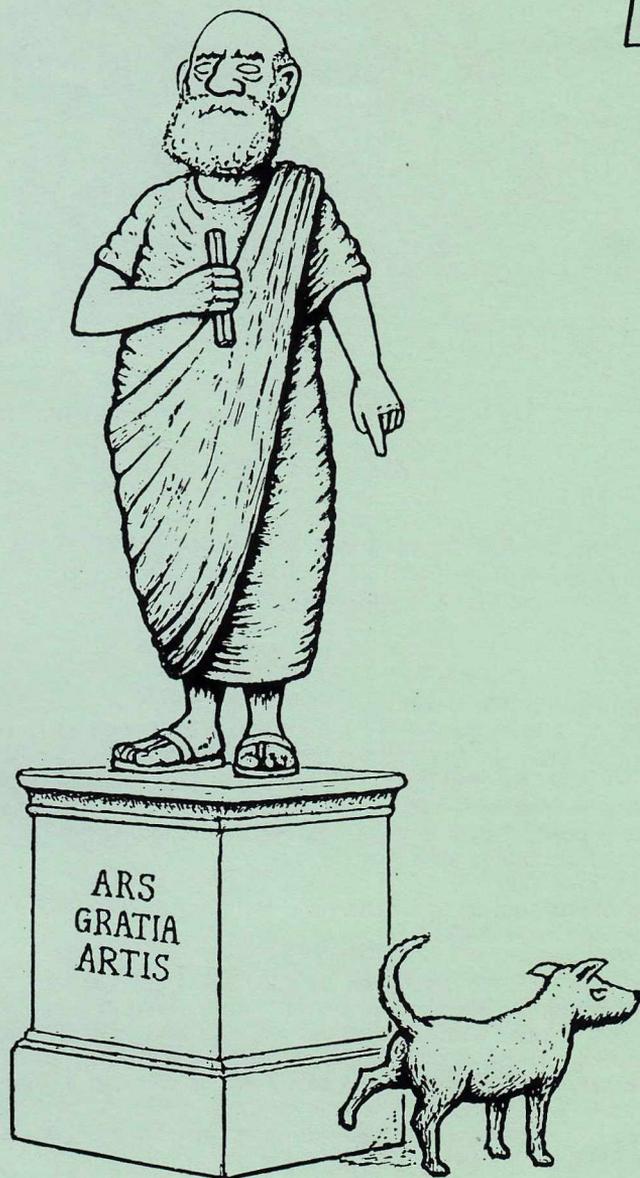
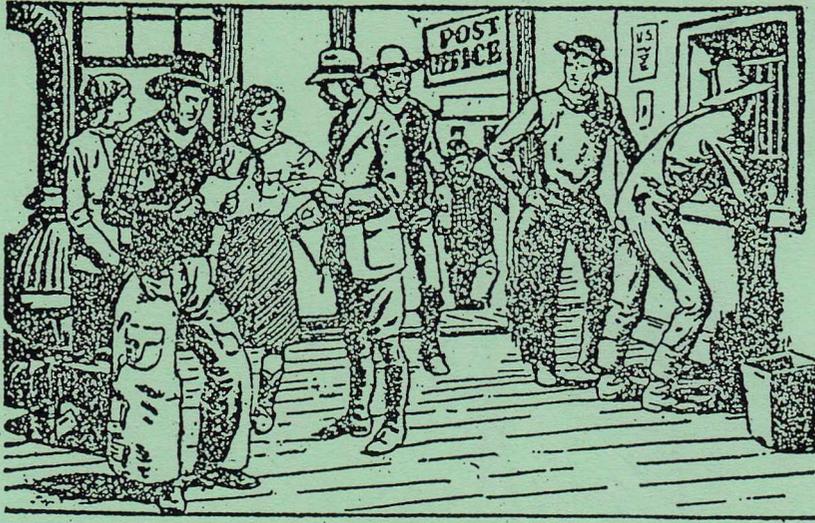


YHOS

LVII





FANISHTORY

REDD BOGGS P O Box 441 El Verano CA 95433

Friday 9 June 1995

Dear Art:

I was so impressed (aha! I can do it too) with yr return address on the envelope for the NFFF¹-- which for a moment I thought WAS from the NFFF! -- and which I showed to Dave Rike who was visiting me -- that I didn't notice till the next day that you had addressed me at a mixture of street and post office box coordinates. FAPA Manor is indeed in El Verano at 191 Verano avenue, but the postal system doesn't recognize this, and supposes this address is in Sonoma. Therefore your note/fanzine went to El Verano 95433, where luckily they know me, and were able to find the right P O box to stick it in. Lucky is he who knows the right box to stick it in.

Ours is a quiet country post office, as you can easily see from the illo above. I'm the fellow in leather chaps on the left skimming *Quaro* #20.²

Actually of course this is an OLD illo, and even as a kid I was impressed with the drawing. How much did the anonymous artist get for the work? Two bucks? It appeared in every issue of *Wild West Weekly* for years and years, and I was never tired of looking at it and marveling at the diversity of people he had drawn into this little scene: eight people all neatly delineated, each individualized. I was always worried about the girl with her back to the stove who is wearing a tam and has a sweet calm profile, but with her suitcase beside her she is waiting for somebody. She just arrived on the train, I suppose, but the person who appointed to meet her hasn't arrived yet. I hope it's the man with the checkered shirt just climbing up the steps from the street.

It would be hard to find an artist who could do a drawing like this, even for many times two bucks, in this abused age. I'm ready to believe Siskel and Ebert in their praise of the movie "Crumb," but R. Crumb himself was (is?) a terrible cartoonist, and like so many artists these days makes a virtue out of his bad craftsmanship. I suppose that's all you can do if you have little talent and little training. I would like to see HIM draw a picture like this depiction of the old El Verano post office!

I was sorry, though, that you mostly gave up on leaving a line between each paragraph after the first page and didn't take it up again for a while, making the account of your odd-to-see a little more difficult to scan than it should've been. Thanks, though, for giving the thing a title, something few fan writers chattering away about their latest misadventures ever bother to do. It makes it easier to reference, for one thing, and someday when a future indexer gets to *Quaro #20* he will let out a happy sigh and twiddle down "A Present For Santa Claus" and move on to "Mailing Comments #189" instead of agonizing over what to call this piece for the record.

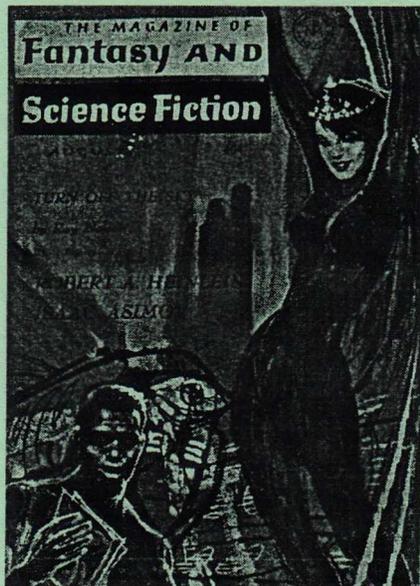
I assume that you never activate the spell-check on your Starwriter 80, else smoke would pour from its innards every time it hits a passage like "we huft & we puf, huf puf, hufpuf hufpufhufpuf for abt 20 min," but otherwise "A Present For Santa Claus" was pleasant reading. I don't know what a "kindegraten teacher" is, but Shirley must have endless patience to put up with, ugh, a *faan!* The VW bus that would die on you when you pulled to a stop reminds me of Gretchen's old Ford sedan that kept dying on me as I returned from L. A. in 1965 with the remainder of our possessions left there in the keeping of Arthur Jean Cox, Ed Cox, and Jim Harmon, which would die on me every time I had to slow down on the freeway but would accommodatingly cough back into life in a moment or two. Not the happiest thing to contend with on a crowded freeway nearing Oakland at commute time.

Natchurly you ARE going to reprint that fifty-year-old "Shortype"⁴ from *Yhos*, and just want to be coaxed a little. Do it! The anecdote about the Arab Muslim is sobering. It is hard to believe there are such maniacs in the world -- a whole hemisphere of them. (That poor shlub ought to have read Alfred Bester's "The Man Who Murdered Mohammed" -- in which somebody tries to change history by murdering various influential people of the past including poor ol' Mohammed, but NOT Jesus; which is very interesting -- I suppose the omission was intentional, not to raise the ire of Christians.) The only Muslim I was acquainted with in college was a nice quiet fellow and the only thing I remember about him, aside from his British accent, is that he sat hugging the radiator every morning in the classroom. He was from India, and remember this was wintertime in Minnesota! I guess the fellow you mention isn't really much more maniacal, though, than some Christian right-wingers. You heard about the recent furor over the *New Yorker* cover showing a figure "crucified" upon an income tax form, which some devout Christians believed was impious. Oh Jesus Christ! Some of these people made noises like they "wd kick the living shit out of" the artist who did the illo.

I'm not sure what the lady on your cover wielding a sword with an oversized handle is pointing at, but I was just looking at an ad/bookmark of *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine* and the chap on horseback depicted thereon is also pointing at something out of the picture. I guess fantasy figures spend a lot of time pointing, even in the very moment after you've come spouting up out of a stopped-up drain like the lady on your cover. She's pointing, yes, but she's not a bit damp from rising from the flood and she didn't snag that sword on the narrow opening from which she emerged. Clever and adroit girl, she is.

I was glad to hear that Ventura is "blest with several xint used book stores." These should be federally funded. Dave and I just visited Holmes Books in Oakland, which is going out of business after 101 years -- HAS gone out of business, but is holding an "Encore Sale" to dispose of 300,000 books in stock. Before we even went in I smelled that wonderful musty aroma that always marks the oldtime used bookstore, and it made me sad to know that another such institution is biting the dust. Just the other morning I saw the admirable *Chronicle* columnist Adair Lara on BayTV flogging her new book, *In Adair's House*, and felt a momentary pang to realize that someday her little book will end up on shelves among other books forgotten by a new generation, like the books of once famous authors like Richard Harding Davis and Christopher Morley. After seeing the demise of the ancient Holmes Books, though, I realize that that fate is not for Adair's book. It won't end up in a used bookstore, but will merely be pulped and disposed of, someday soon, and never make it to a used bookstore of the future.

→
(cont. p.7)



Ray Nelson's "Turn Off the Sky"

Reviewed by
Walter Breen

Any attempt to judge this story must begin with the irreducible truth that the version printed in *F&SF* is not the original story Ray wrote six years ago (long admired by editors to whom Damon Knight submitted it as Ray's agent, but always rejected as too pornographic for publication in unmutated form), but a mere fragment. I dislike judging a man's work on the basis of a few scraps and shreds, but in this instance no alternative remains. And from what I have heard, some fans dig the story and others damn it on just such a basis. I only hope that doters and damners alike will sometime get the chance to see the original manuscript—nearly double the length of the published version and a great deal better. What was cut out was not padding at all but erotic and philosophical materials essential to plot and character development.

Despite contrary claims made to me by some critics, this story—though intended for an audience quite other than the usual generation of fans brought up to expect linear

plot and high adventure in a piece of SF—does have, or in the original version at least did have, a fairly well-knit plot, centering around a "what if?" idea (an approach Asimov regards as one of the classic ones). Ray set himself this problem: suppose an absolute utopia, a real one of the technocratic kind in which all material problems of society were solved, and in which no punitive laws remained in effect, whether or not they stayed on the books as dead letters. Given such a society, under what conditions would anyone still remain disaffected, and why? What would motivate them? What kind of hangups would they have? An obvious parallel to this kind of treatment, in traditional SF, immediately comes to mind: Shiras's "In Hiding" presents us with a seemingly optimal environment for a gifted child and explores the problems he would nonetheless be facing, problems so severe (and so inevitable) as to force him to wear a permanent mask and take almost nobody into his confidence.

It follows that such a story seriously attempting to deal with such a theme as Ray envisioned would have to rely more on character development than plot. Plot, in fact, is a major difficulty in any utopian fiction; a society in which conflict is artificially stifled by choking the cat with cream is just as static as that of 1984. Ray's plotting—so far as I can judge from my own rather fuzzy recollection of the original manuscript compared with the fragments printed here—follows directly from his attempt to solve the basic problem around which his story unfolds. And the story nevertheless does manage to pass one common test of plotting: the “whatever happened to . . . ?” questions are all answered fairly well.

In a completely non-punitive society, says Ray in effect, some people—like the Noble Savage of Huxley's *Brave New World*—will still be hunting for a purpose, for something to give direction to their lives. Ersatz religion provided by the state, ersatz sex with robots, sensory gratification of all kinds, will not suffice. Others will find their own hostile and destructive impulses surviving even though without a meaningful outlet. And, most important of all, many women—archotypically fickle—will find their affections switching unpredictably from one man to another, while men will find themselves still desiring exclusive possession of such women. And *there* is the basis for Ray's plot as well as for much of his choice of features to emphasize in characterization. All three of his major characters are seeking a purpose: Little Brother needs an outlet for his hostilities; Reva is desperately clinging to a natural archetypal pattern, even refusing aspirin for menstrual cramps; Abelard is getting back at Big Mother, and he realizes only too late that he is as sexually possessive as Othello. And as

a final irony, even after Reva has taught Abelard how to be honest with himself and how to write poetry, Abelard cannot benefit by this discovery. Ray seems to be asking if all such idealisms are not ultimately a result of self-deception as to human limitations.

A story of this kind also, if it is any good, has more than one theme, more than one “point”; it yields further meanings on rereading. As I recall the original manuscript, it swarmed with subsidiary themes, though relatively few of them survived the mutilations in recognizable form. At the party which opens the story, and in several brief episodes later on, Ray presents us with some fairly convincing speculations as to the development of music in a future society—a rather rare theme for SF. Making divergent outgrowths of jazz and Indian sitar music on the one hand, and developments of the Harry Partch 13-tone music on the other, as Ray suggests, is actually as good a guess as I've heard anywhere. It is fairly evident that music cannot go much farther in the direction of randomness without exceeding the psychological limits of its hearers. And for Western ears, Indian ragas and the Partch system are two relatively unexplored areas in which a great deal can be done.

Among the other subsidiary themes still recognizable are numerous spoofs against types recognizable even today—types, by the by, with which Ray is largely sympathetic. In Ray, beat and square, hip and mundane, fan and antifan, true believer and agnostic, jealous and non-jealous lover, anarchist and capitalist have long been at war; and in this story (as in many others by him) many of these aspects are satirized, sometimes gently, sometimes bitterly. Abelard—black Jewish anarchist with blue paint on his genitals—when asked at an “anything goes” party to demonstrate free love, presses a pamphlet into the

dancer's hand rather than making love to her. Abelard—non-violent anarchist—does not even stop making his beatific smiles when someone wreaks physical violence on him in a manner calculated to hurt maximally rather than to kill. And despite the non-violence, he still realizes that he is as full of repressed hostilities (stimulated by sexual jealousy) as is Little Brother Ivanovich. Little Brother, in turn, rejects the suggestions and becomes furious. Abelard preaches Universal Nonjealous Love—and finds that inwardly he is as jealous as the next man. Reva, an embodiment of the Bitch Goddess, a clairvoyant, nevertheless throws herself at a clod whose terrific load of hate makes him probably incapable of the kind of love she craves. The newly-elected head of the Anti-Political Party, making post-campaign promises to destroy the last traces of government (without giving any hint as to how society will run itself thereafter), sounds just like any other politician in similar circumstances—unctuous and self-satisfied. And so forth....

One other subsidiary theme, of course, failed to get past the censors. What is probably "the most unkind cut of all" occurred on what became page 16 of the magazine version. The original manuscript contained at that point a sex scene which took all the Olympia Press stable aside and showed them how it *ought* be done—and all to the ironic accompaniment of advertisements visible through the subway windows or in the feelies: a scene at once macabre and wondrous, erotic in the highest degree, and a terrific spoof on the Madison Avenue association of sex with the Buy Our Product line, as well as exploiting the Freudian implications hinted at in the fragments still remaining.

Probably most fans will have spotted the major scientific failure in the story:

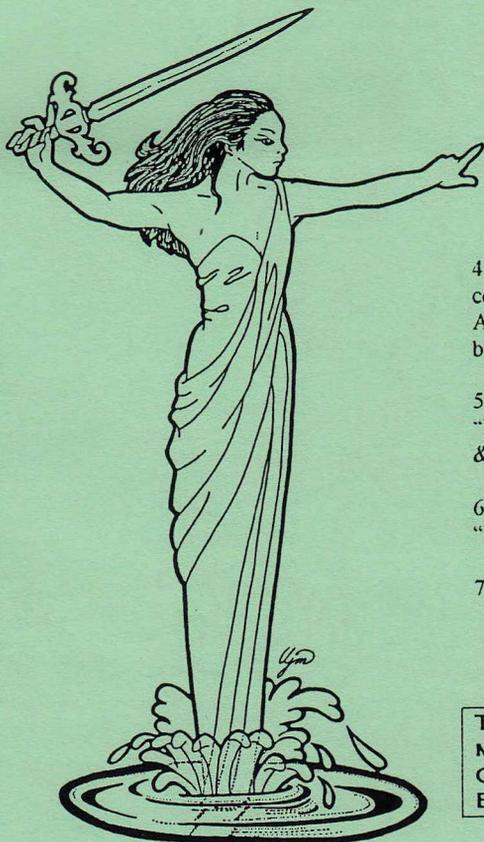
sudden decompression following the explosion in the subway most likely would not have caused the passengers' bodies to explode, but they would have died instead in other ways, probably equally ugly. It is not even clear why a vacuum would be called for in the subway; one would expect, rather, that the trains would be powered by jet or rocket. But the science in this story is comparatively unimportant, and the story ought to be judged on other grounds. As an exploration of utopian themes, this story manages to say something new, and to avoid the pitfalls besetting most utopian fiction. That alone sets it well above many other recent efforts, even aside from the musical speculations and the spoofs. As with Avram Davidson's *Joyleg*, this story should have been marketed somewhere in the mainstream; its ideal context is not that of science fiction at all. One can only hope that the unexpurgated version will eventually be printed somewhere.

—Walter Breen, 1964

[Ray Nelson's "Turn Off The Sky" appeared originally in the August 1963 issue of *Fantasy & Science Fiction*; it was the cover story that issue and Emsh did it proud. It's only been anthologized once, in Asimov & Greenberg's *Isaac Asimov Presents the Great SF Stories 25* (1963), published by DAW Books in 1992. According to David Nee at Berkeley's Other Change of Hobbit, it's easier to turn up a copy of the magazine than this collection. Walter Breen wrote this review in 1964 for publication in Paul Williams' fanzine, *Within*. It was scheduled for the 120-page first annish, but Paul—unlike Joel Nydahl—was unable to complete publication.] Thanks to Robert Lichtman for both the material and formatting. -AV

As for the Canon Starwriter Pro-5000, which I have, as Dave Rike said, its main attraction is that it has a large computer-like monitor, as well as a "zoom" function that helps visibility of smaller size fonts. I am not yet in the sad shape of Rosemary Hickey, but my eyes start to squint when I have to look at great length at that little backlit screen of the Starwriter 80. The Pro-5000 has many other advantages, but also some drawbacks, such as the fewer usable fonts for text as compared with the Starwriter 80. It partially makes up for this by offering a greater variety of type sizes from μ to some incredibly large size I won't demonstrate, and it has other virtues too.

I am keeping my good old comfortable Starwriter 80⁷, at least for now because I have lots of material on it, and I haven't figured out whether those golden words can be transferred from one machine to the other. The relative complexity of the Starwriter Pro-5000 makes one admire the simplicity of the Starwriter 80, which may be less versatile but -- as I often say, with some exaggeration -- can be used immediately by anybody who can figure out where the "on" button is. The Pro-5000 gives you a *User's Guide* of 483 pages plus a *Tutorial* manual of a mere 58 pages. And of course it still isn't a real computer, and won't give me access to the Net, if that's a disadvantage. You will have to see the Pro-5000 when you come down to Sonoma county someday.



Yours,

Redd

FOOTNOTES; 1. Some old envelopes from 1942 that I thot fan history buff's wd get a kick out of.

2. My SAPzine, ca. 1995.

3. Boggisian for Odyssey, a wild trip in a decrepit VWbus to see Shirley's family in Ventura, 500m from here. (Also in *Yhos 54*)

4. "Shortype" was a fairly rigorous system of fonetik spelling that cd b done on typewriter (w/o resorting to the International Phonetic Alphabet with its 48? difrent symbols). I don't think I reprintd it, but got bewitched by the Pelbar Cycle.

5. A classmate at LAState (ca 1952) misunderstood my reference to "Mohamet will have to go to the mountain" as a slur on his religion, & thus was the effendi offended.

6. See illo to the left. Linda Michaels seems to be pointing at "Redd," little realizing he is now safely out of range.

7. I still have mine also, & share Redd's admiration for same. If u just wanto do a quik loc or a poc, turn it on & away u go. Unfortunately, I never got to see his Pro-5000. *Sigh*

THIS HAS BEEN *Yhos 57*, FOR THE FAPA NOV 2000 MAILING, ETAL, PERP BY ART WIDNER, P O BOX 5122, GUALALA, CA 95445. EMAIL: bugr@mcn.org. BODACIOUS PUBLICATION #158

COVER BY D. WEST

