

# The WSFA Journal December 1996

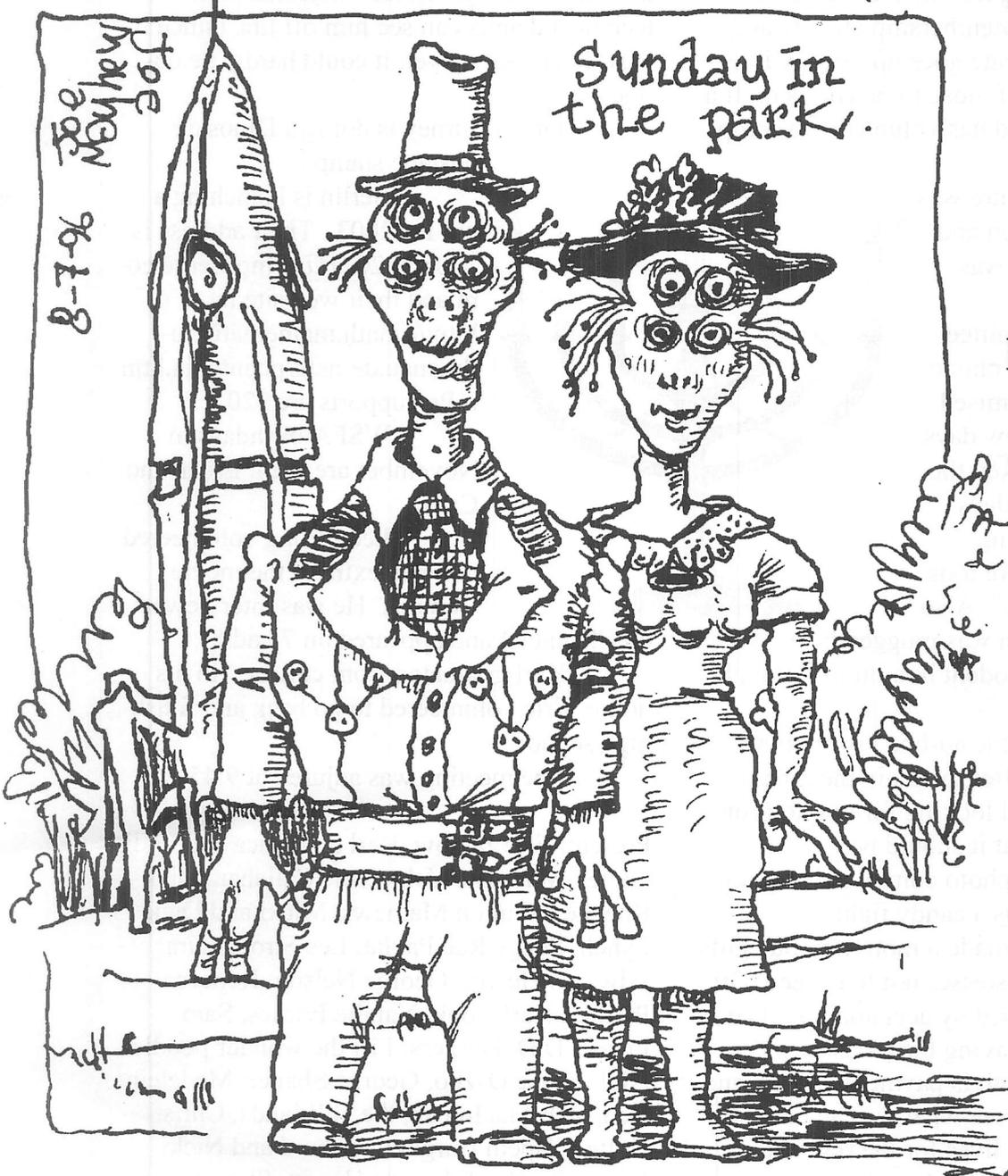
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There's not much life on Mars,

Sunday in  
the park.



Attack of the  
"Suburban Rodent  
Hoodlums"!

The Man in the  
Bright Red Suit

Phil Was Conned

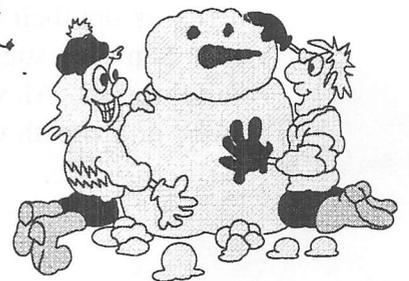
Tales of Presents  
Fictional

WSFA Meeting  
Canceled

'Twas the Night  
Before Star Trek

Weather Report

Happy Holidays



## Attack of the "Suburban Rodent Hoodlums"!

The November 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting, all Saints all souls (but no visible ghosts), was held at the Gillilands. The treasurer reported \$3,105.57. Disclave current said he lied when said would have an origami party this meeting. The hotel contract has been signed and Dan has flyers. If you don't have a membership already and are not comped the rate goes up. Peggy Rae has turned in a list of those to be comped. If a manager or area head has volunteers to comp please send them in.

Disclave Future was at World Fantasy Con and Disclave Far Future was being a slacker. The Entertainment committee had a to-do with the phone company. They promised to come out and a few days later they did and fixed the phone. Then a few days later it wasn't working again. "This time, we took out the whole block." Also their Jack'O'Lantern was mugged by a squirrel "suburban rodent hoodlums." (tough neighborhood)

Terilee said the ad-hoc vision thing would be meeting after the main meeting to discuss it. John said looking for opinions on what it was and what it should be.

The WSFA photo committee was not present but there was a candy fight.

Sam Lubell made a motion to buy gifts for our hosts and hostesses not to exceed \$30 each. This was passed by acclamation. Lee Gilliland said that having the pleasure of hosting us each month is payment enough and she doesn't want to see what we can come up with to disrupt their lives for the rest of the week. Someone suggested getting them a squirrel feeder. Alexis said if the club insists, flowers or a wreath would be nice. The

chairman appointed Sam Lubell to run said committee. Sam proceeded to forget about it until he started typing these minutes.

There was a brief discussion about the WSFA web page, John threatened a motion at the next meeting. Those interested in the technical details can see him off line (since it hasn't been set up yet, it could hardly be on-line.)

James Gurney is doing a Dinosaur postage stamp.

Berlin is launching a bid for 2003. Their address is 100550.2021@compuserve.com and their web site is <http://imath.mathematik.tu-ilmenau.de/nsfg/phantopia.html>. Presupports are \$20.

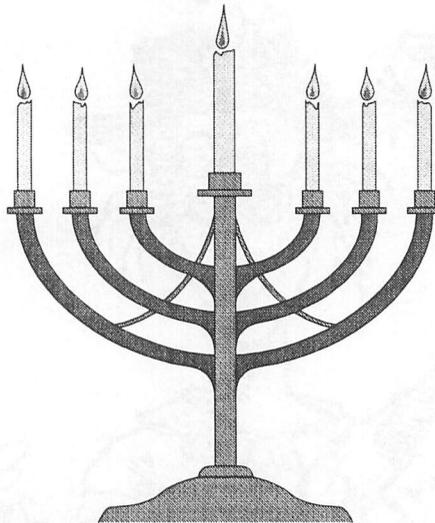
WSFA birthdays in November are Sam, Erica, and Cathy.

Lee Strong volunteered to be an extra in the movie Contact. He was interviewed on Channel 4 and appeared on 7 and 8.

Karl graduated from college. In his honor, Eric volunteered to go back and finish high school.

The meeting was adjured at 9:45

Present: Eric Jablow, Karl and Erica and Lydia Ginter, Madeline Yeh, Chris Callahan, Dick Roepke, Winton Mathews, Micki and Dick Lynch, Peggy Rae Pavlat, Lee Strong, Jim Edwards-Hewitt, George Nelson, Rebecca Prather, Karl Cook, Natalie Barnes, Sam Pierce, D.D. Burgess, Fifi the wonder poodle [sic], Lance Oszko, George Shaner, Madeleine Yeh, Bob MacIntosh, the Gillilands, Chris Holte, Elspeth Burgess, Richard and Nicki Lynch, Terilee Edwards-Hewitt, Steven desJardins, Michael Watkins, Michael Nelson.



**THE MAN IN THE SUIT WHO GOT  
OR  
THE COOK WHO DID**

"Bailiff, please reading the charges," intoned the Judge.

"It's a very long list, Peter" the Bailiff protested.

"Just read them," said the Judge.

"Multiple incidences of breaking and entering, Wow! Do numbers go that high?" the Bailiff asked.

"All by chimney," the accused confessed.

"Multiple incidences of espionage."

"I had to know if Chelsea was bad or good and the list had to be checked twice."

The judge smiled, twitched once, and combed his own impressive whiskers.

"Copyright and patent infringements"

The criminal in the red suit sighed. "Advertising, they all want whatever is shown on TV."

"And multiple counts of child labor violations."

"Now that one I protest. They're elves, not children." The man's white beard looked fake.

"And even cruelty to animals. A red radioactive nose device?"



"For the fog," the accused explained.

The judge turned to the fat man in the red suit. "How do you plead?"

"Ho Ho Ho" was the only answer.

"No matter," answered the Judge. "Twenty years."

The policemen handcuffed the convicted criminal and pulled him out of the courtroom. "Wait a minute!" he screamed. "Where's the camera? How can this be real? Santa's not real! I'm Jimmy Banquo, the janitor!"

The judge watched as the Santa was escorted out of the courtroom. "How many does that make for today."

"That's number 24, Peter"

The judge pulled on his long pink ears and combed out his fur. "Let's take a break after number 25. My cottontail is beginning to inch underneath this hot robe."



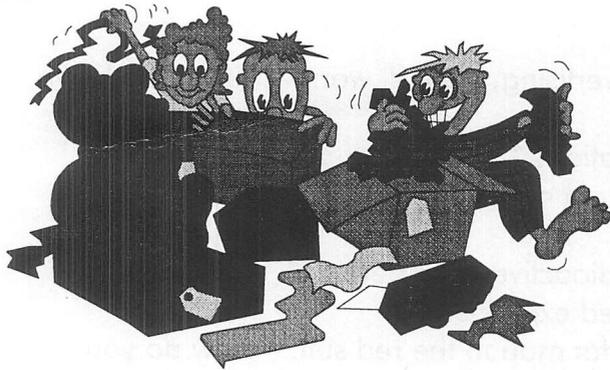
## Phil Was Conned

*This is the first in a series of notes from PhilCon for those who were unable to attend (or who did attend but had better things to do than go to panels.)*

### Where Did All the Young Fans Go? - PhilCon Panel with J. Berends, K. Cramer, A. Gilliland, C. Bacon-Smith, S. Lewitt.

How do you define young? Cramer said a lot of young people wrote lots of genres and the science fiction magazines just bit first. This is very rare today. Smith said good science fiction has change and the quality level is much harder to achieve.

Lewitt said that literary values in the 40s and 50s were much lower. There was no



characterization, plots were mechanical, and there was a lack of sophistication. This level of writing is something one can do at 14, but what attracts editors to writing today is beyond most teenagers.

Berends said that fans are into media, Internet, and culture. They are not attracted to books at first.

Lewitt objected saying the leather clad fan is seen as not there for the reading. She herself was once kicked out of Disclave <not the publicity we want>. This convention complained of some Goths sitting in the hallway. Now one has works in the art shows and four others are trying as writers. The perception that these kids are just interested in media is a bunch of cant by people who don't know them.

Cramer said that if you have a convention focused on books the average age of attendees shoots way up.

Smith said that her son writes ghost stories but wouldn't be caught dead here.

Alexis said that there is a perception. Young people look at conventions and sees a bunch of old folk and say this won't be fun for me.

Cramer: Look at the demographics. The average age of those reading SF has gone up. Teenagers are doing something else.

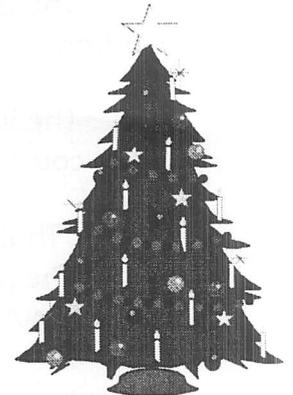
Berends. There are also cultural differences outside fandom.

Smith said that when she looked through the program there were few topics that interested me. There were none that would of interested my son. He would be a fan at Dragon\*Con and so its membership is 11,000. They like the dark gothic cyberpunk and the dark fantasy. The are disaffected by the idea that the world is going to H in a handbasket, we're not going to get anything so dark writing appeals to them.

Berends. The traditional optimistic plucky lad saves the universe doesn't appeal to this audience.

There was a discussion about Dragon\*Con appealing more to media and comics than SF.

Berends said that Media guests attract more people. They start by seeing the media first, then go into media tie-ins and then start reading other books.



Lewitt said that she just did a media tie-in. She had to because she had quit her day job. New writers are forced to because there is no midlist anymore. There is no choice. The publishing world is focused on the bestseller of the month.

Cramer commented that the tie-in is good for practice but you don't take your audience with you when you move on to other books. It doesn't help careers. The audience for tie-ins has to be bigger than SF.

"When I was a kid," said Smith. "You knew all the authors. Now there are so many authors that you don't know who is good. I sometimes go into a bookstore and walk out with nothing."

Cramer said that school systems and education software has censorship of difficult ideas and words.

Lewitt said that a Young Adult publisher tried to change one of her novels so nothing bad or unhappy happens. It is patronizing. Kids fed sugar and light become disassociated because doesn't reflect their reality.

Cramer said that the children are capable of reading the stuff but there is other stuff they prefer to be doing.

Alexis said that there are many things competing with SF—such as television. Dark comics and novels are the anti-sitcoms. People have watched a lot of television and want an alternative. TV is isolating.

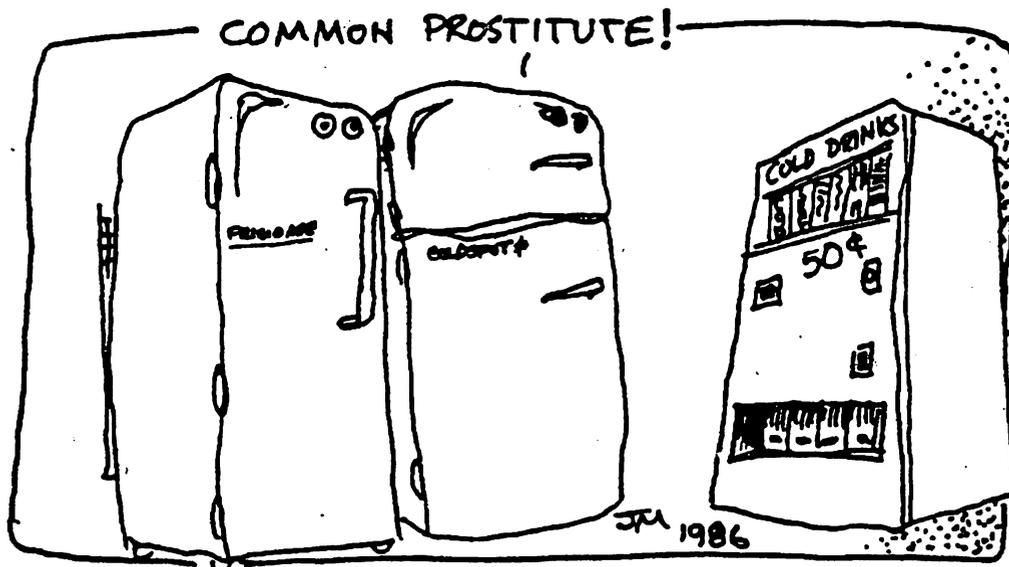
Lewitt said that fans have never been the majority. They never have been a statistical sample.

Cramer contested that people did do more reading in the past.

Smith said that based on those who she teaches, these teenagers never read. They hang out on their stoops and talk. We have college students upset at reading Darwin. We who are educated have a higher idea of what the uneducated are. We have people whose only book is the bible.

Cramer said that the reading population is only about ten million (about a tenth of the population) and stays the same even as the population grows. Different cultures have different reading genres.

Smith said that Philadelphia is not a science fiction town. Our SF section has shrunk in bookstores and the percentage of these books that are Dragonlance and similar is up. Not the good stuff. These books pushed the good stuff off the shelves because



tie-ins take the space. It distresses me that live writers are pushed off the shelves by those too dead to enjoy the royalty.

Cramer said that massive consolidation of distribution systems has gone from 200+ to

25 distributors. Celebrity backlist. But this can't continue. How many copies of *The Stand* do you need? People are taking good older stuff and putting it out on the Internet.

### **TALES OF PRESENTS FICTIONAL**

What should we give our favorite SF/fantasy characters for the holidays? This handy gift buying guide has ideas.

For Emperor Paul Muadib (*Dune*) – The videotape of *Waterworld* and a year's supply of DC tap water (To drink or not to drink, that is the question)

For Asimov's robots – The services of a lawyer to find loopholes in the three laws of robotics

For Hari Seldon, the man with the plan (*Foundation*) – A CD-ROM encyclopedia and Gordon Dickson's *The Final Encyclopedia*

For Lazarus Long (Much of Heinlein)– A doctor's visit (with Dr. Kevorkian) and a copy of Zelazny's *This Immortal*

For Captain Kirk (*Trek*) - A day book to keep track of all his alien children's birthdays.

For R2D2 (*Star Wars*) - A speech synthesizer (hey, if we have them in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?)

For Captain John Sheridan (*Babylon Five*) from Matt Leger –A new electric razor...to get rid of five o'clock Shadows. :-)



### **WSFA Meeting Canceled**

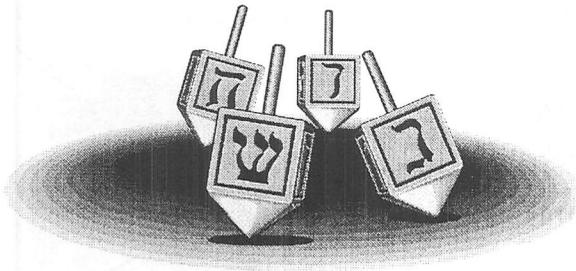
The Nov 15 1996 meeting at the Ginters was called to order at 9:20 by President John Pomeranz. Sec Joe Mayhew advised that there was not a quorum present and therefore no business could be conducted.

Disclave 97 Chair Michael Nelson said no walk-through had been scheduled as yet for the Ramada. The flyer folding party will be at Gillilands during the Dec 6<sup>th</sup> first Friday meeting.

Joe Mayhew circulated some WSFA photographs for identification. He wants to put together a "faces of WSFA" album with photos and blurbs and will be looking for help.

Dan Hoey submitted the following obituary: "In memory of Marina Werkheiser, cat. 21<sup>st</sup> April 1991 - 14, Nov 1996. Beloved Companion of Ann Werkheiser and Dan Hoey."

Walter Miles showed up just at 9:42, in time for the adjournment.



Attending: Pres. John Pomeranz, Sec 98 chair Joe Mayhew, Treas Bob MacIntosh, Trustee and 97 chair Mike Nelson, Bernard Bell, Alexis Gilliland, Lee Gilliland, Erica Ginter, Joe Hall, Dan Hoey, Judy Kindell, Keith Marshall, Walter Miles, Lee Strong, Michael Walsh

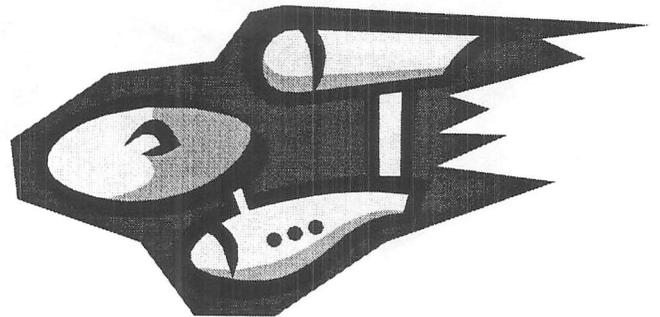
**'Twas the Night Before Star Trek...**  
by The Internet

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the ship  
Not a circuit was buzzing, not one microchip;  
The phasers were hung in the armory securely,  
In hope that no alien would get up that early.

The crewmen were nestled all snug in their  
bunks  
(Except for the few who were partying drunks);  
And Picard in his nightshirt, and Bev in her  
lace,  
Had just settled down for a neat face to face...

When out in the hall there arose such a racket,  
That we leapt from our beds, pulling on pant  
and jacket.  
Away to the lifts we all shot like a gun,  
Leapt into the cars and yelled loudly "Deck One!"

The bridge red-alert lights, which flashed through the din,



Gave a lustre of Hades to objects  
within.

When, what on the viewscreen, our eyes  
should behold,

But a weird kind of sleigh, and some  
guy who looked old.

But the glint in his eyes was so strange  
and askew,

That we knew in a moment it had to be  
Q.

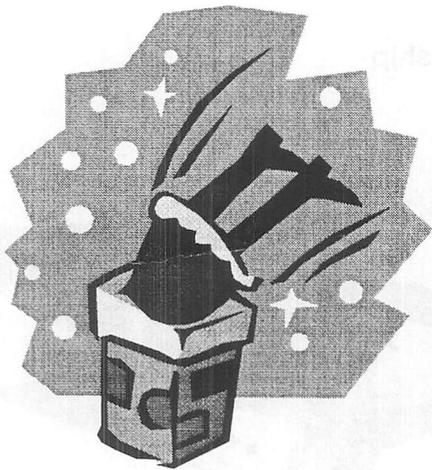
His sleigh grew much larger as closer  
he came.

Then he zapped on the bridge and  
addressed us by name:

"It's Riker, It's Data, It's Worf and Jean-Luc!  
It's Geordi, And Wesley, the genetic fluke!  
To the top of the bridge, to the top of the hall!  
Now float away! Float away! Float away all!"

As leaves in the autumn are whisked off the street,  
So the floor of the bridge came away from our feet,  
And up to the ceiling, our bodies they flew,  
As the captain called out, "What the Hell is this, Q?!"

The prankster just laughed and expanded his grin,  
And, snapping his fingers, he vanished again.  
As we took in our plight, and were looking around,  
The spell was removed, and we crashed to the ground.



Then Q, dressed in fur from his head to his toe,  
Appeared once again, to continue the show.  
"That's enough!" cried the captain, "You'll stop this at once!"  
And Riker said, "Worf, take aim at this dunce!"

"I'm deeply offended, Jean-Luc" replied Q,  
"I just wanted to celebrate Christmas with you."  
As we scoffed at his words, he produced a large sack.  
He dumped out the contents and took a step back.

"I've brought gifts," he said, "just to show I'm sincere.

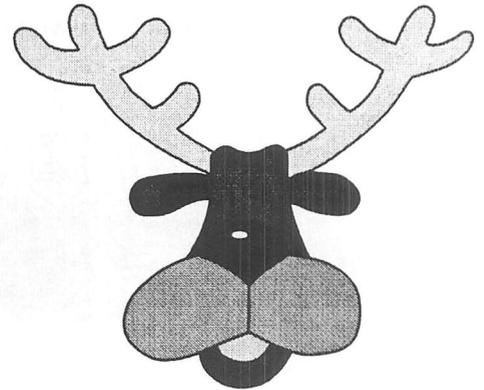
There's something delightful for everyone here."  
He sat on the floor, and dug into his pile,

And handed out gifts with his most charming smile:

"For Counselor Troi, there's no need to explain.  
Here's Tylenol-Beta for all of your pain.  
For Worf I've some mints, as his breath's not too great,  
And for Geordi LaForge, an inflatable date."

For Wesley, some hormones, and Clearasil-plus;  
For Data, a joke book, For Riker a truss.  
For Beverly Crusher, there's sleek lingerie,  
And for Jean-Luc, the thrill of just seeing her that way."

And he sprang to his feet with that grin on his face  
And, clapping his hands, disappeared into space.  
But we heard him exclaim as he dwindled from sight,  
"Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good flight!"



## Weather Report

by Samuel Lubell

Nine tenths of *Heavy Weather* by Bruce Sterling is really excellent, even though it is not really about the tornadoes. The tornadoes are almost a backdrop and an excuse for the story he wishes to tell, that of Juanita and her brother Alex who join the tornado chasers because Juanita is in love with their leader, the charismatic mathematician (not an oxymoron in this case) Jerry Mulcahey. Juanita (whose real name is Jane) has had very little contact with her younger brother, in fact when she calls him at the start of the novel he is puzzled because he didn't think it was Christmas. But in an exciting opening she breaks him out of a Mexican clinic, takes him aboard an extremely high-tech smugglers' vehicle and makes him join the storm troopers, a band of tornado chasers looking for a F-6 storm, which Jerry's calculations predict but no one aside from the Troopers believes can exist.

Much of the book is the struggle of Alex, whose extreme medical problems have prevented him from having a normal life before, to fit into the troop and the efforts of the storm troopers to chase through a few smaller tornadoes. Yet when the final storm does come in, rather than focus on the efforts of the troopers to gather the data and survive the storm, the author drags in a conspiracy by a few secret spy types to quit their conspiracy to destabilize the world by taking advantage of the F-6's effects on communications systems.

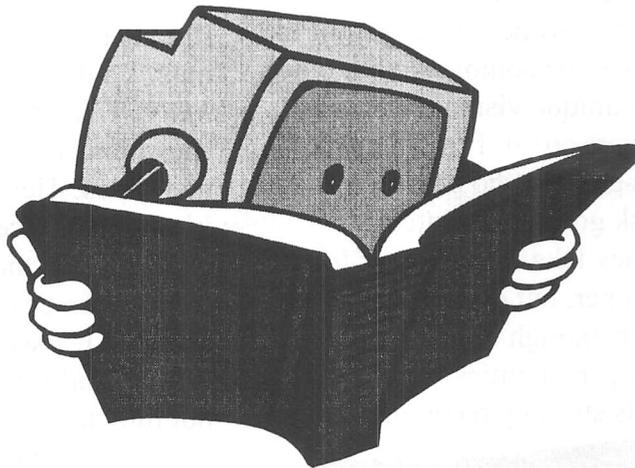
This subplot and the twist in the ending demonstrate that Sterling is not trying to do a print version of the movie *Twister* (which it predates) but rather tell a more people-oriented story. Jane frets about her relationship with Jerry, at one point misinterpreting a conversation about the F-6 as a metaphor for their relationship.

The background to this is just as interesting as the action of the novel. The

book takes place in a world that has been devastated by the weather and overpopulation, with strange new diseases appearing from nowhere (which would be unbelievable if not for our

world's recent experience with AIDS) and cyberpunkish technology and attitudes about software being free coexisting aside a fairly anarchist landscape (governments have basically no control over money and not much over anything else either.) Characters wear clothes made out of paper, a city is rebuilt to look like a wasp's nest, and the border is even more permeable than today (a guard tells Juanita that they don't even try to stop vehicles.) At one point Alex says:

"The border is f--ked and the government is f--ked! And society is f--ked and the climate is *really* f--ked. And the media are f--ked, and the economy is f--ked, and the smartest people in the world live like refugees and criminals!.. And nobody has *any idea* how to make things



better, and there *isn't* any way to make things better, and there isn't gonna *be* any way, and we don't control *anything important* about our lives! And that's just how it is today, and yes, it's funny!" He laughed shrilly. "It's hilarious! And if you don't get the joke, you don't deserve to be alive in the 2030s."

This book shows the future of cyberpunk, not books drenched in cyberpunk like those of Gibson and Stephenson (although Sterling can write pure cyberpunk as well as anyone) but as part of the SF writer's toolbox to be combined with other elements to form a unique vision.

The characters are all firmly drawn, not only self-pitying Alex who gradually matures as the book goes on, eventually abandoning his fancy fake dude clothes for the paper suit of a Trooper, but even minor characters are given enough of a chance to clearly define their personalities.

This book is strongly recommended as



having an interesting background, fascinating characters, and enough action even to overcome some dissatisfaction with the ending (which I admit is properly foreshadowed, most notably in Jerry's wondering about what will happen after the F-6 storm is over.)

*Mage Storms #2: Storm Rising* by Mercedes Lackey (DAW \$21.95, 1995)  
Mercedes Lackey continues her career as a



very popular fantasy writer although I think she hit her peak with her *Last Herald-Mage* series and her *By the Sword* semi-standalone (the character has since been absorbed into her main Valdemar series.) Certainly neither her *Mage Winds* nor her *Mage Storms* trilogies has shown much more innovation in plot than in their titles. Her strength is more in the invention of races, characters, and backgrounds, then in actually doing much with them. Worse yet, the middle books in just about all her series seem to be heavily padded.

And yet, I have to give her credit for not fully taking the easy path. It would be very easy for her to just continue her very popular *Heralds of Valdemar* series with Herald characters (special agents of the queen who have magical gifts and are mind-linked to their intelligent horses), but this book shows she is willing to tinker with the formula. Despite being set in Valdemar, the *Heralds* are mostly background characters. The book basically belongs to Grand Duke Tremane of the Eastern Empire who was sent to invade Valdemar but now struggles to survive the mysterious magic-draining mage storms; Karal, the very young ambassador from Karse (Valdemar's former enemy, now ally); and Firesong, a Hawkbrother mage who finds himself tempted to seek immortality. They have a few adventures, eventually making a decision that sets up the third book, and try to find a way to end the mage storm. The storm

itself is basically background and not really weather related but dates back to a Great Cataclysm caused by a duel between sorcerers as described in her Gryphon series.

One failing of the author notable in this book is her tendency to have the characters talk to themselves, telling themselves things they already know and generally moping. This violates one of the basic rules of writing, "Show don't tell." For example:

"Karal lived in a time of wonder and strangeness, yet the feeling he had was not, at any time, that of being a spectator. He was a part of it all, an active player in whatever game the fates set the board for, and that feeling itself was beyond anything he'd prepared for. I can't help it; present me with a situation, and I have to think about both sides of it. I can try to suppress it, but I cannot shut off the way I think. Once knowledge is gained, there's no going back to ignorance."

In the past, many of her subplots have

revolved around a conflict between two people which could easily be resolved if they would just talk to each other instead of making assumptions and which is finally resolved through just such as conversation. She almost does this yet again here in another ambassador's mistrust of Karal but manages to actually have them sit down and talk it out. This is clear progress in her books. She also has an interesting subplot of a group of young nonmagical protoscientists who have formed a research group whose ideas could catapult medieval Valdemar into the steam age. That would be an interesting twist that would not just tinker with the formula but rewrite the rules.

This book is for fans of her Valdemar series only or for fans of Piers Anthony and gaming novels who will find this book slightly higher in quality but close enough to be comfortable. Others who wish to give the author a fair shot may want to look at the first and last book of her *Arrows of the Queen*, the whole *The Last Herald Mage* trilogy, and the single volume *By the Sword*. But otherwise this book is not recommended.

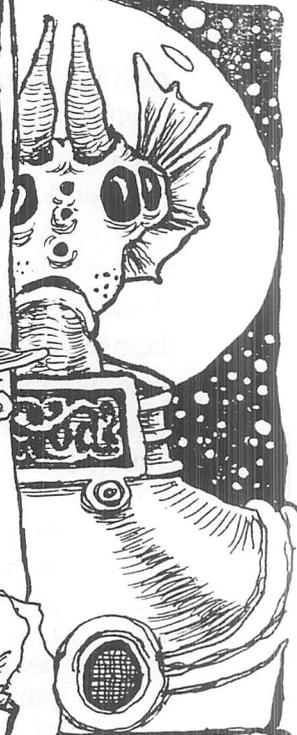


# FUIT

an elaborate doodle

All that went before was wise, all that came afterwards was madness ... but, during that brief and glorious day we made WHOOPLE.

The proper study of mankind is therefore man.



Joe Maynard

In a former life, I was J. Edgar Hoover Director of the F.B.I. Before that...

I was Karl Marx. Next

Next time I want to be Plato

Got him!



O BOY! O BOY!



Brahma?

NOT AGAIN!



I was Plato once. It wasn't so hot. But I had to be Brahma three time before



I amassed the points to be reincarnated as a Greek Philosopher



on mars we don't believe in reincarnation

based on frequent flier points!

I guess that's why you have gone extinct.

