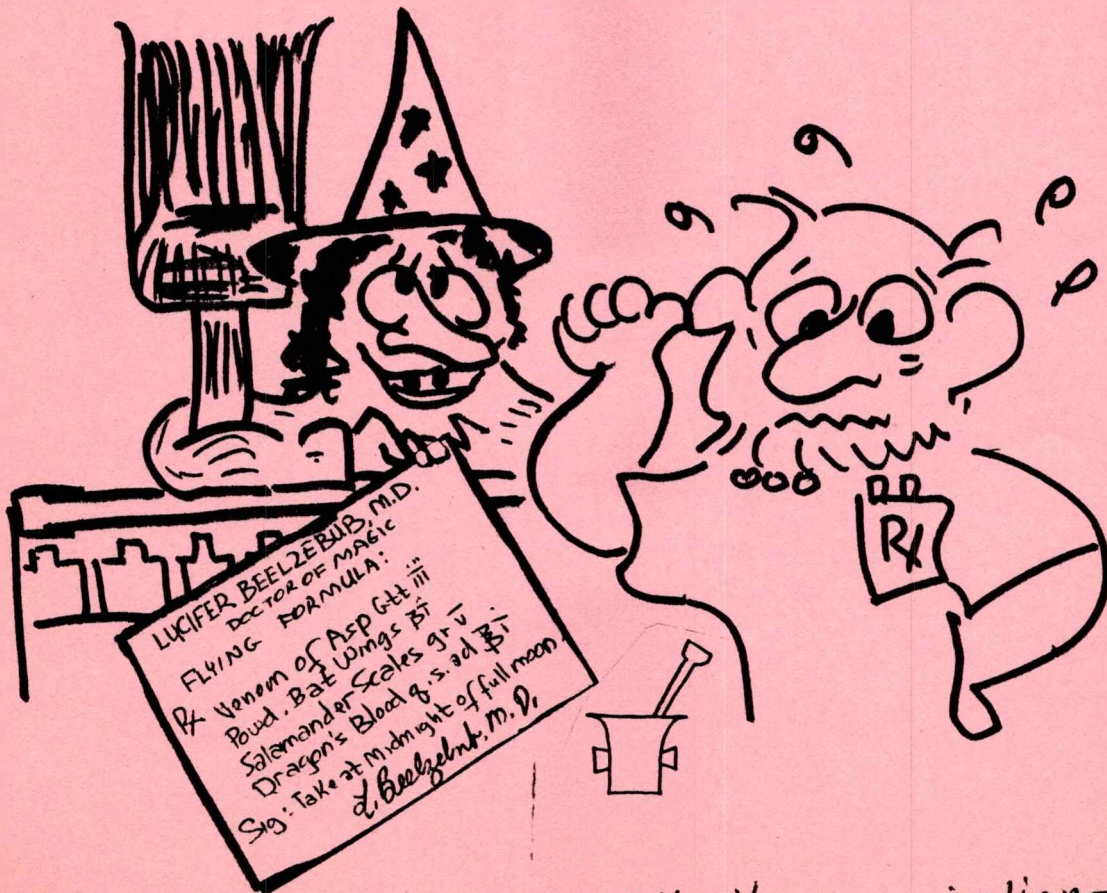


--AROUND THE PHARMACY--

Can you guarantee
I'll lose twenty
pounds this week?



IN! IT OPENS
IN!



But your sign says "We fill all prescriptions"!

BEN'S BEAT IS

Ben Indick R.Ph.

Ben's Beat 15

Published by Ben Indick, 428 Sagamore Ave, Teaneck, N J 07666

.. emcees on FAPA Mailing 208 plus natter ..

I still support Tom Perry's foreign mail proposal since dues rise will be small, and it would provide more rapid and more certain overseas delivery. Members abroad would feel more a part of current happenings. In turn they should get their apazines out as soon as possible. Still, since the question is so contentious, I second the suggestions by Bob Lichtman and Russ Chauvenet to continue debate. I appreciate Helen Wesson's fears, but do not think Tom's proposal is precisely equivalent to "our export deficit," nor do I fear that FAPA will be bought out by foreigners. As for Life Memberships, reconsidering, I shall side with Helen. Individual members and friends can certainly send copies to retirees; I discovered elsewhere that after a few I no longer received a response. It is similar to "Honorable Members" in an apa I just joined. At this time I do not know whether they ever respond at all or even care; if not I would be in favor of a gracious farewell to them.

I supported Robert Silverberg's request, although I should be totally honest and say that knocking off a few pages of fanac should actually be R&R for Bob. Believe it or not, many of us find spare time tough to come by too, even without novel deadlines hanging on us. I say it with full respect, because I enjoy his work and because he is obviously harried just now. One hates to leave an APA. I just dropped out of EOD, the Lovecraftian APA in which I was a charter member, the only remaining one after a decade and a half and 67 mailings who had never missed one. It was for personal reasons and pained me very much; I can honestly say I lost sleep over the decision, but I felt it necessary. Maybe you'll find time anyway, Bob.

Norm Metcalf: Your comments on Mary Gnaedinger were most interesting. In his zine this mailing Harry chides you for "hyperbole", but I'll accept your statement at face value. I brought your accusations up at Gerry de la Rees's home; he had a few guys over, including Sam Moskowitz. Getting together with peers is something I have not enjoyed in a long time, and it was great. Sam looked fine, and with his hand held, battery operated gadget he spoke with ease and, he said, no strain on his throat. I mentioned your thoughts about Mary's editorial style. No one disagreed with you, but they were less incensed (many years have gone by!) Sam said he had once recommended The Ghort Pirates to some fans when FFM reprinted it, and was surprised when they disliked it. He looked into it and found Mary had cut out 10,000 of 40,000 words! Back in WWII I found in the woebegone library aboard one of the troopships I used to sail the thick hardbound copy of the complete George Allan England Darkness and Dawn trilogy. The FFM version of the first novel had short stories in the same issue. Scarce wonder -- Mary had chopped out whole chapters! "Excess verbiage" she said

when I wrote her about the discrepancy. I reread the original, and did not mind the pounds of extras words, but her editing had been, at least, skilful, in reducing it to more modern style and publishing requirements. (That "library" was just a few shelves of Salvation Army style books, and I must admit I swiped the copy! I atoned years later by donating lots of stuff to my local library, for their then-poor SF shelves.)

You have hit her with very tough words, which she apparently deserved. However, a GI, home for a week, visiting her in her NYC office, was most cheered by her grace and charm, a quiet little woman. I regret she cut so many books, but she did bring many forgotten or neglected authors back to public attention, even if she depended on fans for recommendations...I enjoyed your three issues, with the wealth of knowledge and memory they hold. The Blish story is sad. I recall reading in one of Gerry's books that Samuel Loveman, perhaps HPLovecraft's closest friend then, once overheard HPL make an anti-Semitic crack, and the friendship was finished.

John Foyster: Your angry letters were properly curmudgeonly. Recently, announcing to Ed Ferman at F&SF Mag that I would not renew my sub (finishing some 35 years of the magazine) I told him that I had carefully removed the mailing label from the front cover, had taken a look at the art and promptly pasted it right back on. Nasty, but true. You may be unhappy to learn that "Alien Nation", whose wit extended only to the title and to a movie house in the shabby area billing RAMBO VI, is now a TV series...Your unidentified Song Book is, even with some dubious meter, a delight, pretty to look at, fun to read. No, I didn't sing out loud, but it made SOME commotion in my mind!

Andy: Very tranquil sounding CD titles...Hey, Kathleen! from one apazine to another you met, got engaged and got married -- mazel tov!...Marty C.: Stay with FAPA, forget about regrets. Good luck with your new/new/new job. You have gumption and certainly are able...I used to love pipe smoking but gave up after a fall and three cracked teeth. Later, choppers bonded, I could hold a pipe but in deference to my wife's quitting cigarets, did not resume. I miss my pipe. I always enjoyed reading more while puffing my pipe.

Harry W.: Aha, you and Bob Rodgers agree about that night of Bartok/Schoenberg opera. Well, I know it was not easy, and some of the audience booted the set designers, but what can I say, I liked it! I admit the Met was looking for trouble televising it, but you don't want the old warhorses all the time, no? I think I can safely assure you you will LOVE the Ring! I saw them all, was bowled over. Janet too. We were in Seattle this summer, and wouldn't you know, their highly praised "Meistersinger" was not on our two nights! ...Dave Wood: Did Robert Lichtman really go to England just for your dues? I do not think of Jack Speer as a "boring old fart." I enjoy him, but then I am a masochist. Interesting about "Rushdie" as a generic term! It did not make the papers here...Dick Eney: It's three years since you were in Ethiopia -- ready for a grand return?

Harry Bond: Don't misunderstand me about Hubbard. I detest the religious crap he came up with to line his pockets; in BB I only talk about his SF. The "dekology" sold to far more than Scientologists, however, and is now in softcover too. It began well but grew redundant, tedious and juvenile, with much off-color junk. I think Brian Earl Brown has a point this mailing when he says the purpose of Bridge and LRH's SF books is to lure converts to Dianetics and Scientology. Last mailing I praised his "Final Blackout" and I still recommend it, with such caveats. Scavenger's Newsletter is still alive. I sub, and received a copy this very day! It is a useful aid to placing material. Doesn't hurt to be able to write well too. I'll tell Lenny you liked "The Cosmic Times" --- the only person, apparently, who read it, since no one else has asked to come live with us....Graham: In re the MZB Magazine, I have not seen copies but it appears to be alive and well. Ask your druggist for Emetrol!...Art Hlavaty: Yeah, get a different title. I never did like that dopey "Dillinger" schtick. How about "The Dutch Schultz Relic"?..Ahrvid: You are RIGHT about your privilege to publish in Swedish. I thought the issue was fun. I had a writer/fan friend in Turkey, Selma Mine (haven't heard from her in years) who sent me a Big Little Book by her in Turkish. Could't read it but enjoyed seeing it. One of my essays on Lovecraft has been published in Japanese, and again I like to see it, although I cannot read it. (I do have a translation in English.)

Bob Lichtman: Congratulations on being a Taff laureate, and I envy your nice visit to England. It has been maybe 4 years since we were there, and Janet and I love London. Your experience with that tea room being behind another shop is like one I had in Salisbury near the cathedral. To reach the tearoom -- upstairs, it turned out, one had to walk through a men's clothier! (The food was weird. This summer I did better; I had High Tea at the Empress Hotel in Victoria, B.C. Unusual and fun.) Bob, watch that British humor...Fred Lerner: My father's background was Skierniewicz in Poland, not quite the same as yours. Regrettably, although his was a large family, and I am close to my cousins on his side, none of us knows the European background, and as kids did not care about it. There are other Indicks (also Indyks, Endigs, etc) and possibly some may be related and know something. Your account was very moving for me..Randy Everts: I am glad to have you, Langley and Ken around in FAPA. Heck, you even have your name in this mailing! Who's Reeves?

Milt: Harlan is a Great Man, but for us weak-and-badly-directed fingermen, the w/p is infinitely better than a typewriter. (Viz my first Fapazines, typed (typoed) on to stencils. Only a few typos escape now. And, whether or not Ben's Beat is a fanzine for the ages, I would have given up long ago without my beloved computer! I only met HE once, ca 1980, at a con. It was noon and I had to leave early. I was leaving as he came in, and someone was nice enough to introduce us. He smiled. I expressed regrets I had to miss his talk. Still smiling, he snapped "That's a crock of shit." ..Brian: Fine thing, Don Herron talks me into rejoining Rehupa (3rd time) and here you go quitting! Well, I suppose I'll be dropping out

again after a while, but it is a lively place now...Russ: In re the presence of old tomes on your shelves, the fellows at Gerry's house (see above) mostly felt the old books we loved and saved are not holding their commercial value. Young collectors are uninterested in them. I love my books anyway. I, in noblesse, bow to your love for your books, which remain eclectic in composition (I have, to save space, winnowed out many non-SF/F and sold or given them away)...Joe Moudry: I have read by MacCammon only his Bethany's Sin, which did not shake my universe; I'll try him again.

Redd: Your ruminations on Asimov's "Nightfall" prove we cannot examine SF stories too closely, although I agree with him madness would ensue. I pray he writes no sequel. His last few books have been dreadful. That latest Foundation filled chapters with unimportant adventures, and then a belated and obvious surprise ending; Fantastic Voyage II grumpily pretended there was no prior novel on the theme. He has given us a lot of great stuff although I do agree with Patrouch about his wooden characters; his plotsmanship makes the books...Seth: Politicians, vis a vis the Abortion issue, will do as always, put a wet finger into the wind and go that way. Certainly without the Gipper on hand to hypocritize (sorry, Speer. Where were you this time anyway?)...Don Fitch: Another retiree! I am old enough (66) but still put in my day (a short one, 9 to 3:30, Wed. off, Sat to 1. No Sun. So, except that my store is located in a bad area, it is not hard. Still, I think I could fill my time, if only at this w/p. Good luck! You would not remember me from old FAPA days since I joined up only a little over 3 years ago. I said "Augie" because everyone does, but many years ago, when I wrote him he signed his letters "August" and I wrote him by that familiar name. I never actually met him, but I have always respected him. Theatre tix here are probably costlier than in LA; I belong to Dramatists Guild, Audience Extras (which is in LA too; look into it if you like theatre) and get in to many shows, the lesser ones at least, for only a very few dollars. When something special is on, give the man his money! Theatre is a privilege and a joy!

Art: Long may you wave that wine! Ray: Sam insists he never claimed Fandom began in the 1930s, or the 1800s. He traces it back to Roman times! Ask him!...Don, DoS is growing again! Your Yugoslavian branch of fandom is remarkable, bright youngsters who may one day find time to become FAPAns and add to the need for faster mailings! I wonder whether the boys know anything about Selma Mines? (See note above to Ahrvid.)

Langley: Another splendid issue. Mike Ashley and SaM are joys to read (even if a young generation must rediscover Blackwood, and no one remembers MacFadden at all.) Your own review of Benson is acute, and I hope you have read the same publisher's books of Burrage and Nesbit. A reprint of a Kelly story would have been a useful adjunct to the article and interview. The latter portrayed a vital and fascinating man. Heck, a reprint of one of his speeches for old Give-'em-Hell Harry would've been OK too! Fine magazine.

— Ben

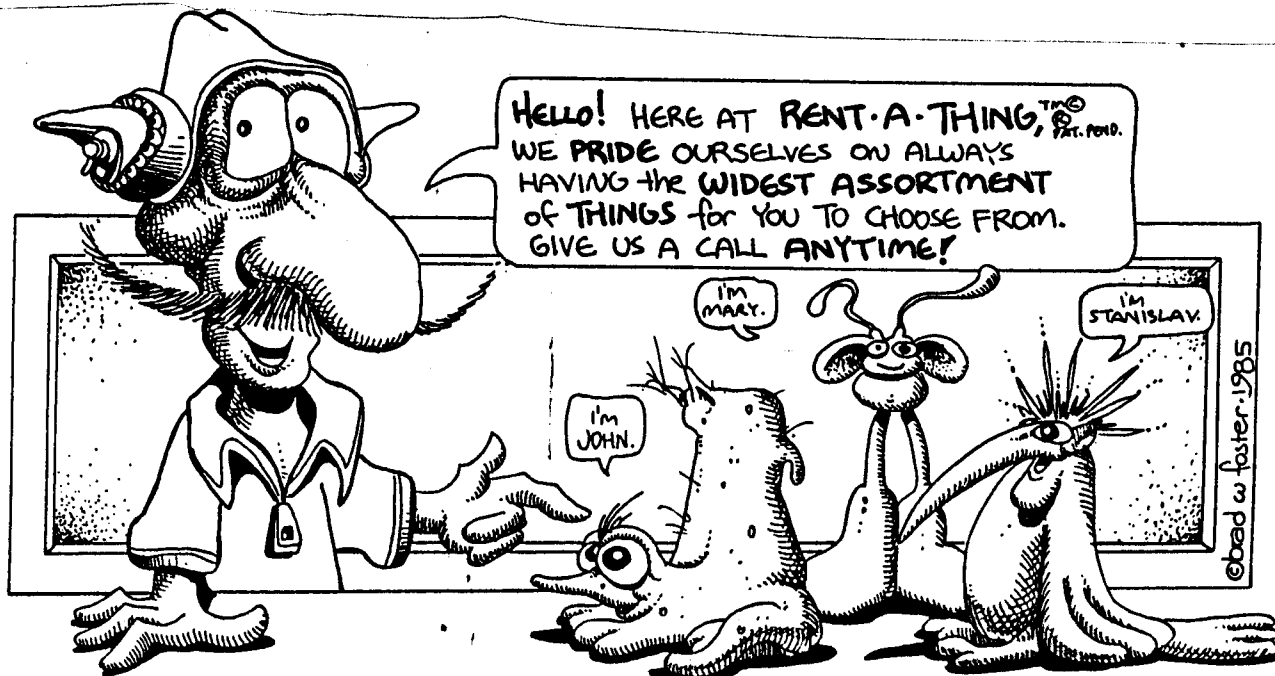
Summer Broadway Beat

Writing in mid Sept. it has been a slack few months for us theatre-wise. The surprise hit for us was Tamara, and I'll save that most unique evening for last.

Call Me Ethel! starred a good look-alike, Rita McKenzie, doing a very good Merm. The book was awkward: she told her autobiog to an unseen agent, but it was only a frame on which to string many of her hits. As a kid I never cared for Ethel; however, my own kids saw "Mad Mad World" and loved her in it. Maybe her loud-mouthed role reminded them of us; whatever, they were true Mermanuts thereafter, and I became one as well. She is quoted as describing Hollywood's replacements in films that eliminated the Broadway stars, esp. Roz Russell in "Gypsy" as jeeps among limousines. Ethel was a real stretch! Rita has been doing the show in cabarets for a long time; this performance starred this non-Jewish actress in a play about a star who was not Jewish at the American Jewish Theatre! Maybe because for some reason everyone thought the Episcopalian Ethel was Jewish. Bet you did too, huh? (OOB)

The Good Coach, a first play, tried to be a mystery about a serial killer, and the high school coach fears that either he himself is the killer, or that the latter is after him, and knows of an unsavory experience in his background. At times the suspence was good, but the author was determined to get psychoanalytical elements in and a real thriller shouldn't have distractions in its way. I think it could be cleared into a thriller at least as good as the now-outdated Night Must Fall. (OOB)

Another error a young playwright may make is to end the play by killing a major character. Best Friends is about an unsuccessful artist envious of his oldest friend, the latter a great TV success as a tough guy. For most of an act the artist points a gun at the actor, who is tied to a chair, The curtain was a little too quick for the 2nd act and the victim did not have time to be tied up; he had to sit pretending he was tied! Finally he gets loose and turns the tables. However, the enmity is overcome, the gun is placed on a table, where, sensing an inexperienced playwright's resolution (as I have done it myself) I kept mumbling, Put the gun away, put the gun away. No such luck. At the end, by accident the artist fires it and kills his Best Friend. Bad stuff. (OOB)



Yet another first play, The Man Who Shot Lincoln, mounted a very fine production but did not quite score with us. Edwin Booth is narrator, and tells us his brother John Wilkes did not shoot Lincoln. He is pathologically jealous of the dashing John, unfairly suspects John has been dallying with his wife and may even be the father of his new child. He seeks revenge, and gets it in a rewriting of history, which, had it been more concerned with the great men and events and less with Edwin's oft-reiterated jealousy, would have been more effective. If you really want to know who killed Lincoln, ask me! I'll tell you! You won't much believe it either, but I'll know you are interested. (OOB)

Some ballet: The world-famous, Russian Kirov: Fabulous ladies, beautiful, elegant, superb. They make it all look so easy. London Festival Ballet: a good company, even if the first 2 of the 3 pieces were dull. The third was just fine. (At the Met)

The Fall of the House of Usher: A short opera with music by Philip Glass. Janet and I have always been Glass fanatics; however, some time ago I was bored stiff by his allegedly science fiction opera 1000 Airplanes on the Roof, a 90 min. monologue by H D Hwang (of M Butterfly) to which Glass fruitlessly tried to match music. Usher was at least a real opera, but the score was never more than a rehash of familiar Glass themes, and the book went nowhere. I shall not spend more big dollars on Glass unless I am assured the work has merit. (LincCtr Tully Hall)

Double Blessing was a featherweight but endearing show about an orthodox Jewish widow and her marriagable daughter. The swain chosen for her does not show up but his eccentric buddy comes to explain. Of course he and the girl fall in love. The girl, Helen Greenberg, formerly an impro comic is utterly delightful, never misses a beat, makes the show. (OOB)

Most of you Fapans are old enough to remember one of TV's great early comics, and it was a privilege to see him in Sid Caesar and Company. Sid did many of his great acts, and if his co-stars could never equal the unforgettable Imogene Coca and Carl Reiner, it still added up to a hilarious evening. Sid has gotten by his hard years, of nervous exhaustion, of alcohol, of drugs (Rx); he is slim and controlled, and content to repeat his familiar classic turns. Now it happens my son wrote lyrics for a Cannon Film Sid starred in, The Emperor's New Clothes (not released here, but available on videotape. A cute film, hardly great. Michael remains annoyed that they only used six of his songs, out of many carefully planned others.) So we had to go backstage, and there, after his guests had left, we were introduced. Very graciously he listened as Janet told him "I have your picture on my kitchen wall." He looked surprised. She explained it was the movie poster for which "my son wrote the lyrics." He laughed with pleasure at the memory.

AND, one of his company was a singer, Gerianne Raphael. The name hung in my memory and I placed it: maybe 18 years ago we saw a

little show at Equity Library Theatre, a revival house, Ernest in Love, a musical version of Wilde's masterpiece, and this girl, young and beautiful, had been in it, singing "A Wicked Man." Well, by golly, 18 years later she was STILL singing it, and I was probably the only one in the audience who remembered it. We saw her and she was delighted with the memory. It was an all-star evening. (OB)

Tamara is now in its second year, and is presented in an armory (on Park Ave.) It is the story of one day in the life of famous Italian poet, revolutionary and lover Gabriele d'Annunzio, his entourage and a beautiful young Polish woman painter, Tamara de Lempicka, here in his castle to paint him. The day is 10 January 1927. We enter the building and a maid offers us champagne as we file in toward a desk. There a stiff young man in black shirt and uniform gruffly checks our names off against a list, pulls out a passport made in our names, has us sign it, and stamps it. We are cautioned sternly not to lose it, as the consequences of such carelessness cannot be foreseen. (In truth, the passpoert, which really looks like one, in heavy blue cover with seal, is a form of Playbill, with instructions, cast, etc and also the elegant menu tyo be served.) We are ushered to a large room, decorated beautifully with draperies, paintings and sculpture. We are offered out choice of beverages, soft or hard, and served impeccably by uniformed staff. The audience, about 150 persons, is conducted to the large central hall area, and after a brief introduction, in which we are told to follow such members of the 10 actor cast as we wish (of course such terms are not employed; this IS d'Annunzuio's home, and it is that day, and we are invited guests. Several cast members enter, talk, argue and split. The audience flurries after whichever it wishes.


This is how the play proceeds. Of course, one can only get part of the show, since you cannot follow everyone, and sometimes you really must scurry. You are breathing upon the actors, yet they never lose their composure or their beat. Sometimes there is violence, sometimes sex (no, not X); the many rooms used usually have several exits so that actors can exit from separate doors. Segues between scenes are wonderfully done; I lost Janet early, encountered her now and again, and, finally the audience is skilfully reconvened in the large hall for intermission, and a cold buffet banquet, prepared by Le Cirque, one of the great restaurants in the city and our favorite,

Now I must admit that even Le Cirque cannot do such mass production away from its own kitchens, but it was a good buffet indeed, with lamb, chicken, pasta, vegetables, wines, breads, everything, and coffee. As much as one wanted. Only glass and china -- no plastic. Then the action resumes. Afterward the group is gathered again for dessert, the celebrated Creme Brulee (caramel custard) very delicious, but not up to what one gets in the restaurant itself, of course. Plus chocolates, coffee.

The story is based on actual incidents. D'Annunzio, a WW I hero and a prime mover in the unification and liberation of Italy, was

already beyond his prime; the blackshirts his private army wore were adopted by Mussolino, whom the deflating hero would admire; on this night, politics has ceased to matter, and his objective is to bed Tamara. An idealist tries to get him to oppose Il Duce, and is shot by a fascist spy as the play ends.

There is intermission fun when someone has lost her passport and is threatened with deportation. It may be a plant, because I know it happened on at least one other night (when the woman was taken into a room, a slap and a cry were heard, and she emerged, abashed and trying not to laugh.) After it was over we compared notes to fill in some of the details, but the play hardly mattered! The format was the show, and it was a terrific night, memorable fun. Tickets run \$125 on a Sat night, \$100 on Sunday. Happily, in the slack season, they were 1/2 price, so we spent only \$50, for so great a night, food and drink included.



Il Vittoriale degli Italiani

NOME DELLA CASA
Gardone Riviera, Italia

LOCALITA
Gabriele d'Annunzio

PROPRIETARIO
il Principe di Monte Novoso

SCOPO DELLA VISITA
ospite

AUTORIZZAZIONE DATA A
BENJAMIN INDICK

ENTRATA AUTORIZZATA DA
Indick

DATA: *1-10*

FIRMA
Benjamin Indick

(Tamara passport, 1938)

Some Recent Reading

I generally concentrate on tales of fantasy, the supernatural and horror. Frequently I could sell essays on such books to Castle Rock, if they touched, in some way, upon the work of Stephen King. To my horror, the newspaper is quitting. Editor Christopher Spruce wants to return to school for his MA, and to teach and write. And just when I found an editor who inexplicably liked my stuff well enough to buy and print it! So I shall simply foist off some of the work on you, if you care to slough through it. I sent Chris a lengthy essay anyway, comparing several recent books (each with one King short story) to classic supernaturals, using three recently published books as examples.

The comparison was unfavorable to the new books, which included Book of the Dead, a high point in redundancy, poor writing and idiocy (unless you are a fan of George Romero's films. You might like this stuff then.) The classic stories were contained in In the Dark by E. Nesbit, The Flint Knife by E. F. Benson and Warning Whispers by A. M. Burrage, Equation Paperbacks, all from England and all very good, particularly the first two.

I do occasionally read some SF and, shamefully to admit, even some non-SF or F altogether! Thus, I read Stephen Hawking's A Brief History of Time, which was not precisely a grammar school science book; it was well-written and presented difficult subjects in only mildly difficult form. It was a useful key to some unfamiliar scientific subjects and is recommendable indeed. One Fine Day the Rabbi Bought a Cross is a typical "Rabbi Small" mystery, but the subject has gotten worn. The series was always more interested in synagogue politics than the mystery, and this is no exception. As a matter of fact, when we were in Israel in 1975, we also bought a cross. So there. I enjoyed the first Tom Clancy book, The Hunt for Red October, but the next, Red Storm Rising was a stiff. The reality which drove the former was absent in the latter, a WWII novel. I shall read the subsequent books, and hope for better. The opening pages of Doctorow's Billy Bathgate did not grab me but I shall try again later. And somewhere in this house is the latest Frederick Forsyth, drat it, but where?!

On our recent vacation I brought along Jack Vance's formidable (554 pages) new SF novel, Araminta Station, the first of a series, as well as a 1927 novel recommended highly by HPL



in his essay on supernatural horror, Leonard Cline's The Dark Chamber. For 7 days it figured to be enough. It wasn't so I picked up in a Seattle used book shop (Shorey's) another 20s book, by Michael Arlen and finished that off too.

Vance is one of my favorite writers. Eccentric, brilliant, a dazzling wordsmith at his best. So, okay, no one is at his best all the time, but his record is high, his books rich with wit and insight. His characterization is solid and the language of his dialogue while not always the stuff of reality is filled with charming turns. Clearly getting older now, the book rambles, the wit less pronounced, the points achieved later, the high drama delayed. In addition, except for sequences in the final part, when events do require rather fanciful people on different worlds, generally the book need not have been fantasy at all. It could have taken place right here on earth, with racial and environmental problems at its core. I am uncertain some of his answers may be mine. Having said all these awful things, I have to admit the old master did not put me to sleep, but kept me with him. Jack Vance, who looks more like a truck driver than a Life Master of Fantasy, (whatever THAT looks like!) never lets me down, and I shall read on, no matter if he never reaches the point when the next tome, however long it is (so long a book as this is uncustomary with him) appears.

HPL had written that Cline's novel was "high in artistic stature" and gave an excellent summary, condensing 277 pages (in this pb) into a paragraph, and doing much better thereby than the author, who only occasionally warmed to his allegedly horrific theme. A brilliant and fanatical man seeks to recover all memory, his own and primal, with the aid of drugs, music, mnemonics, etc. The back cover calls it "one of the most horrifying journeys ever recorded on paper", a mild, like 90% overstatement. Most of the book is concerned with the amorous travails of the hero, the daughter and the wife of the scientist. The characters are very 1920 novelish, and the horror is rarely encountered. The book ultimately simply peters out. The author likes to invert his clauses, Time Magazine style, and after a while, although they are only fairly frequent, each example socks the apprehensive reader across the eyeballs. "Out of the reverie I clutched ... out of the lane we wheeled.. Suddenly in she thrust the brakes...Very little wisdom get from you..Torpid the blest will be forever..Exhausted I fell into a heavy sleep..Knee-deep sometimes the drifts were.." Well, tired one gets from this. I have a romantic novel by Cline, Listen Moon!, a sweet, loveable book in the Robert Nathan tradition. HPL's problem was that he had little current literature to criticize and took what he could get. Today he would be swamped!

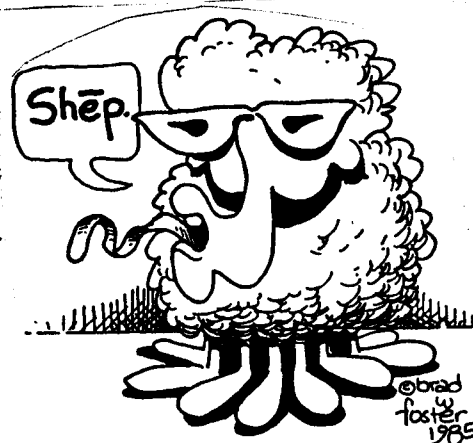
I am very fond of Michael Arlen. An Armenian of unpronounceable name, he emigrated to London, and became more British than the naturally born. He was in his time one of the most popular writers of short stories, knew many literary luminaries and not long thereafter was forgotten. His most well known story, often anthologized, is "The Gentleman From America", a simply wonderful

horror story, although not fantastic, unspoiled even by its dreadful imitation of American slang. Arlen wrote novels as well, some of them fantasy and even science fiction. One, The Green Hat, became very popular in a film adaptation as well. His son, Michael J. Arlen, has written a moving biography of his parents, Exiles, most highly recommended. Mayfair is probably his most commonly encountered book in sales of books long stored in attics, and it is a sprightly and sparkling collection, one story of which, "The King of the Jews", riled me a lot many years ago. Eventually I accepted Arlen's adopted snide attitude toward the Jews because it was clearly a posture he felt the upper classes held (they did) and he is so all-fired charming about this story and the others with sneeringly derogatory remarks about the Jews that I can laugh them away. (Such books may have done their share of harm, I know, however, it is 1989 now and I hope we can understand and laugh.)

The book I found was The Romantic Lady, (1921) four long stories, of which I must admit only the title story was top drawer, about a beautiful woman who cannot love a man for more than a few years, yet, so desirable is she that a man will seek to marry her, even knowing how she has disgraced and discarded husbands...and that his turn will come. It is told as a "club story" and is a winner. It helped make up for the lousy meal I had on American Airlines.

I have just finished Dan Simmons' science fiction novel Hyperion. I should caution potential readers first that although not advertised as such this is the first of two books, so the story is not truly complete. That said, this is a remarkable piece of work, uneven perhaps, brilliant also. There are shades of the universe-moving Van Vogt, but the characterization is more up to date and the fantasy, no matter how wild, more controlled. vV bowled one over with his prose, but Simmons is consistent within his framework. Simmons likes to codify some SF aspects, cutesily if effectively, just enough so you can understand without explanations (as "farcast" for teleportation.) It is almost Gernsbackian, but does avoid the endless oo-ahing explication Hugo gave to such terms.

The novel is in the Canterbury Tales format, i.e., one in which seven very assorted characters are on a trip and each tells his story. One problem with this is that everything stops when a story is being told, although as readers, we know something somewhere is going on and should be attended to. Also, Chaucer's pilgrims had no other purpose than to visit a cathedral; Simmons' are chosen as parts of a group, very different individuals, and he intends their stories to further the story, since the ultimate goal is of paramount importance. However, the author also wishes to tell independent stories without obtrusive aims.



It does not always work. The stories that are best are those most self-contained. Only the final one bears directly upon the final plot. The first story is perhaps the best, a priest whose exhilaration when he thinks he has demonstrated the existence of God and Christ on a distant world becomes a horrifyingly different kind of truth. In another, a young woman exposed to anti-entropic "time tombs" abruptly begins to live backwards, something like F. Scott Fitzgerald's wonderful "The Strange Case of Benjamin Button". The sequel is to be The Fall of Hyperion, and, I hope it will be the ONLY sequel, in this publishing world of multi-decker novels.

Simmons' novel of short stories sent me to his actual short stories in Night Visions 5. Metastasis, a mad view of cancer quickly wears thin. "Vanna Fucci is Alive and Well and Living in Hell" is a satire on the self-satirizing, televangelists. It reveals that the worst torture in hell is being forced to watch, endlessly repeated on numerous big screen TVs The Brother Freddy Show.

In "Iverson's Pits", Simmons leaves the expected and offers a beautifully researched story of the Civil War and a reunion at Gettysburg 50 years later. A boy scout is assigned to a garrulous old rebel captain determined to gain revenge on his inept old colonel Iverson. The old man recounts a moving scene where opposing forces in the war are across the Rapahannock. The Rebel band plays Dixie, and the Northern band promptly plays Dixie back at them. The Rebs play Yankee Doodle and then as if rehearsed each band plays Home Sweet Home, while all the soldiers on each side sing the sad sweet words. War was not sweetness: The old man then points out the "pits", deep graves dug for the dead.

He is about to shoot a young man as Iverson but the boy stops him. The man takes them to his cabin nearby for a toast, wine grown from arbors over the pits, bloody tasting. But when he man toasts Iverson himself the old man explodes in anger. Then Iverson comes out, bitter that soldiers constantly return to berate him, to explain away "their own cowardice by slandering me." The old man tries to fire at Iverson but the man, his nephew, hurls him against the wall, where he gasps and dies. The nephew digs a hole in the pits and drags the old man in, but slips in and the ground caves in and sucks him in. The boy thinks he sees teeth tearing at him. Iverson cannot escape; he too is finally taken up by the hungry earth. Many years later, the boy, an old man now, reads an account of excavations in the area, of discovery of artifacts, guns, buttons, a few bones, and teeth.

All interior artwork is by Brad W. Foster. Did you recognize Pic's brother on Pg. 9?

