tales. People kept writing about it in the letter column year after year, speaking of it almost with reverence. Finally, Farnsworth Wright reprinted it, either in the magazine or as a booklet. It might still pass muster for inclusion in mundane anthologies of Christmas writings.

When you have both front and back covers by Dan Steffan, what can you do for an encore? The most frightening part of the front cover is the strong resemblance that man on the right bears to Howard Co-sell.

Bob Tucker, 34 Greenbriar Drive, Jacksonville, FL 62650

I spent a very pleasant evening with Starling 35, and thank you for the delight. Easily, the top article in the issue was that one on Thorne Smith. Others may faunch for music, or comics, or Jim Turner's amusing words, but I was delighted by Rick Dey.

Thorne Smith was one of my earliest discoveries, after Wells, and Verne, and Burroughs, and that ilk. I first read him in the Thirties when I found his hardcover books in the lending libraries (they were grouped with the *sex* books for over-eighteen reading) and later, I was able to buy almost all of those same hardcovers in used bookstores and rummage sales. I still have them packed away in one or another of the two dozen cartons of books stashed in closets, and the article has me itching to get them out and read them again.

I like Jim Turner, too. I don't think he is insulting, I view him as just a lovable old reprobate although that view may cut him to the quick. Perhaps he only frightens the neofans.

Ira M. Thornhill, 1900 Perdido Street Apt. B97, New Orleans, LA 70112

Lesleigh continues to make me wish that my interest in comics as a youth had extended into areas other than Marvel. Much of what she deals with I remember only from cartoon shows on Saturday morning, comics read while waiting in barber shops or doctor's offices, or from old cartoons they used to show before movies. Lesleigh drags up memories that I would've thought lost forever, and shines them for me until they reflect the light of lost childhood like tears. Love it!



Without too much effort Jim Turner could win himself a Hugo for best fan writer. I get this fantastic image of a little old dude with long shaggy hair and two days growth of beard and fingernails an inch and a half long from doing speed for weeks staggering and giggling insarably toward a pair of would be muggers. Ghod! Now that appeals to my sense of humor. Swordcane hell, a chainsaw is more like it. Too bad he didn't do 'Pimpily Masturbating Assholes of Gor' though -- a friend of mine is in the process of writing a philosophical analysis of the Gor novels for me and I would've loved to see Jim's views.

Buck Coulson, Rt. 3, Hartford City, Ind., 47348

Jeff Smith has just decided that Jim Turner's columns are designed to irritate people? A little slow on the uptake, isn't he? (As for McDonald's suggestion that Jim had better watch out for toes when he's stomping around, no, Steve. The toes had better watch out for Turner.)

Of course my problem with Turner is that I pretty much agree with him. (And since he is trying to outrage me, along with all your other readers, that means that either he or I has failed. He, preferably. . .) Anyway, his descriptions of the would-be muggings was the best part of Starling. (If Jim Turner came at me, either giggling or chuckling, I'd damnwell run, whether I had a knife or not. Hell, unless he's lost a lot more weight recently, you couldn't stick a knife into him far enough to hit anything vital -- and if you did, he'd fall on you and crush a few assorted bones and arteries. Besides, he looks like he'd fight dirty.)

I also enjoyed Carlson's review. My Henry Shute book is brite and fair (Cosmopolitan Book Corp., 1920) but as I recall, Louis Chauvenet loaned me a copy of Real Diary years ago when we were both in FAPA. (And Carlson and I seem to have at least one other similarity; when I was in 5th grade I read Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia all the way through, learning to play chess in the process. I think I already knew about the Maginot Line.) I think Ted White may have read one or the other of the Shute books, too, and taken them as models for his letters of apology. . .

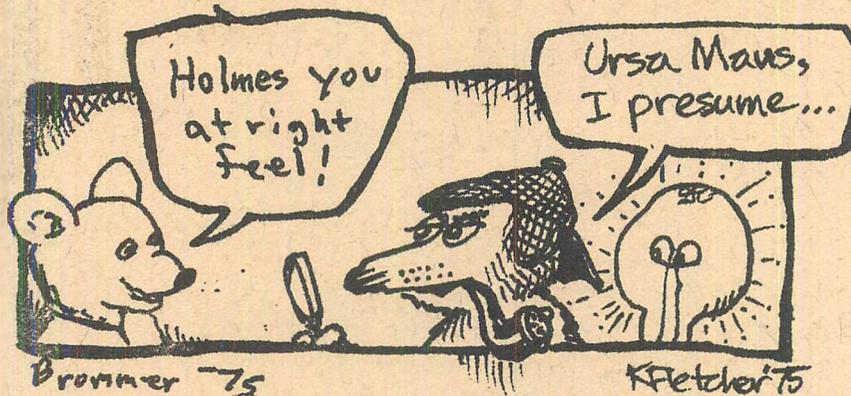
"...of coarse it wasent so mutch becaus you swore so but becaus you are a decon of the chirch and speek in prair meating and so you hadent augt to have did it. but that is no xcuse for me to sass you. father sed i wasent verry mutch to blaim. he says he dont object to swaring but when a man tries to be a decon and plug ugly at the saim time it is the dam hippockrasy of it that maiks a man mad. i only tell you this to show you i was not verry mutch to blaim. but i am verry sorry i done it."

I have occasionally modeled my own apologies on that. . .

James A. Cox, 290 Orchard Drive #1, Oregon, Wi 53575

My favorite piece was Lesleigh's tribute (or was it diatribe) to the fauna of the funnies. Growing up in the 40's meant the only good comics were the funny animal

comics -- according to my mother the Disney Ducks and Looney Tune folk were the only legal entries into our home. All others were smuggled under shirts, between school books and quick raids while the grown-ups were off somewhere getting religion.



Jim Turner's reminiscences were read avidly. Toward the end I got a little worried -- my own prejudices paralleled the man so much there might not be anything left to kibbitz. Maybe it comes with approaching middle age -- this distaste for psuedo-liberalism, downer writing and the younger generation tsk-tsking.

I'll dance to the music of Juanita Coulson anyt ime if her approach to humor comes anywhere close to her approach to life. I too am a devotee of Jor: Hall - Maria Montez movies. But to me those south sea island fantasy flicks were reality. It's what awaited me outside the theatre and the walls of my little house in the city that never came across as quite real.

My favorite cartoon (aside from the cover) is the missionary position. I always did root for the cannibals in the old Playboy cartoons of yesteryear.

Terry Hughes, 4739 Washington Blvd., Arlington, VA 22205

Dan Steffan's cover for Starling #35 was a very humourous combination of funny animal fandom and Alfred Hitchcock. An innocent duck ("Quacko") finds himself being interrogated by government intelligence officials -- it makes a great cover scene for Starling, especially when drawn by that well-known duck fancier, Dan Steffan.

I found it rather amusing that Juanita Coulson's column immediately followed your piece, Lesleigh. In her pages Juanita talks about what has been and what is funny to her. The primary thrust of her piece is that different things are humourous to different people and Juanita cautioned everyone against being too harsh on forms of comedy a particular individual may not care for. This following your well written but none the less critical review of funny animal books you don't care for made me smile. Those books were successful so they did indeed have an audience, even if you weren't part of it. I know that as a child I was quite fond of Tom & Jerry -- especially the adventures where they dressed as musketeers -- at the same time I was enjoying Uncle Scrooge. I read all sorts of trashy comics, ones which no longer have any impact on me other than nostalgia. They may not have been comic art but they made me laugh, and that's what they were trying to do. Even when crudely done, a joke is usually funny on first exposure. As an adult -- no snickering, folks -- I am quite discriminating about "funny books" but as a child I read almost anything. True, many titles quickly bored me, but there are few comics of that nature and time span that I did not read at one time or another. Then again, I also used to laugh at Bob Hope movies. . . .

Brian Earl Brown, 55521 Elder Rd., Mishawaka, Ind., 46544

Enjoyed Jay Kinney's history of the undergrounds. It would be interesting to hear about Jay's own involvement in that, but perhaps that's appeared already ~~someplace~~ else. I have little hope of the undergrounds ever becoming more than a marginal cottage industry. It's too idiosyncratic, obsessed with cheap thrills sex and very little of it was drawn well enough that I'd want to publish it in my zine. On the other hand, the trend in newspaper comic strips seems to be towards "art" as crude as the worst of the undergrounds.

Lesleigh brings up an interesting matter about funny animals and old time cartoon features. Those old cartoons were incredibly violent. Did we really like them because of their violence? I know I enjoyed them as a child, but when I see them now I'm rather appalled by them. The closest I ever came to Tom and Jerry or Sylvester and Tweety was the cartoon versions, but I imagine there was little difference between the cartoons and the comics. Even the Roadrunner has begun to be tedious because one can predict what's going to happen.

David Mraz, 3112 Holmes Ave., S., Mpls, Minn., 55408

Looking through a stack of 50's vintage "Fox and Crow"s "Tom and Jerry"s and "Looney Tunes" I agree completely about the conclusions and observations Lesleigh made. The Barks funny animal stuff always had genuine capital "W" warmth to them. Donald, Uncle Scrooge, Huey, Dewey and Louie had great family ties though they had their "family" fights.

I always loved the covers of the 1940's and 1950's "Looney Tunes" but found the stories very weak and contrived. I really enjoyed the artwork of "Fox and Crow" but can't stomach the story lines.

Almost all the comic book characters mentioned in Lesleigh's articles have been animated at one time or another: Little Lulu, Uncle Scrooge, Tom & Jerry, Fox & Crow, Tweety & Sylvester. . .all except Howard the Duck.

For Terry Hughes. . .!Colonel Beep' was created in the same year as "Crusader Rabbit" and "Ruff 'n' Reddy," 1957. There were 100 episodes produced by Richard Ullman at Soundad Color Productions, each episode was about 5-10 minutes in length.

Jim Meadows, 31 Apple Ct., Park Forest, IL 60466

I think Lesleigh left out a factor in examining these funny animal comics. That is, they are always affected, somehow, by their source. I don't mean that they are identical, but they are affected, and when one looks at the comic book one should remember that whoever wrote the format was going by the source. Tom & Jerry came from a series of animated shorts made at the MGM studios from the 40's through the 60's, and then the Hanna-Barbera cartoon mill in this decade. Their definitive years are in those first two decades, when they were mostly directed by Hanna and Barbera. H & B were gifted directors in the days before they went to television, and the Tom & Jerry cartoons reflected that, especially in the fast paced timing of the gags. In the movies, Tom & Jerry are mute, and so are most of the characters around them. About all they could do was cry out in pain. There's a good reason for this; of the animation studios making one reelers in the 40's, only Warner Bros. ever really excelled at using dialog in both writing and performance aspects. The simplest visual scene is the chase, and that is basically what Tom & Jerry cartoons were: glorified chase scenes with heavy gag elaboration. This was a common theme in the animated shorts, but Tom & Jerry did it a lot better than most cartoons.

Tweety & Sylvester also came from the movies. Their first short ("I Tot I Taw A Puddy Tat,") won an Oscar in the late 40's, with Tweety being a novelty that livened up an old idea. With such success, of course, a series was given them, and they stayed for quite a while.

Lets take a series like Bugs Bunny, which started out as a chase gag cartoon like any other, but which over the years evolved into a deeper work. Bugs, instead of being the chased cute animal quickly became a chased animal who was more audacious than cute. The audacity grew into urbanity, a worldliness. In the cartoons of the 50's, especially the Chuck Jones ones, Bugs is almost always completely on top of the situation. He could use violence to solve a situation, but he could also use ingenuity humor and even a grudging compassion. I don't see too much of the Bugs comic books, but I remember them as being more, well, domestic, than those based on simpler cartoons.

George Kelley, Apt 503, 505 North Carroll St., Madison, WI 53703

I've just finished reading Malzberg's collection Down Here in the Dream Quarter and I find myself troubled by the book, and by Malzberg's statements about the reasons he's leaving science fiction. This is hardly news; I knew Malzberg was leaving when I read The Best of Barry Malzberg over a year ago. That was about the same time SF Commentary published Robert Silverberg's article on why he was leaving science fiction and Harlan Ellison stated he was leaving the field, too. The bicentennial saw reaction to Ellison, Malzberg and Silverberg's farewells: they were asked to SF conventions to talk about the reasons they were leaving, breaking out of the ghetto and reaching the readership (and money) they think they're entitled to.

While Ellison, Malzberg and Silverberg are not my favorite writers, I admire much of their work and I feel sf will be poorer in their absence. Their careers have some similarities: Ellison and Silverberg were hacks in the late fifties, Malzberg became a hack ten years after, but surprisingly all three became quality writers. The work these men produced, the best of it, was stories of madness, sickness and doom. Most of the best work was done during the Vietnam years, the Nixon-Agnew-Ford years, so perhaps we can't blame them for the stories of darkness and death. But the work is unrelenting, uncompromising as a terminal cancer patient. Ellison, Malzberg, Silverberg: they're all downers.

We, as readers, have some choice. We don't have to read their stories. But maybe they have to write them. How many times can Ellison write "A Whimper of Whipped Dogs" and Malzberg write "Trashing" and Silverberg write "Born with the Dead"?

It will be a curious type of limbo without them. As they stop writing sf, the body of work produced over the years will remain to be reprinted. Malzberg says one, possibly two collections of material are still to appear. Ace is reprinting Silverberg's tacky hack work. Someday Pyramid will issue the rest of the Harlan Ellison Library. Kurt Vonnegut, another downer, managed to escape the sf ghetto early and become a Big Name. Yet, I suspect Vonnegut is a better writer than Ellison, Malzberg and Silverberg; they lack Vonnegut's whimsy, the ability to sugarcoat horror without copping out.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM: Carolyn "CD." Doyle, who's mother doesn't like Kiss, even if Gene Simmons was once a fan; Steve McDonald feels sorry for Jim Turner, and says that living in Columbia, Mo. is enough to drive anyone nuts; David C. Merkel thought our Special Humor Issue was depressing; Kim Gibbs wrote, "Dan Steffan's cover would have been more appropriate for Science Fiction Review." Stu Shiffman; Horrible Old Roy Tackett; Lester Boutillier; Denis Kitchen (I especially like Jay Kinney's "Sitting In Limbo."); David Cohen, Wally Staelting, Marc Ortlieb, Howard Cruse, Gil Gaier, Paul Novitski, Laurine White, Dave Piper, Paula Gold, Alan Bosco.

Fourth Annual



Award

+ Michael Carlson +

I confess. I make lists. I read a book, I mark it down somewhere, usually with a few notes on it for myself. Ditto with movies. I've done this for a long time. I even did it before I encountered Bruce Gillespie (he even lists short stories! how weird!) Once I tore up three years lists, and a week later was trying frantically to reconstruct them. Starting with 1973 I began compiling year-end master lists, rating things and publishing those in my fanzine, Jawbone. When JB folded after 2 years, and transferred to the pages of Starling, the lists came with it. I'm still not sure what they signify. They are a look into my habits, and my tastes, and they are also suggestions for reading which I subtly make to you, the reader. I know some of the responses these lists get, and that feedback often leads me off on new avenues of exploration, the same as reading itself does. And that's a benefit I'm loathe to surrender.

TEN BEST OF THE YEAR

1. V Thomas Pynchon (1963)
2. The Universal Baseball Association Robert Coover (68)
3. The New Empire Brooks Adams (02)
4. Invisible Man Ralph Ellison (52)
5. Charles Olson/Ezra Pound Olson, ed. C. Seelye (75)
6. A Fine and Private Place Peter S. Beagle (60)
7. A Time to Die Tom Wicker (75)
8. Interface Joe Gores (74)
9. The Pledge Friedrich Durrenmatt (59)
10. Hammett Joe Gores (75); Confessions of a Crap Artist Philip K. Dick (75/59); Samuel Fuller Nicholas Garhnam (71)

This year's best reading is selected from a total of 191 books (1975-194), not counting poetry. By genres, 53 were crime, mystery, or suspense; 35 were sf; 49 were non-fiction; 43 were general (mainstream) fiction; 4 were westerns; 6 were historical or adventure;

and 1 was a play. Of these books, 150 were of more than decent quality, as opposed to 129 in 1975. I think the upsurge in quality is related to the drop in mysteries, and the increase in general and non-fiction. As those are the two areas in which I am most selective, most of the books I read in those categories tend to be good. Part of the drop was also due to my having polished off large doses of certain authors in the mystery field last year (Westlake, Garfield, Grand, Runyon.) This year the reading was more spread out. Only 11 authors had 3 or more titles on the lists: Philip K. Dick 7; Donald Westlake 4 (+2 as Richard Stark); Colin Wilson, John D. MacDonald, Maxwell Grant, Barry Malzberg 4; Roch Carrier, Marie-Claire Blais, Thomas Burnett Swann, Michael Moorcock, and Brian Garfield 3.

CRIME, MYSTERY & SUSPENSE

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Interface--Gores | 6. Hopscotch--Brian Garfield (75) |
| 2. The Pledge--Durrenmatt | 7. The Eighth Circle--Stanley Ellin (58) |
| 3. Hammett--Gores | 8. The Return of Moriarty--John Gardner (74) |
| 4. Marathon Man--William Goldman (74) | 9. The Schoolgirl Murder Case--Colin Wilson |
| 5. Straus--Anders Bodelsen (71) | 10. 52 Pickup--Elmore Leonard (74) |

The Second Ten (in order): The Romanov Succession (Garfield 74), The Dead are Discreet (Arthur Lyons 74), Pay On the Way Out (John Murphy 75), Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy (John Le Carre 74), Jimmy the Kid (Westlake 74), God Save the Child (Robert B. Parker 74), Hollywood & LeVine (Andrew Bergman), Killing Time (Westlake 61), The Giant Rat of Sumatra (Richard Boyer 76), The Retaliators (Donald Hamilton 76).

Joe Gores had produced two of the best, and most important, mysteries I've read in years. Both INTERFACE and HAMMETT are so firmly rooted into the hardboiled ethos and mythology, that I wonder if they would be as effective to the "outsider". But within those limits, they are devastating. THE PLEDGE is one of Durrenmatt's better studies of not only crime, but also of cause & effect in a random universe. The book MARATHON MAN is better than the film; although the latter was well done, the former packs more punch. STRAUS is a novel in which the second-best crime writer in Denmark, initials AB, decides to kill the #1 crime writer. A tour-de-force of psychological writing. Besides the Gardner/Moriarty book, THE GIANT RAT OF SUMATRA is an out-and-out Holmes pastiche. HOPSCOTCH is one of Garfield's best; and THE EIGHTH CIRCLE was a pleasant surprise.

NON-FICTION

1. The New Empire Adams
2. Charles Olson & Ezra Pound Olson
3. A Time to Die Wicker
4. Samuel Fuller Garnham
5. Viking America J.R. Enterline (72)
6. They've Killed the President Robert Sam Anson (75)
7. JFK: The Case for Conspiracy Model & Groden (76)
8. Fat Cats and Democrats G.Wm. Domhoff (72)
9. Order of Assassins Colin Wilson (72)
10. The Politics of Lying David Wise (73)

The Second Ten (in order): Small is Beautiful (EF Schumacher 73), If you Have A Lemon, Make Lemonade (Warren Hinckle 74), From Reverence to Rape (Molly Haskell 74), The Stature of Man (Colin Wilson 59), Government by Gunplay (Blumenthal & Yazijian 76), The Higher Circles (Domhoff 70), Five Readings of the Maximus Poems (Frank Davey 70), Ezra Pound (Donald Davie 75), Charles Olson in Connecticut (Charles Boer 75), None Dare Call It Conspiracy (Gary Allen 71), B Movies (Don Miller 73), Norse Discoveries & Explorations in North America (Hjalmar Holborn 40).

It's easy to see the topics that dominate my non-fiction reading; political conspiracy, Viking exploration, movies, poetry (esp. Olson). Somehow THE NEW EMPIRE fits none of those categories, except that I found it while reading Olson. It's a fascinating study of civilization based on trade routes and control of metals. The Olson/Pound book is a thing of beauty; a perceptive look into both men. A TIME TO DIE is moving, and honest, and the one has a great deal to do with the other. The study of Fuller is the best study of a director I've yet read. The political books are pretty much self-explanatory; the only problem is that generally only the people who already believe these writers will read them. No hope for the rest. Enterline's Viking study presents some unusual conclusions about the Viking settlements--raising some good questions. Two Wilson books are in the top 20 this year, along with 2 studies of the ruling class in America by the droll G. William Domhoff. CHARLES OLSON IN CONNECTICUT was Theresa's Christmas gift to me; it's a touching memoir of a great writer.



GENERAL FICTION

1. V Thomas Pynchon
2. Universal Baseball Association Coover
3. Invisible Man Ellison
4. Confessions of a Crap Artist Dick
5. Snow White Donald Barthelme (67)
6. The Real Life of Sebastian Knight Vladimir Nabokov (41)
7. La Guerre, Yes Sir! Roch Carrier (68)
8. The Investigation Stanislaw Lem (59)
9. The Lime Twig John Hawkes (61)
10. 92 in the Shade Thomas McGuane (73)

The Second Ten: Knife on the Table (Jacques Godbout 65), A Season in the Life of Emmanuel (Marie-Claire Blais 66), Getting Into Death (Thomas M. Disch 76), The Quarry (Durrenmatt), A North American Education (Clark Blaise 73), The Studhorse Man (Robert Kroetch 70), The Man Who Changed Overnight (Fielding Dawson 76), The Giner Man (J.B. Donleavy 55), Inside Mr. Enderby (Anthony Burgess 63), Bear (Marian Engle 76), The Choirboys (Joseph Wambaugh 75), Goodbye Bobby Thompson, Goodbye John Wayne (Alan S. Foster 73), The Hawkline Monster (Richard Brautigan 74), Tete Blanche (Blais 60).

I'd almost finished V when I was 17, but for some reason left off in the middle of Mondaugen's dream, so I count this reading of it as the first one. It's a fantastic novel, that repays any investment of effort. UNIVERSAL BASEBALL deals with the same sort of universe as V, using a dice baseball game as its metaphor (shades of David Eisenhower). It's a much overlooked little classic. INVISIBLE MAN was overlooked only by me. CRAP ARTIST is one of Dick's very best novels. That says a lot. I guess it was just too far ahead of 1959's mainstream. SNOW WHITE is a typically clever Barthelme exercise, while KNIGHT is (I think) Nabokov's first novel written in English, and would seem to be one of the inspirations for V. Carrier is a very talented French-Canadian writer; this novel, the first and best of a trilogy, is structurally amazing and written (& translated) very well indeed. Both the Lem & Hawkes books require a great deal of attention, but are worth it, and 92 IN THE SHADE is one of the better American books of the last few years. A couple of other notes; Godbout's novel is

the best I've yet read in terms of the French/English characters in Canada. Part's of Tom Disch's collection are stunning, others merely good. Clark Blaise writes simply and well, very similar to Fielding Dawson in many ways. And THE STUDHORSE MAN is a charming little Odyssey set in Alberta.

If you notice a bit of Canadian content in this list, you're right; one of the top 10 and six of the second 14 are Canadian books; this is partly a reflection of my living in Canada and partly a reflection of the new surge of creative energy north of the border.

SCIENCE FICTION

1. A Fine and Private Place Beagle
2. The Simulacra Dick (64)
3. A Cure for Cancer Moorcock (71)
4. Dr. Bloodmoney Dick (65)
5. Galaxies Barry Malzberg (75)
6. The Futurological Congress Lem (74)
7. Chronocules D.G. Compton
8. Half Past Human T.J. Bass (71)
9. Now Wait for Last Year Dick (66)
10. The Hollow Lands Moorcock (74)

The Second Ten: The Variable Man (Dick 57), Lady of the Bees (Thomas Burnett Swann), The World Jones Made (Dick 56), We Can Build You (Dick 72), The Forever War (Joe Haldeman 75), Minikins of Yam (Swann 76), The Gamesman (Malzberg 75), Illuminatus Trilogy (Shea & Wilson 75), Tournament of Throns (Swann 76).

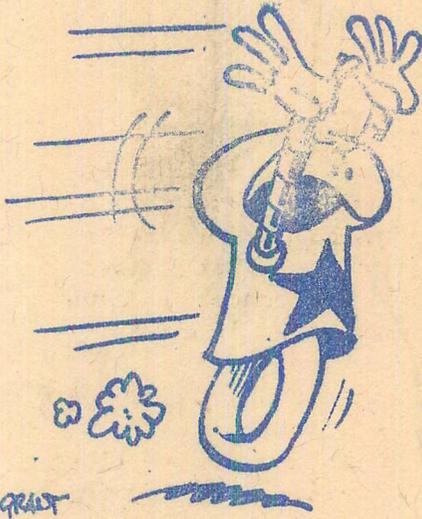
It was not a banner year for my sf reading, except for the reissues of Phil Dick, which continually astound me. Peter Beagle's book, of course, is a masterpiece; the best fantasy I've read in years, and something that should be a fine, Topper-style movie. GALAXIES is another of Malzberg's post-modern sf novels, a good one; and the next three novels on the list (Lem, Compton, & Bass) are all very solid efforts, with the overall quality dropping off a bit after that.

The one play I read last year was BUTLEY, which of course is tremendous. There were so many impressive books of poetry that I can't begin to mention them; my favorite I think was Ed Dorn's COLLECTED POEMS. The worst book I had the misfortune to begin and cussed stupidity to finish was P.J. Plauger's FIGHTING MADNESS: last year's winner in that category, which I forgot to include at that time, was BLAKE'S PROGRESS by Ray Nelson.

* * * * *

For those of you thinking about getting some back issues, here is a summary of some of their contents:

- STARLING 27 -- 10th Anniversary with Richard Gordon, Joe Sanders, Bob Tucker, Terry Hughes, Jerry Kaufman. covers by Joe Staton and Boxell/Fletcher \$2
- 29 -- "How to Write Swell" by Rick Dey, Sanders, Jim Turner, Juanita Coulson, Leigh Edmonds. covers by Fletcher and Fletch/Tom Foster \$2
- 30 -- Sandra Miesel, Sanders, Leigh Couch, Great American Comics "Gix Sptzl Blx!" covers by Shull and Canfield \$1
- 32 -- Coulson, Sanders, Turner. covers by Sirois and Schirmeister \$1
- 33 -- Sanders, Michael Carlson, Don D'Amassa, Richard West's "Christmas with Carl Barks" covers by Gomoll and Schirmeister \$2
- 34 -- Frank Denton, Edmonds, Turner, Carlson, Chris Couch, Sanders. covers by Harry Bell and Fletch/Jim Young \$1

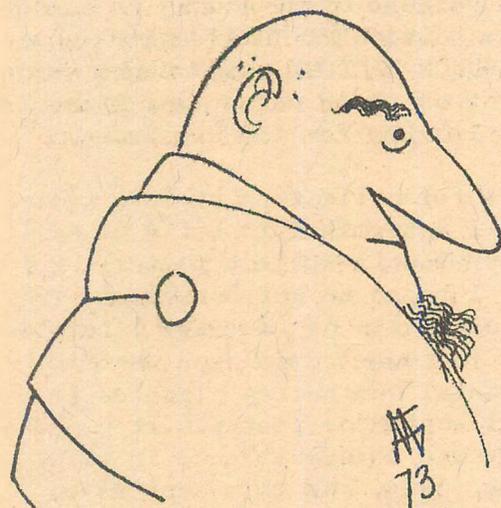


Have You Read Them All?

+ John J. Alderson +

"I have two large houses filled with books, and at this moment I have not read them all, but I meditate upon them daily. There is not in the whole earth a book that I have not. After I have left the schools, there will be no one under heaven so learned as I."

Benedict of Clusa



Chesterton once referred to a "monstrous" library owned by an acquaintance of his, occupying three houses and consisting of some thirty thousand volumes. He was not referring, in case any may be thinking along those lines, to Forry Ackerman, who manages, I have been given to understand, to fit his collection into one, admittedly extensive house. We have in Australia several extensive collections of books, still in private hands that is. Probably the two best known collections which have passed to public ownership are those of Mitchell (now the cornerstone of the National Library of New South Wales), and Fergusson's collection of Australian literature, which formed the basis of his immense bibliography of Australia, and which is now one of the chief ornaments of the National Library in Canberra. (For the interest of foreigners, we have at least seven national libraries in Australia.)

Why does a man begin to collect books (and seeing one of our most famous Australian collections is owned by a woman, why do women begin to collect books), and having started collecting, why do some collect modestly, and why do some collect promiscuously? Lets be clear on those two extremes. Some collect within a very narrow field with very few books, whilst others, at the worst extreme, seem to buy every book they see. "Oh dear," I can hear you all groaning from here, "He's going to tell us about his collection." Well I did have that intention too, but if you're all going to turn the page and read the next article...

I had the pleasure, once, of looking over a collection of books of which the possessor was quite proud. There were about twenty of them, all concerning Rabbe Burns (it may be irrevelent, but he was a Scot living in Glasgow.) In comparison with his income they were all expensive books, and I can imagine every one of those volumes being carefully pored over in the shop before purchase, just as many other volumes had been pored over, for books on Burns are not real scarce--one could build up a library of them in a very short space of time--but these books had been considered worthy of purchase and had been bought and, not read, but studied. That man was an expert on Burns (there are about three million near-experts) and what he didn't know about Burns and his poetry was nobody's business. This is intellectual discipline of the sternest kind, the buying of books for absolute intellectual value.

I began my book collecting at about the age of ten... I was so young that I asked dad to bid at the auction sale for me. The immediate reason for buying has been forgotten but they did work out to tuppence ha'penny each. I still have them and treasure them more than most books, not so much because they were my first, or for that matter

even because they happened to be valuable books, but because of my acumen in snapping them up. The least was Bacon's ESSAYS, then Porson's edition of EURIPIDES which my trusty Lempriere praises very highly, and Wadrow's CHURCH HISTORY which ranks as one of the valuable sources of Scottish history. I learnt of their value many years later. Incidentally the sale was one of our farmer neighbours leaving for the Big Smoke.

Within four or five years I had developed a rationale for collecting books. Living well away from libraries and always wanting to know, I determined to build up a collection of my own. Thus it has always been pretty wide in subject matter. Being possessed of extremely small amounts of pocket money I began to get book lists from N.H. Seward in Melbourne and I began to build up a collection of (mainly) literature, predominately of the 17-18th century English poets. In those days none were in print, nor for that matter were even the most fundamental Australian classics in print. To those days belong the basic part of my collection of poetry. It happened that, regardless of their other short-comings, poetry was then available in local bookshops. (Today it is not, except for some obvious musts, and this applies to virtually every bookshop outside of Melbourne). One shop in particular had a magnificent collection of poets, and also of other goodies which I would dearly love to be able to get hold of now, but alas, that shop went whilst I was abroad and only really learning the true value of these sort of places.

Later, expeditions arranged with considerable difficulty (we didn't have a car) to Ballarat (a train journey) and to Bendigo (a ride with a neighbour) brought in a great haul of treasures and the first of the besetting worries of my life began to trouble me...shelving. This was later solved to some extent as we set up our own saw-mill and I ripped myself some red-gum planking, and as I couldn't wait and timber is sawn green, they later began to look like a politician's election promise. But they held my books.

My trip abroad was not wholly a book-buying expedition. Paying for them and getting them home were two major headaches. The heartache of not being able to buy a perfectly good edition of Doré's illustrations of Dante in Italy is still with me. Not enough lira, and in any case, not enough Italian to post it home...no'it must have been just lack of lira to do that. Imagine hiking around Europe with a volume of Doré in your rucksack.

It was in the British Isles that I got most of my history collection. At the risk of becoming as immortal as Benedict of Clusa, I shall say no more of them except that "at this moment I have not read them all." Many of the volumes are quite rare in Australia as there seems to have been very few of us with a Scottish interest. Boy, was getting them home a headache.

I was in John Grant's (an Edinburgh bookshop) one day choosing what books I could pay for (this afford business doesn't work with collectors and wise booksellers don't give credit) and I spotted a pile of books and asked... They were a pile being picked out for an American who had come in, asked them to pick out \$500 worth of well bound books! This is not collecting. I am told that they have a strip which can be pasted onto the wall to look like books and fool visitors though not true booklovers who will immediately begin browsing in the library and will spot the sham. It reminds me of people who buy wine to put on shelves and be kept for visitors to look at. Fie on such dishonesty.

Back home again I made the acquaintance of John Moir (whose collection now graces the La Trobe library I think). He was a keen book collector and book buyer. There is a difference; he collected, but he also bought to preserve the books, and several institutions in America have been enriched by gifts of such books. The main interest at

present is that I beat him buying a set of Speewa at the Melbourne University Book Sale one year. Had he bought it, the set would probably have gone to some undeserving place such as Yale University. Speewa was a duplicated magazine featuring Australian folk songs and stories. It was about the first glimmering of the subject in days when The Bulletin which should have known better, was saying that we had no folklore.

It was at the opening of that sale that I heard an interesting story. A certain woman finding herself in the position of being able to do so (she had married a wealthy husband) was able to indulge herself in her life-time's ambition of collecting Napoleania, and accordingly wrote to a London bookseller asking them to send her all the material they had relating to Napoleon. Some time later she got a cable reading, "First consignment of 50,000 books dispatched today. Larger consignment following next week." The auction of part of this collection was quite a big thing and took place recently. Yet, in my opinion, that is not collecting, that's merely acquiring, and there's a whole world of difference.

At the last Syncon I attended I went with several avid book-buyers to a book mart, together with Leigh Hyde who is a reader of books. Time and again he had to tell them, "I don't collect books, I read them."

It is not wealth that determines the size of one's library. At least lack of wealth has not stopped my collecting. Indeed I attain more satisfaction of finding treasures in Opportunity Shops at five and ten cents each than in being able to buy an entire set of books. There is considerable pleasure in taking half a dozen of the most heterogeneous books out of a paper bag and putting them on shelves amongst their own kind where they are no longer isolated insignificant volumes but have become part of a collection. A collection is not something you can go out and buy in an afternoon. It's something that lives and grows with the collector and as he gets old and tottery the collection becomes stronger and more valuable, more viable.

It may seem strange that the book I buy in an opt shop for five cents, and which may bring fifteen dollars in the right market, still is not worth fifteen dollars to me, or for that matter the five cents paid for it. As I don't sell them they have in a sense become priceless.

I have bought books to preserve them. And because I liked the binding. And because I thought they might come in useful. I have even bought them to read. I have bought them to fill a gap in a set and even to replace a poorer volume, or because they were a first edition instead of the 7th edition I had. I said I don't sell them. I do sometimes give them away and some of my nephews and nieces are starting what could easily be quite good collections. But mainly I have bought them to use.

Tonight I had two visitors and as soon as they saw the library they went into raptures and suggested I had more than the Maryborough Free Library. Probably. They asked the inevitable question, Have you read them all? I wonder what would be thought of the man who visited someone's workshop and saw a fine collection of spanners on the wall, and asked, "Have you used them all yet?"

But to put the record straight, I do have a Swedish-English Dictionary up on the shelf which I have not read, indeed I can't even remember consulting it. Before any of you sadists go writing to me in Swedish I may as well tell you I don't read letters in Swedish unless they are short and accompanied by a reasonable-sized cheque.



The Lurker Behind The Locked Pen Name

Paul Kenyon
aka

+ Bob Vardeman +

Lesleigh asked for a short article on what I've been doing to stay alive as a writer for the past few years. It might have been spurred by a conversation at last year's Minicon; I mentioned in passing to her one of my on-going projects was the Baroness series, the house name Paul Kenyon on it. Lo and behold, she sends me a clip from one of Don D'Amassa's letters inquiring about the vast publishing empire of Lyle Kenyon Engle (LKE from this point on.) Don mentioned just a few of the series ("pulp series" to use his phrase, and an accurate one it is, too) so I'll elaborate a bit, pass along hearsay, give my own impressions and generally bore you to death with my opinions if you bore easily.

First a word about LKE garnered from various news releases. I'm sure all of you immediately recognize the name John Jakes and put it with the American Bicentennial series. Jakes is the only author to have three books in one year on the best seller list. But look at the copyright. It'll read: John Jakes and LKE.

The Blade books are among the most successful of the s&s genre on the market. For all I know, it's the longest running s&s series around. While I've never met Roland Green, I don't believe it's any secret he's the author of the most recent ones (which ones, I don't know -- he has written two excellent s&s novels, both from Avon, under his own name.) But look at the copyright information on the Richard Blade series. LKE, again.

Attar the Merman series died quickly, not so much from concept as from poor marketing and packaging. "Robert Graham" is the author. Again, I don't know if this is DNQ information but consider two facts: (1) Attar communicates well with dolphins (2) In Joe Haldeman's book MINDBRIDGE, one Robert Graham communicates well with dolphins. If you make the logic jump, you're right on the money. As an aside, I have a tendency to use my own pseudonyms as characters in other books; it's heartening to see this narcissism is a commodity shared with writers better than I.



The Nick Carter series seems in flux. Many of the titles are listed as being "produced" by LKE. Current ones -- within the last 18 months -- are not. Nick Carter, a character created by John R. Coryell in the 1880's, was a mainstay of the very early Street and Smith pulps with over 1000 first person adventures printed. In the UPD editions (remember UPD? They're the company that brought you Worlds of IF and still, sporadically, come forth with Galaxy), better than 20,000,000 copies of 70+ new titles have been sold. Whether LKE is currently procuring scripts for the series or not is a datum I lack.

Let me pass along a few statistics on LKE. He's been in the business for over 35 years and the books, magazines and records he's produced have sold over 300,000,000 copies. A most impressive record (and this is of July, '75. The Bicentennial series is sure to push the numbers significantly higher.)

I'll not list the magazines, records, movie promotions, etc., since I want to concentrate on the pulp fiction aspect (and also since that's where I'm marginally involved.) The series LKE's produced include: Nick Carter; Richard Blade; Operation Hang-Ten; The Expeditor; Mafia; Dracula Horror; Attar the Merman; HorrorScope; Aquanauts; Don Miles; The Shadow (7 titles from Belmont); Hot Line; Balzan of the Cat People; Chopper Cop; Dark Angel; Devilfish; Grandview (gothics); Hero Haggity; Sidwinder (westerns); Vigilante; the Bicentennial books; the Baroness.

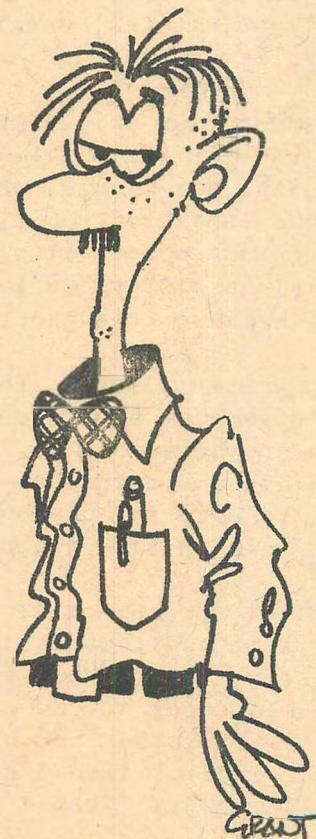
I left the Baroness for last since this is my contact with LKE. When I was just getting the bug to write, I shipped off a positively terrible sf novel to Fred Pohl. He might have gotten to the second page of the ms. though I doubt it unless his stamina is far greater than most humans. In spite of this, he sent a nice written reject mentioning in passing that LKE was looking for new writers.

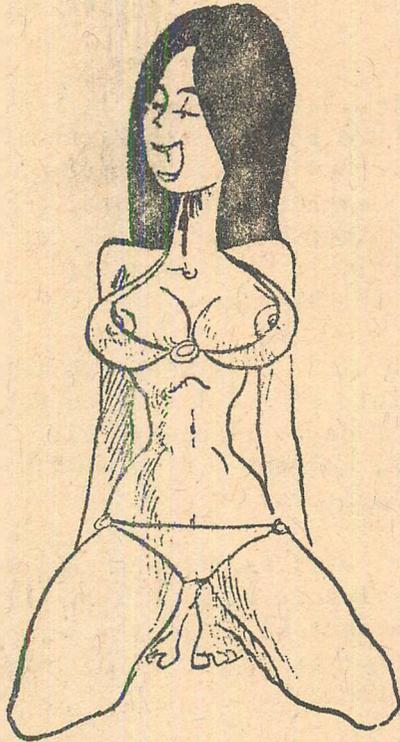
I didn't know anything at all about LKE, but fools rush in, etc. as the expression says. Needless to say, LKE rejected the book, too. But, miracle of miracles, LKE called a few months later asking if I would like to take a shot at doing the Baroness series. I'm not certain what happened to the original author or even who this was but I believe there was only one author for the eight published books.

I sent in a proposal, reworked it, did a couple chapters, got it okayed, signed contracts and then cranked out 70,000 words of the Baroness book QUICKTIME DEATH. However, as I've since learned, the publishing world is filled with wags, even for a series like the Baroness which has sold well for Pocket Books. Many changes in editor have shelved the series. There's no way of telling when my particular efforts will see print, or, if they ever do, if it'll be from Pocket Books. I hope for the best but this is a matter of negotiation between LKE and the publishers. Engle markets the concepts and characters, others like me come up with plots acceptable and in keeping with the established formula.

At the time I started on this project, the money was better than what I could have earned on my own; some have described LKE as some sort of evil being leeching off the sweat of writers. Maybe, for them, he is. All I can say is that he's provided an opportunity for me to write and for reasonably good money and write about an enjoyable character. From the contract I have with LKE, I hope he makes a fortune off my books because I will, too.

For those of you -- probably the majority -- who've never read a Baroness book, the character is one which interests me greatly because it is such a pure pulp creation. The Baroness is a super James Bond secret agent sporting tons of gadgets (most of which, believe it or not, are actual gimmicks as opposed to sf -- one reason I suspect I was given the nod to continue the series. I keep up on esoteric applications of technology and know a bit about science to begin with.) The original writer obviously knew the science biz well





The recent "blinding" of our spy satellites by a Russian laser was used as the basis for **DEATH IS A RUBY LIGHT** (#3, April '74). The heat sensitive plastic which hardens into a knife edge, methylmethacrylate, exists. Slightly jazzed up for the books true, but not much. The black widow spider venom is described as the most deadly in the world, and that's close (it's not, by the way. In the world of spiders, the Phoneutria nigriventris is more poisonous and there are any number of other creatures more deadly, e.g. some scorpions, the sea wasp jelly fish, a couple varieties of sea snake and, most deadly of all, two frogs. No fooling. Dendrobatid and Phyllobatid frogs produce the most lethal of all animal secretions. Don't go kissing any frogs, gang.)

For the most part, the science is pretty good -- better than some of the "hard" science in Analog.

As you might guess, I have some pretty complex files on various topics. But the character of the Baroness exceeds just gimmicky stuff. She's rich. She's a high fashion model (her cover story). It isn't easy for a boy from the boonies of Albuquerque learning about and keeping up with haut monde; it's required for the atmosphere.

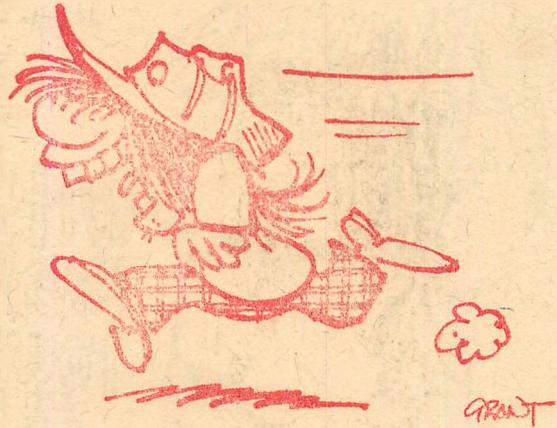
And each adventure has to have the classical villain bigger than life and more evil with a setting out of the ordinary. Hong Kong, Scotland, Africa, Brazil, Finland, China, Russia have all been used. With a lot of travelling between.

To add to the pulp atmosphere, the Baroness doesn't sally forth alone. She has her Mac (if you follow the Matt Helm series, the reference is obvious), an ex-OSS man. And like Doc Savage, she has her entourage, all brilliant, all skilled in diverse things like electronics and explosives and chemistry and street fighting. But when the crunch comes, it's always the Baroness against the villain, one on one, gimmicks not working or lost or cast aside. Guess how it ends? Good triumphs over Evil because it's nicer.

Pulp writing, sure. The Baroness has a detailed background but, like Doc Savage, she's somehow a little bigger than real life, more mysterious, vastly more talented than any human can be. As such, she stands aloof, the readers' ideal, an archetype and not a true-to-life person. The power of the series comes from the adventure itself, the glamour of the setting, the sheer vileness of the plot to destroy the world in some diabolically plausible way.

It might strike you as odd but I've done considerable background work on myriad things in addition to the scientific. It pains me that QD won't be released in any near, foreseeable future. I love playing the predictions game. A few readers might remember the 20 or so predictions I made in December 1970 for the year of '71. Better than 80% hit with painful accuracy (I predicted the earthquake in California which killed a score of people, some three months before it occurred -- not psychic power; just a lot of facts and some insight into how they might fit together.

You can write this one down in your diary if you like: watch out for a major Southern California earthquake in March or April 1978. An aside -- a proposal for another Baroness book, EARTHSHAKER, awaits some sort of decision by LKE, probably dependent on finding a home for the others.) But back to QD. I proposed QUICKTIME DEATH in September 1975 and the book was firmed up by January 1976. In it I not only predicted Teng would be ousted from power, I predicted Hua Kuo-feng's assumption of the reins of Chinese government. A lot of reading went into that guess. If and when the book comes out, this will all be history, not prediction. Readers will maybe say "So what?" not knowing the book was written nine months before Mao's death and the ensuing power struggle in China.



It's this aspect which fascinates me most about the series or any pulp series, for that matter. The previous writer was luckier in seeing print rapidly. Snuff flicks, the killer satellite, ultra-sound, alpha-wave conditioning, the bacteria which eats oil, all are in the books and before most were picked up by the popular press as interesting topics to bandy about. In a way, this is the essence of pulp fiction. It should precede the headlines giving a ripsnortin' good story along with it. My own personal preference in this line adds a strong demarcation between Good and Evil -- moralistic, if you prefer, didactic even, but having characters whose motives aren't obscured by esoteric character sketches. In a Baroness book, a villain might be an ex-Nazi concentration camp commandant who loved his job. Who mourns when he gets his? Likewise, if one of the white hats is removed permanently, a tear should well up in the eye. They might have been vain or snobbish or even stupid, but they were on the side of Good. Their death should mean something, to give a reason for revenge. Crime should be crushed.

Writing the Baroness is writing a space opera set in contemporary society, albeit high society filled with cunning villains. I enjoy the genre and hope that not only will the series find a home (and regular publishing schedule) but that I'll be the one doing future books. I won't be getting as much for them as books under my own name, but this is a recent development. Just writing the series is fun for me -- and, aside from money, why else write?

The next time I'll blather about how I was a geek for a major publishing house (and even had to furnish my own chicken). Names will be deleted but some of you might guess, since I've bitched about it on occasion.





The universe expands; the atoms decay; the school year drags on.

So Bob and I set there in our office, grading Freshman Comp papers. Occasionally we go a little crazy, but most of the time we're the epitome of bright young teacher-scholars. Still-- it would be nice to get into print. It would be even nicer to make some money at it. We think about that a lot. And we think about the trends, the cycles in the textbook market.

with
malice
toward
ALL

Joe Sanders

A few years ago, everyone was publishing mod-nowagogo anthologies. Relevance was the big thing. Publishers' ads warned that if a teacher assigned anything written by a non-revolutionary, non-minority, old person the students would rush out and

burn something. Probably the teacher. That trend has passed now, leaving faculty offices littered with dozens of titles like Relevants and Up Against the Ivy Wall. The publishers haven't stampeded in another direction yet; mostly, publishers are scared these days, and they're trying all kinds of desperate things to catch an audience. One recent semi-movement, though, has been a back-to-basics emphasis that translates as "Give the little cruds a dose of heavy culture." Solid stuff, I mean, written at great length and presented with massive pretentiousness. Bob and I discussed the trend, glanced at the title of one recent text--The Lively Rhetoric, and began work on the proposal for our new text: THE DEADLY RHETORIC.

THE DEADLY RHETORIC will give the student something he can relate to now and use in his later life; proficient dullness. Since almost every student tends to do abstract discussions, badly written, THE DEADLY RHETORIC will take that latent ability--beginning where he's at, as it were (not all the trappings of that earlier movement are gone)--and encourage it to grow and thrive. We see this as an immediate advantage. Most students expect to be bored by a composition course anyway; the teacher who selects THE DEADLY RHETORIC can promise them that they'll be bored beyond their wildest imaginings. Very straightforward; telling it like it is. Beyond that, the teacher of most composition courses finds that his students have little interest in the subject because they can see no application for it in their lives. "Why," they grunt, "do I gotta write good. I not gonna write essays or criticize poetry or stuff like that. I'm a business major an I don't care." For the most part, they are correct. The teacher who uses THE DEADLY RHETORIC, however, can bring before his students the example of successful businessmen, politicians (about the same thing), scientists, and educators who practice the skills taught in this text. On the practical level, the teacher can advise his students that they don't have to worry about being another W.H. Auden or James Baldwin--they can pattern themselves after H.R. Haldeman.

So much for the rationale. Let me summarize briefly the book's contents. You will observe that we have kept the best and most characteristic of the relevant concerns, while developing them by time-tested, solid examples of writing.

I. Man and His World: R. Buckminster Fuller--from Nine Chains to the Moon; Wordsworth--The Prelude; Albert Galatin--selected nature writings; J.S. Mill--Autobiography.

- II. Man and His Fellow Men: Roger Ascham--from The Schoolmaster
Earl of Shaftsberry--on Philosophical Optimism, from
"Of Men, Manners, & Characteristic's"
- III. Political Man: Thomas Hobbes--Leviathon, Part II; Thomas Babbington McCauley--
The French Revolution; Thomas Carlyle--from Past and Present;
Milton -- the Divorce Tracts (complete)
- IV. Man and His Arts: Edward Bulwer-Lytton--from Zanoni; Shelley--"Queen Mab";
Lord Byron--"Julian and Madaloe"

We may add a few selections to the list--especially if any of you readers would like to make suggestions--but we'd prefer to keep the number of items relatively low, so the students will be encouraged to spend enough time savoring and digesting each piece and so that teachers will be able to bring additional, contemporary material to class as it becomes available.

Obviously, we've got a winner. At the moment, though, we're at a standstill because we've each begun individual projects. Bob is working up a proposal for a new magazine: Blah. The initials stand for Big Losers Aim High; the implication is that it's better to settle for less. Bob believes the market is almost limitless. He envisions it as a magazine featuring strong lead articles such as "Blah Stocks" (those that don't lose much money but don't make much either) and "Blah Science Fiction" -- but based on continuing departments like "Blah Homes and Gardens" (discussing spindly oak American Colonial furniture, white tile floors instead of carpeting, etc.), "Blah Gardening" (such as rubber plants and philodendrens--the ones in the previous section will be plastic, of course, but the gardening department will discuss how to keep your plants vaguely sick and yellow), "Blah Vacations" (listing the unexciting things to do in Cleveland, Ohio, and Talahassee, Florida, for example), and "Blah Entertainment." He envisions many profitable spinoffs from the magazine. There will be, for instance, the Blah Key Klubs, each proudly sporting the Blah crest: A poodle rampant upon a bar sinister of credit cards, with a mixed fruit jelly mold in the lower right hand corner. Then there'll be the Blah Book Service; yes, the possibilities are limitless. . . .

I, meanwhile, am at work on a longer-range project, based on the theory of cyclic trends. Someday the with-it anthology will come back into fashion and when it does I'll be ready with a proposal for THE ECSTASY OF COMMUNICATION (title from Emminent Victorians) full of people who let it all hang out or whatever they're doing by then.

Also, Bob and I are collaborating on a straight writing project. Inspiration struck us as we were sitting in the airport, on our way to an English teachers' conference. "Don Manly--Don Manly, report to American Airlines Ticket desk," the intercom blared. "Of course!" we exclaimed as one. "The perfect adventure series hero--Don Manly!" "Yes," said Bob, "I can see him now--cleft chin and hairy arms--" "No, no," I interrupted, "That's his dumb sidekick: Harry Arms."

And so on. We keep busy. For we are sure, given the state of the publishing industry, that our projects will be successful. As the trends develop, we'll be there. Hamlet was right: The readiness is all.

NOTEBOOKLINGS

BLAH BOOK SERVICE

+ Hank Luttrell +

Since even Harry Warner has expressed surprise at some of Notebookling's recent news stories, I'm pleased to be able to continue that feature with the latest on long time Wisconsin SF magazine editor and writer (among many other professions), Ray Palmer. Palmer is mainly remembered today as the perpetrator of the Shaver Hoax or Mystery, but many people also credit him with publication of the first fanzine. After being fired by Amazing Stories, Palmer tried his hand for a while with science fiction magazines of his own, but eventually seemed to specialize in all kinds of flying saucer and occult books and magazines.

I was delighted when I heard fresh news about Palmer at Madison's WisCon in February. Palmer is still doing fine, and is still in Wisconsin, and is in fact again involved with science fiction -- although very indirectly. Palmer is printing David Truesdale's Tangent. Judging from Tangent, Palmer is a pretty good printer, and David is a promising editor, so while there does seem to be an ever increasing number of semi-professional science fiction publications around, Tangent is worth your attention. Look for it where ever good fanzines are sold. . .around here, I see Tangent in lots of book stores, which is more than I can say of Amazing Stories.

I tried to give you an introduction to the Madison Review of Books last issue, but I ran out of room too soon and lots has happened since then. Now, I don't want anyone to get the impression that the title of this column refers to the Madison Review of Books -- though it is true that when you receive as many review copies as we do, lots of them are pretty Blah. To bring new readers up to date and remind old readers what I'm writing about, the Madison Review of Books is a program broadcast on WORT-FM here in Madison.

The most concrete reward of book reviewing is that you get lots of free books. Ultimately though, free books can start taking up time and shelf space that you really don't have, so more important in the long run is the less tangible satisfaction involved in participating in the creative process of mass communication. . .you know, something like publishing a fanzine. The Madison Review of Books has always tried to emphasize reviews which not only describe the book, but which also include personal reactions or opinions, and we have always tried to create a forum for all sorts of viewpoints and ideas.

Our Book Review of the Air has greatly expanded its scope in recent months, producing an increased number of short reviews and an expanded one hour weekly show made up of longer reviews and discussions, interviews, book news and a little appropriate music. The short reviews are played throughout the broadcast day, dropped in between other sorts of things by the station's programmers. Lots of new blood has become involved (and some of the old blood has gotten an energy transfusion), doing the dozens of things that have to be done in order to keep things rolling: production work, letter writing and publisher contact, manuscript typing, publicity, program scheduling, editing our print media book review service, on-air announcing and engineering, interviewing and editing tape, and all sorts of general leg work. As a result of all this volunteer work, our Review has been able to review a large number of books -- around half a dozen short (less than 3 minutes) reviews a week, plus lots of longer reviews on the hour shows, plus interviews and special features and programs.

Our hour shows so far have been an interesting mixed bag of programming. Jim Cox's "Things Bookish" has presented an inexhaustible supply of long reviews and literary miscellany. Mark McFadden presented a preview of summer books, book news and opinions on the National Book Awards. John Ohliger hosted the International Book Show, spotlighting an actual recording of the voice of Tolstoy. Lesleigh and I finally did our long planned Philip K. Dick program on the show titled "Science Fiction Double Feature." This consisted mostly of Lesleigh reading her article on Dick from Janus and a review of Scanner Darkly and a few other remarks by me. We also included most of the other SF reviews that were on hand, and it gave us an excuse to play a song from Rocky Horror Picture Show.

Coming up, Philip Kaveny and Jan Bogstad are going to do a special show on World War I, including interviews with local veterans, music, readings from the war poets, a review of a new book distributed by Peace Press, and commentary on the effect of the war on the Far East. In June, Mark McFadden is going to do a show titled "Best Sellers: 17 Million Books." Lesleigh and I are going to do shows titled "Comics and Comix" with an interview of Denis Kitchen and "Books about Music/Music about Books." Also in the future some time we'll be doing a show devoted to one of my favorite publishers, Dover Books.

Obviously, I'd like to share a bit of what this radio show is like with you, which is really hard with the majority of Starling readers living outside the Madison area. (Of course one project that we hope to activate soon would make tapes of our best features available to other community broadcasters.) I guess one reason I want to share the radio show with you is that to some extent our programming gets little feedback from listeners -- maybe a few phonecalls on a good day. With fanzines, at the least we'll get some letters. But I can tell you about our visit with Denis Kitchen, which resulted in part of a program item mentioned above.

For a long time I'd been trying to find a chance to drive the short distance north to one of Wisconsin's



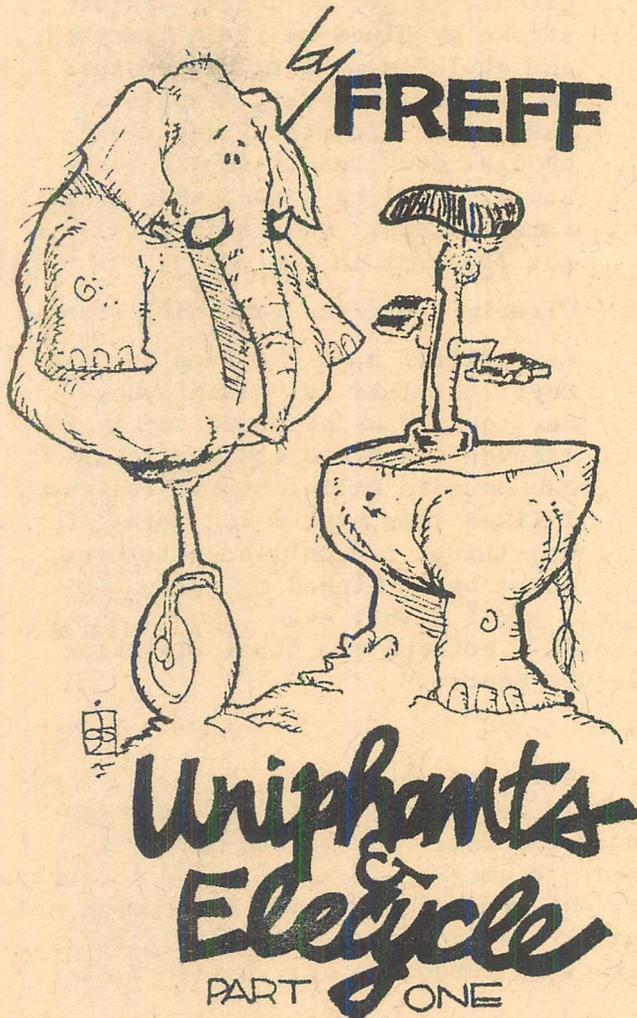
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most exciting cultural attractions. No, I don't mean Circus World Museum (though that is my second favorite) but rather Krupp Corporation's Cartoon Factory and Betty Boop Museum.

I know you are all wondering what an underground comix publisher's warehouse and studio looks like. This one looked like a penny arcade, a rural newspaper office (the Fox River Valley Patriot), and pop art museum. I was impressed. We discussed lots of things in the interview that Denis Kitchen allowed us to tape for MRB. With Krupp Industries banging away in the background, we recalled when the undergrounds as we know them today started in 1967 with R. Crumb and his wife and agent hawking ZAP on the streets of San Francisco. In 1969, Denis published his first underground comix in Milwaukee, thinking that it would be mostly a regional humor item. He was surprised when a west coast distributor bought copies, starting him out as a comix book tycoon. Around 1973 were lean times for underground comix, as proliferating books meant lower standards, and the Supreme Court sent a scare through distributors and retailers with their community standards decision.

While we were discussing a definition for underground comix Denis said he felt the important distinction was the lack of censorship -- no Comic Code Authority. I think of undergrounds as small press comics. Denis added that most comix have an initial print run of 10,000 copies, but that some of the best sellers could eventually be reprinted again and again and sell over 100,000 copies, and at some point that figure leaves the small press field.

Underground comix as collector's items is an interesting topic. I'll make an easy prediction and say that comix will be the most valuable of any comics published during the 60's and 70's. While some books go through many printings, the first is always the most sought after. (Don't ask me why.) Prices on some of the more obscure comix are already surprisingly high. Denis tipped me off that one of his books, Commies From Mars will be particularly rare since a printing error meant only 7,000 were distributed. I hope Steve Stiles still has some copies, since his pages in that book were some of my favorites. Collectors should be pleased to hear that Krupp comix will now be mostly on 50lb white paper, instead of newsprint which deteriorates rapidly.

In some ways the outlook for underground comix -- how can that label of the mid-sixties still mean something now? -- is rather bleak. For more on this, consult the letter column. I was disappointed to learn that probably Arcade has folded. But to me at least, it seemed like there is a renaissance in Princeton, WI comix -- new titles every month! With so many new books there isn't room to mention them all, but Joel Beck's Comics & Stories is the stuff legends are made of. Beck was an early favorite of mine, even though he wasn't as prolific or successful as some other cartoonists. These stories are reprints of comix that appeared in 1965, even before ZAP, and the earlier editions are rare to non-existent. And besides that, they are bizarre and funny. Snarf #7 has more Joel Beck, along with an inside front cover by Steve Stiles which is a neat little sf story. There are good stories from George Metzger, Justin Green and several others, plus the miraculous origin of Barefootz by Howard Cruse. Trina fans will want Snarf, along with Trina's Women and Wet Satin. Dutch Treat wasn't a total surprise, since Denis has published some of these Dutch cartoonists before, but seeing a whole book revealed an unexpected diversity. My favorite was the one where Sailears discovers that he has entered Duckburg, of course. Also, even now Mr. Natural #3 might be out. June will be an interesting month, too, with the publication of Goodman Beaver by Harvey Kurtzman, reprints from the great old HELP magazine -- another fossil ancestor of underground comix, with new life and just as funny and probably on better paper. Corporate Crime sounds interesting, too, with underground investigative reporting turning up the true stories of various convicted big business crimes. So have fun!



((Stagelights come up on the Narrator, standing alone, with hands clasped, in front of a black curtain. Cue high-light spot. Narrator spreads his hands and grins slyly, style and dip.

NARRATOR: Listen, this is one of my favorites. Y'see that subtitle on your programs? What it is is a bastardized quote from Ecclesiastes, the unbent original of which goes "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of the fool is in the house of mirth." You ever read Ecclesiastes? Wonderful stuff. Pithy. And doubly wonderful because when read with half an eye and more than a peachpit for a soul the old drone is revealed as the worst sort of fool of all, an unknowing one. But me, I know who I am. I'm a clown. I carry a card. And what you are about to see, good fannish friends, is the true history of how Freff (humble boy SF illustrator) went into that world (all to itself) of the 1974 Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Clown College (O Strange Place) and came back out again.

Narrator falls off stage. Blackout.

Curtain parts. Lights come up on a high school auditorium stage. Standing center is a thin youngster with dimples and no glasses, holding a script in his hands. Action:))

"JESUS CHRIST!!!" Thus began my threadbare theatrical career. Taken by a momentary insanity I auditioned for a part in my high school's production of YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU. I wanted the romantic lead, of course. But audition parts were rotated and I was given Henderson, the nasty IRS agent, first. What did me in was my generalized enthusiasm; when the script had Henderson back into a cageful of snakes and (naturally) make a fuss about it, I lifted the roof with an agonized cry and it was generally conceded that there was no one better--or louder, anyway--for the role.

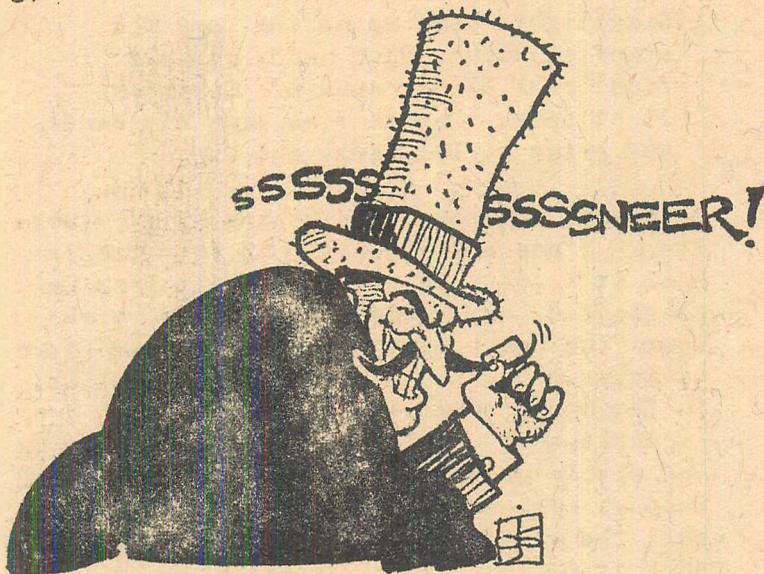
That was how Thalia, the muse of comedy, managed to bind my sixteen year-old soul.

Shortly after that I trod the boards off campus, which is a fancy way of saying I wandered into a local civic center to check out the art classes and ended up in their children's theatre group instead, playing Rudolph Bernard Boo, the villain in "The Clown Who Ran Away." Sample dialog:

RUDOLPH: Well, I'm going to steal all those dolls and take them to my cave, way up in the mountains. Then I'll make Mr. Frumpkins pay me a million dollars to get them back. If he won't pay, I'll just chop up his dolls into little pieces.

UGLY (Rudolph's assistant): Teensy-weensy pieces!

RUDOLPH: I'm bad, I am.



It was a charming part, full of pathos. I got to sneer, sinisterly stroke my glued-on black moustache, and skulk in my long black cape. In the end, however, despite my best worst efforts, I was always brought down ignominiously (off-stage, yet!) by a horse-Einstein named Gladys, who, incidentally, got the girl in the end.

Clearly there was something wrong.

Next time I made the leap to Good Guy: the lead in "Mischievous Harlequin," which purported to introduce the historied characters of Commedia Delle Arte to children. I liked this part a lot more. For one thing, I didn't have to worry about being kicked by overenthu-

siastic gradeschoolers. For another, I got the girl, and I didn't even have to share her with a horse. Everything was just wonderful until I noticed the stage direction in the middle of page 27, the one that read "Harlequin dances."

Dances?

Not me, Mr. Director, I said. I am a clumsy sod. We'll see about that, he said, probably because I was the only Harlequin he had, and then he turned me off to the unten-der mercies of the college student who was playing Columbine. She became my first dance instructor. Under her direction I discovered one amazing fact. I was not clumsy. Not graceful, mind you -- just not clumsy. And as she pressed me harder I accomplished more, uncovering a surprising aptitude for movement. The dancing in the play itself turned into seven kinds of fiasco because of a rainslick outdoor stage, but no matter. A major step had been taken.

Dance? Lead me to it! (Ah, the arrogance of the slightly trained.)

* * * * *

About eighteen months later SF fandom, which has been responsible for so many of the changes in my life, took that new theme and did a variation on it. A lot had passed between times: I'd graduated early from high school and taken refuge in junior college; studied modern dance; had a final falling out with my parents, leaving behind me their house, junior college, and any pretense of financial security. September of '72 found me at LACon, all my worldly goods parked outside the hotel inside a van named Steeplechase.

Someone in LASFS had come up with the notion of using mimes as helpers at the masquerade, and I was asked to be one. All that dramatic vaulting over rails at club meetings had lent me a certain, ah, reputation.

Fine. The night of the masquerade Vanessa, Mike Yampolsky and I took over a hotel bath-room and set to slapping on the whiteface makeup. They had done this before; I hadn't. But I had seen mimes, and done some theatrical makeup, and I could draw, so I set to with a will. And exploded. There isn't any other way to describe it. As the makeup went on the gates inside me came up and a startling (in retrospect) amount of energy burst out. My makeup was crude, my costume no more than white bellbottoms and a short-sleeved pullover...and I could have been Grimaldi himself. It was a possession of sorts. By the time it was over six hours later I had been all over the hotel, a constantly performing white blur. For those who may remember me; I damned well hope my

intensity made up a little for my total lack of expertise. I just don't remember 38 anymore.

* * * *

But you were wondering where the Clown College came in, right? I'm getting to it. Trust me.

Not only did I know very little about mime, but I tried to make a living at it. As Howland Owl told the Deacon: "Anything I happen to know nothing about, I'll teach it if I have the strength." I wasn't teaching, but I was performing, in Sproull Plaza on the UC Berkeley campus. The idea had come to me one poverty-stricken night while I was watching CHUSHINGURA. It seemed as reasonable as any other mad plan, and so the next day I hustled back and forth from a theatrical supply store to the Goodwill to a campus washroom--and there transformed myself. Mind you, I still didn't know the first thing about clown makeup, or technical miming, but I went out and sold myself for four hours and came away with \$7.38 in my sombrero, the remains of an Orange Julius crusting in my hair (aggressive crowd, that day) and a glow in my heart. Just before I had been about to quit a little girl had tugged at my leg. When I glanced down she so lemnly nodded and said "I love you." I grabbed her up and waltzed her around the plaza and back to her parent's arms, and then bussed home happy.

There are performing peculiarities unique to a university plaza. I discovered that as I worked Sproull over the next few months. Propositions in the washroom. Campus Police. Religious fanatics of all persuasions. And dogs. God, the dogs. Bowwow-hey-let's-play-with-the-bouncing-white-thing-snap! Tear. Rip. Crunch. I say with not a little pride that I survived. It wasn't easy, sometimes. There was one accident where I came within a hair of breaking my back, and several people who tried to include me in their personal nightmares.

It should be added here that I was getting better. I read about mime and I practiced mime and I watched my betters across the Bay.

It wasn't, alas, to last. Cold weather came down, I went traveling, caught the flu... any number of things, but the net result was that my Berkeley season only lasted those few months. After that my income came mostly from more prosaic activities like teaching art lessons and selling my property piece by piece.

Then, in August of '73, Michael Kurland made an offhand suggestion: why didn't I check out the Clown College? (Told you I'd get to it. All things in their place.) Little relays clicked in my brain, as I recalled reading about some special wedding at a clown school run by Ringling Brothers. I had thought it neat at the time, but those were the days before my own performing hungers were kindled.

So I wrote them, straight away, requesting information.

Zap! A reply came back, full of information and enclosing an application form. "We have a teaching staff of fifteen," it said, "teaching the following circus arts: Arena Action, Gymnastics, Comedy Acrobatics, Acrobatableaux, Pantomime, Clown Makeup, Costume Designs, Clown Props Building, Websitting, Production Clowning, Juggling, Unicycle Riding, Stilt-walking, Elephant Riding, Yoga, Circus



History, Nutrition, and Clowning in all phases." One hell of a curriculum. And the questions on the application, muy bueno! My head whirled. In its four pages I found "Describe briefly some memorable turning points in your life" and "List your five favorite books" and "How do you enter a crowded room?" And much more.

I loved it, plain and simple. The only problem was that the application had arrived three days after the filing deadline for that year's session. And even though there was no tuition you had to pay about \$500-\$600 in room, board, and supplies, and I was doing well in those days to come up with \$50 a month for rent. Food was another matter entirely.

But maybe next year? There was the ticket. I hitched to New York via Torcon, turned 19, and tried to find freelance writing and artwork. I would use the year's wait to train myself, I decided. And that is just what I did. Many the night I disturbed my neighbors with miscellaneous crashings and bangings (it's hard to do yoga in a 7'x12' room that already contains a filing cabinet, a desk, a drafting table, a chair, two bookcases, and a bunkbed) and many the afternoon I struggled through dance classes, feeling like an aardpig among gazelles. It became a sort of ritual. I marked my days by it, and sluffed off too much.

In early January I suffered an uncontrollable urge to buy a Sunday TIMES, which I rarely did. It turned out to have an extensive article on the Clown College in it. In early spring I mailed my application, with two attached photos. For the sake of historical perspective, here are a few of my answers.

Describe Your First Proud Accomplishment: Reaching my 4th birthday. It seemed of cosmic importance that I had lived that long.

Your Most Recent: Tonight I fixed my hot plate using only a butterknife. Every day has its small accomplishments. ((And setbacks--the hotplate went out again the next day, and this time ignored my best efforts. Feh.))

If You Could Be Someone Else, Who Would You Be and Why? I would not want to be any other human (though it would be nice to have Marceau or Villela's ability). I sometimes think I would like to be a chinese dragon.

List Your Five Favorite Books: White's THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING, Greenan's IT HAPPENED IN BOSTON?, Barrie's PETER PAN, Cabell's JURGEN, and anything by Peter Beagle.

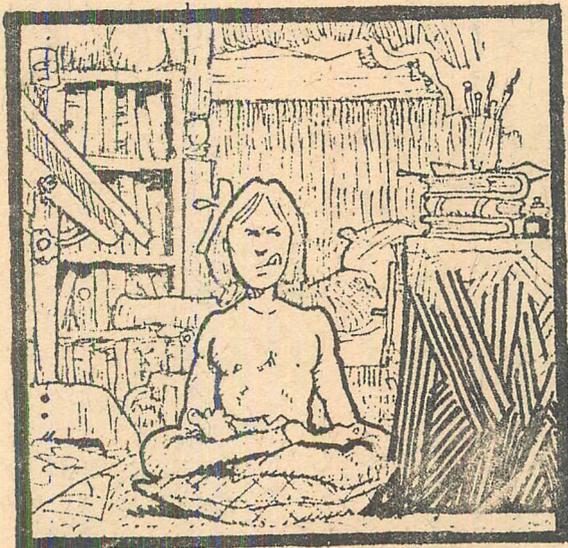
Give Two Sayings You Find Useful As Lifestyle Guidelines: "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch, but there are cheap ones a'plenty if you know where to look -- Susanna Jacobson. "Trust in Allah, but tie up your camel." -- Sinbad, THE GOLDEN VOYAGE OF SINBAD.

I also appended a page describing my Berkeley experiences. Meanwhile, the circus was

in town! Ringling's blue show, that year. They have two, each traveling a two-year circuit around the country, so that no town gets the same show twice in a row. I set out to gather an expedition of friends, all of whom were enthusiastic about my chances for the CC. As usual, I was less so.

And that's when the phone call came.

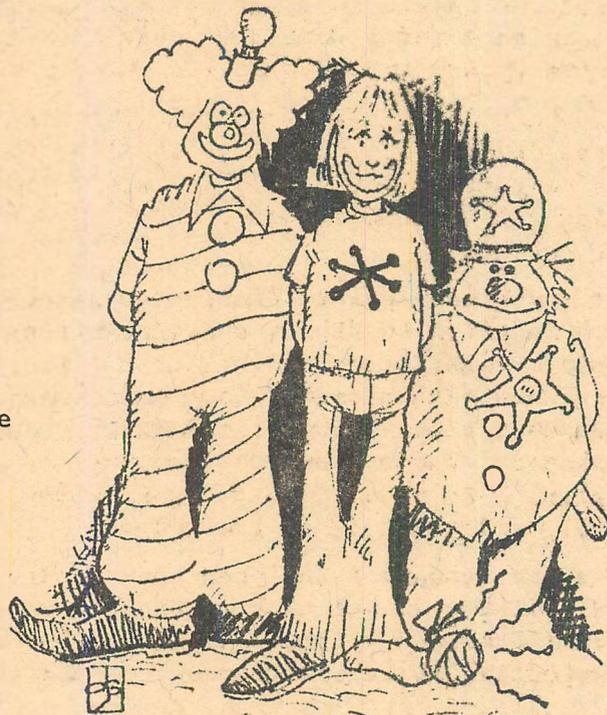
Time for a slight aside. There was something about New York City that made me have accidents. Perhaps I was attempting to live up to the view from my one window, which was reminiscent of the "Hell" panel from Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights!" I don't know. But in January of '74, in the dark, I had fallen through a subway ventilation grating. And a year later, after the CC, I managed to



sprain both ankles in separate but equal accidents. Ah well, at least I was bilaterally symmetrical.

The relevant accident to the phone call was that I had fallen out of bed a day before. Out of a bunk bed. I had an overnight guest (unlikely in a 7'x12' room, but it did happen on occasion) and we talked ourselves to the exhaustion point and then my socked foot slipped on part of the frame as I climbed to my half and army surplus bunk beds have this prong on the side, see...and...suffice to say that I neatly stabbed myself in the underside of the right big toe. It only took one stitch to close but I couldn't have chosen a clumsier place if I had tried.

So the next day when my neighbor's phone rang with a message for me, I limped with a vengeance to answer it. It was Bill Ballantine, Dean of CC, and he was inviting me to an audition held at Madison Square Garden in a few days. He was disappointed to hear that I was temporarily out of commission, but I promised to be there and do what I could.



The audition...they advertise these things in the local papers. The system works like this: if they like what they see in an application, they try and get you to an audition. And if they like what they see in an audition, they hand you an application on your way out and ask you to send it on when completed. About 60 of us showed that day and naturally, with my luck, a scheduling foulup had occurred so that we had only half the usual time. And despite thick bandaging I still had a bad limp.

But there were also some good omens. Right away, after his opening remarks, Ballantine came over and asked how my foot was. It wasn't much, but--we hadn't identified ourselves, which meant he'd been studying my application enough to connect my name and face. (Freff on one foot and a prayer.) And when he selected fifteen people to be put on makeup by the circus clowns who were there showing us would-bes the real stuff, I was picked. This is where the time problem came in. Nobody could be spared for me, so I did it myself. Which I hadn't done in over a year. The result was definitely Not Good, but there could be no second takes in this movie. I remember the way Ballantine lifted his brows when he saw me, and I may or may not have imagined him crossing himself; I was not entirely rational by that time. Too much primal hunger. All around me: THE CIRCUS.

Only a few people did any acts. I did a mime routine where one ambulatory hand pulls back together a collapsed body and lifts it to its feet by the scruff of its neck. Then it was over, time was up, Ballantine waved goodbye and we had to clear out because the Blue show went on in half an hour. People were already trickling into the Garden in a steadily increasing stream. On the way out I chatted with another hopeful, who either wasn't wearing makeup or was an alien in a facemask. I hope what happened next didn't freak him.

We hit the crowd. A little kid said "Look, mommy, a clown!" And, keyed-up beyond measure, injured foot or no, just like at LACon...I exploded.

This time I came to my senses in about fifteen minutes. (I must be getting better, doctor, my attacks don't last as long.) I didn't come to pleasantly, either; it suddenly seemed that it was a feat of incredible gall, "performing" in no costume and lousy makeup in front of the place where the real clowns were. And, of course, there was the

vendor who warned me that Security had been called. Ringling hates poachers. So I hied me to the subway, sheepish behind my white mask, and even veteran New Yorkers stared at me on the way home.

* * * *

The next time I heard from the CC was in June. I had moved for the summer to Urbana, Illinois, and my parents in California forwarded a letter requesting another facial photo. I complied and went back to training with Colleen Mulvihill, an ex-Olympic gymnast who had taken pity on me and was trying to improve my stretch. A lot of the time it reminded me of those Berkeley dogs: *crack* I ran to increase my endurance, only one rainy day I overdid it on an indoor (and therefore shorter) track, turning my calf muscles into granite overnight. I felt like I'd drunk a gallon of olive-drab lemonade, which nobody ever drank from our local stand because there was a rumor that it pooled in the extremities and solidified. I diligently did my yoga, whenever I could muster the strength. And I read. Lord, I read. Circus history, mime books, training schedules. Also John D. MacDonald novels, because people were usually so wonderfully competent in them.

In mid-August I hadn't heard from CC, even though class started September 23rd. I do not want to give you the impression I was nervous. Not at all. I walk around with a haunted stare for the sheer joy of it. The problem I faced was knotty--I had to move (my roommate was getting married and our "happy" home fading away) and I had to prepare for the Discon artshow and I also had to do something with my property. Store it somewhere in case I wasn't accepted? Sell it and make do if I wasn't? How would I even move it? I was poor then, and you don't make good time hitching with a bunk bed over your shoulder. It was my personal fortune that I read LeGuin's THE DISPOSSESSED then, and it eased my mind enough so that I could sell everything and move on. John and Sandra Miesel in Indianapolis put up with me for a while. Then Summer Miller in Bloomington took me on as a temporary boarder. They were kind, and never commented on how foolish I must have looked grunting and groaning through my exercises.

At that point I had pretty much given up. Surely these people would give more than three weeks notice, right? So I accepted it, I hadn't made the grade. Shit.

Thank God there was a convenient con to drown my sorrow in. Summer and I drove all through a rainy night and arrived at Discon exhausted. I was so tired when I stumbled into the artshow room that I was hardly focusing at all. I did notice that the Miesels were there. There seemed to be the beginning of an artshow. But the rest of the scene? A blur.

Suddenly I was being attacked by Sandra. She strode up to me, grabbed my shoulder, thrust her hip against mine seductively and said, "Honey, you're in" in a sultry voice.

"What?" I am nothing if not articulate. Why was she seducing me in front of her own husband? Sunspots? Had there been a papal ruling I hadn't heard about? And why was he smiling too?

"The Clown College. They called us. You made it!"

"What?" When you have a good line, stick with it.

Cue: Freff explodes. Putting up my artwork was a breeze. I didn't feel tired again until the next day.

* * * *

I found out later the magnitude of their search for me. Quite undeliberately, I hadn't left a clear trail. They called my parents who were not home. Then they called my ex-and-future New York neighbors, who told them I had moved to Illinois. They looked for a "Freff Cochran" (Cochran is my parents' name, which I have since dropped legally) in Urbana, but none was listed. There was a Mark Cochran, though, and wonder of wonders, he lived in the same apartment complex that I had. He also knew my roomie. So he passed the buck, and ex-roomie passed the buck to the Miesels--who were home. Thank goodness. I was told, when I called Ballantine to verify my acceptance, that if they hadn't gotten me on that try I would have been scratched from the list. There is a God, and his True Name is the Cosmic Guffaw.

(CONTINUED on page 11)

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