

A BUDRYS MISCELLANY

Occasional Writing 1954-2000

Algis Budrys

Sweet friends, I pray you press
no subscription monies, in cash
or kind, upon us. The last time
we folded one of these, certain
funds remained unaccounted for,
and remain so to this day. We
are here but for a moment of
infinity, and may be gone again
any second now. I warn you....
when we go, we leave no tracks.

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A Budrys Miscellany

Occasional Writing 1954-2000

Algis Budrys

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Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Introduction: David Langford](#)

[*Dimensions* Reviews](#)

[Special Review: I. Yefremov](#)

[Who Killed Science Fiction?](#)

[*dubious*](#)

[Chipping Gears](#)

[Why Is a Fan?](#)

[Notes on Storytelling](#)

[Mind Control Is \[\]Good \[\]Bad \(Check One\)](#)

[The Politics of Deoxyribonucleic Acid](#)

[Introduction: "Walk to the World"](#)

[SF Capsule Reviews 1978-1983](#)

[Michaelmas and Me](#)

[George R.R. Martin, Dark Harbinger](#)

[Pop Lit: Reviews](#)

[*Tomorrow Speculative Fiction* Editorials](#)

[On Cyril Kornbluth](#)

[A Man in Touch with Tomorrow](#)

Appendix

[The Butchery of Algis Budrys](#)

[The Logics of Mankind](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Original Appearances](#)

[Index of Books and Authors Reviewed](#)

Introduction

David Langford

A Budrys Miscellany is a spinoff from, or pendant to, the huge retrospective collection published by Ansible Editions earlier in 2020 as *Beyond the Outposts: Essays on Science Fiction and Fantasy 1955-1996*. As indicated by its subtitle, *Beyond the Outposts* focuses for the most part on major articles and reviews by Algis Budrys that were of direct relevance to the SF and fantasy genres. The complementary *A Budrys Miscellany* offers a generous selection of further writing by Budrys that for one reason or another didn't match the theme of the larger collection.

What does that mean? This ebook includes the entire content of Algis Budrys's 1960 fanzine *dubious*; a car-magazine column that he wrote under the pseudonym Jeffries Oldman; a couple of once topical popular science articles; a selection of newspaper SF round-ups reviewing multiple books in limited space; many longer reviews of (for the most part) thrillers and spy novels written for the "Pop Lit" department of the *Chicago Sun-Times* – these form the largest segment of this collection and are consistently entertaining; and all his editorials for *Tomorrow Speculative Fiction* from 1993 to 2000, which with frequent personal digressions tell the story of that magazine from beginning to end.

Wherever it seems necessary I have inserted explanatory footnotes signed [*Ed.*].

The Algirdas J. Budrys Trust has kindly given permission for this Budrys sampler to be added to the free ebook library at taff.org.uk. If you enjoy it and would like to read this author's very much more substantial critical writings on science fiction and fantasy, please visit <https://ae.ansible.uk/?a=budrys> for details of *Beyond the Outposts* and our three collections of his review columns for *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction: Benchmarks Continued*, *Benchmarks Revisited* and *Benchmarks Concluded*.

A later note. Not long after releasing *A Budrys Miscellany* on 1 May 2020, I was told about and/or encouraged to reconsider a handful of other pieces not used in this collection, and expanded it accordingly. The late additions

include “*Dimensions Reviews*”, “Special Review”, “Who Killed Science Fiction?”, “Notes on Storytelling” – a follow-up to the analysis of contemporary suspense novels in the second issue of *dubious* – and “Introduction: ‘Walk to the World’”. Still later discoveries include “Michaelmas and Me”, added in July 2020; “George R.R. Martin, Dark Harbinger”, added in January 2021; and two late pieces from convention publications, “On Cyril Kornbluth” and the autobiographical “A Man in Touch with Tomorrow”, both added in May 2021. The ebook subtitle has also changed with the expanded date range: 1954-2000 rather than 1960-2000.

David Langford
2020, 2021

Dimensions Reviews

The Syndic by C.M. Kornbluth

One of the top science fiction writers unlimbers once more, and the result lays waste the horde of “novelists” who have suddenly sprung up in the field. Oddly enough, he does it with a collection of words that resembles a true novel only superficially.

The Syndic is a thoroughly worked-out extrapolation of present-day society, in the style which *The Space Merchants* and *Takeoff* did so much to establish as the leading method for writing a science fiction story. And it is the extrapolation which actually carries the story, for what plot there is has no beginning and no end.

True, the book begins with a problem – a typical, twisted Kornbluth problem: the slow disintegration of a society ruled by the benign and charmingly Florentine descendants of today’s criminals, under the vicious, piratical and unprincipled depredations of the despicable remnants of the former United States government.

True, there is a boy-meets-girl sub-plot, which is whackily resolved in a dead-serious manner, for the hero, a distant relative of the great Falcaros, *does* get the girl – a direct descendant of the rulers. But he doesn’t do it in the logical boy-meets-girl manner which writers generally regard as sacred. None of the things anyone does in this book are more than superficially logical. They are merely right.

But that main problem is never solved. Everyone examines it, gives it an experimental nudge, and then walks away from it, never looking back. And it doesn’t matter. The impoverished young Noble has won the hand of the fair young Princess while the benign spade-bearded Emperor beams approvingly in the background. The dragon is not slain, but nobody cares, because it’s such a nasty old dragon that it wouldn’t be any fun to have anything to do with it.

I could mention beautiful red-headed witches, telepathy, magic, superscience, sociology, satire, and dead-serious irony. I could mention private jokes and a mythical historian named D. Arrowsmith Hynde. I could say picaresque, I could say – hmm, I have, haven’t I? I say, in addition, that I

am quite sure Cesare Borgia would have heartily approved this book. Niccolò Machiavelli would have cribbed from it.

And, in further addition: GO BUY IT! Do yourself the favor. Novel, schmovel, this is *wonderful!*

***Ahead of Time* by Henry Kuttner**

It was 'round the middle of the month, back in 1943, and I'd read my way through all the other SF prozines on the newsstand rack. I stood there, indecisive. "What's this Astounding bit?" I said to myself. "Awful dull cover. No naked women. Should I bother?" Well, I did, out of sheer desperation, and ran head-on into A.E. van Vogt's "The Storm". Who knew from seetee? Contraterrene? What kind of a bit is that? Fortunately, I read "The Proud Robot" next.

Ahead of Time contains ten stories, some of them so new the magazine versions are barely off the stands, others going as far back as '42 ("Deadlock") and '43 ("Shock" and "Ghost"). The lineup contains one – count it, but don't bruise it – *one* story that seems representative of Kuttner at his hackle-raising best: "Home Is the Hunter", fresh out of *Galaxy*. "Or Else" – still on the stands in *Amazing* at this writing – is of another type of Kuttner; the gentle, light-touched Henry with black bitterness in his heart. In addition, there is "Year Day", for which there is no previous copyright notice, which would seem to indicated that it's a brand-new job although I swear the title's familiar.*

* The story was indeed original to this collection. [Ed.]

The most indicative thing about this anthology is the fact that the stories were carefully chosen to conform: to Kuttner's new preoccupation, psychology, which, in an autobiographical note, he refers to as "a science, concerned with human beings, that analyses and studies the world of the imagination that is fiction". Personally, I've always liked Kuttner stories better when Hank did his own analysing – it seemed to come out less depressingly then.

The book has a well-done and slightly nauseating jacket by Richard Powers. C.L. Moore gets no by-lines, but draws a pat on the back in the autobiog. You've probably read most of the stories, but you might like to give a friend a copy.

But I'd rather give that friend a copy of "The Proud Robot" and the rest of the Gallegher stories. I couldn't help thinking, as I read *Ahead of Time*, that I'd much rather be reading Lewis Padgett.

***Untouched by Human Hands* by Robert Sheckley**

This collection of thirteen stories stands unquestionably as the best one-man anthology yet to come out of Ballantine's shop. Admittedly, some of this standing is due to the disappointing level of the Kuttner and Clarke collections which have preceded it, but more than enough of the credit remains with Sheckley.

Neither Clarke nor Kuttner are basically short-story writers. Sheckley is. He has a professional's grasp of his specialty, and knows better than any other writer in his approximate age-group, just what may be done within the borders that define the short story – and where those borders may be extended.

Untouched by Human Hands contains thirteen stories. I wish it were fourteen, for then there would have been room for the sparkling "Feeding Time" which appeared under a pen-name in the first issue of *Fantasy Magazine*, and which threatens to become lost. ("The Demons", which appeared with it under Sheckley's own name, is included in this collection.) Which only goes to show that everyone has his favorite Sheckley story, and that only some people will be satisfied with this collection: the rest of us will just have to wait for the next one.

May/July 1954

Special Review: I. Yefremov

Stories, by I. Yefremov. Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954. 260 pp. Translated by O. Gorchakov. (\$2.98 from P. Tailer, 214 E. 15th Street, New York 3, New York.)

This is a one-man collection of eight Soviet science-fiction stories; and, as far as I know, the first extensive sample of its kind available in the United States.

I read it with purely professional interest. That is to say, I was concerned with what Mr. Yefremov was trying to accomplish, and how he went about it, rather than with the literary quality or entertainment value of his work. I propose to speak of it on the same terms.

As for the literary flavor, it's antique to American tastes. In a short autobiographical foreword, Mr. Yefremov describes his work thusly: "I am fully aware that my descriptive style has its faults, that my heroes are often too much alike, that the psychological line is inadequately developed—" This is an acute self-criticism, and will make it easy for the book to be dismissed in a few pithy sentences by those reviewers who care to do so. But Mr. Yefremov's awareness of these shortcomings doesn't seem to have kept him from producing a large volume of work, nor does it seem to have stayed the Foreign Languages Publishing House from picking him as, presumably, a typical Soviet science-fiction writer. There must be some element in these stories which makes them, by Soviet criteria, excellently adapted to the purpose Soviet science fiction is to serve.

I see no point in summarizing the plots of the individual narratives. One of them is much like John Taine's *Before the Dawn*, and another bears certain resemblances to Schuyler Miller's "Sands of Time". None of them will interest an American reader in search of simple entertainment. But they do have four universal elements in common, and in those four basics is, I think, the meat of Mr. Yefremov's message.

First, they share a common general locale. With one exception, which takes place partly in Russian territorial waters, all are located within the bounds of the Soviet Union, usually in the remoter Asiatic Republics, and all of them take place in the present or recent past.

Second, all the central characters, male and female, are either Soviet

scientists or their assistants, again with the exception of that same one story, which ends inconclusively, has no discernible point, and which seems to be a very early effort of Mr. Yefremov's. And it features Soviet engineers and other technical personnel in the only active roles.

Third, the motivating force is always discovery and exploration for the benefit of the Soviet Union. The plot invariably resolves with the discovery of a mineral deposit, paleontological find, or property of nature which will be of great benefit to the Union. All the characters, central and subsidiary, derive all their satisfaction from this climax. The subsidiary characters; collective farmers, miners, other workers, and the frequent native guides, co-operate to the utmost with all scientists, whom they admire, and whose successes make them happy. There are three love sub-plots scattered among the eight stories. All of them can resolve happily only if the scientist hero achieves his goal.

(There is a further sub-correlation. Quite frequently, the native guides refuse, in broken Russian, to enter "the place of evil spirits", et cetera. When the basis of their superstition is shown to be a phenomenon of Nature, they are much heartened, and admire the scientists even more. There is one exception to this – the native guide's fears prove right. But in this case, the evil force is not held by him to be the work of spirits or demons. It is a hitherto undiscovered property of Nature.)

Fourth, the stories are packed with the raw stuff of the "sense of wonder". Mr. Yefremov is frequently didactic and discursive. He has a positive fondness for the exclamation point following any statement of scientific fact, and he makes quite a few of those, some of them, in the case of a brush with the speed of light, dubious, but most of them, dealing as they do with the geology and paleontology in which he is a retired specialist, quite right-sounding.

Nevertheless, the cumulative impact of all those clearly indicated enthusiasms for the wonders of Nature is enough to make any reader jump! The pace of the stories is not particularly fast – it seems to take Mr. Yefremov forever to arrive at the first segment of his plot – but that ruthless march of facts, each with its charge of communicated excitement, which characterizes his technique, is irresistible after a while. It takes resolution to begin one of his stories; at least, if you're a modern reader of some of the accomplished sweepers-off-your-feet such as Sturgeon or Heinlein who have pushed the narrative technique to a high state of evolution. But once re-acclimated to the slower initial pace of Mr. Yefremov's stories, any reader

may probably not be entertained, but he will be overwhelmed.

This is no place to debate the nature of the “sense of wonder” or its metamorphoses in Western science fiction since modern American and English writers moved away from the exclamation point technique. What is important to this review is the fact that Mr. Yefremov is good at it, however crudely he does it. And I think we may assume that he says the proper things, while saying them in the proper way. I think that therein lie the standard of achievement and criterion of success as a Soviet science-fiction writer which Mr. Yefremov has met.

All right, *why* do Soviet science-fiction writers do things this way?

The Soviet Union has an internal problem unlike in degree to that of any principal nation today. In a world where the competition between social systems rests to a major degree on the technological status of the rival systems, the Soviet Union contains large populations, particularly in the Asiatic areas, which have made no substantial advance over their technological level of a thousand years ago. Some, in fact, have retrogressed. Most of them long ago reached a balance between their accustomed way of life and the small number of tools needed to sustain it, and are contented in this condition, as any group which has lived more or less the same way for generations is almost sure to be. A great deal of effort has been expended toward introducing modern machinery, modern agricultural methods, modern educational systems, and modern attitudes of thought. But it seems likely that, in dealing with people who are *not* “modern” in their basic attitude toward Nature and the universe, that all of these measures suffer considerable attrition from being forced into a cultural matrix never built to receive them.

There’s a subsidiary cultural effect, as well, this time in the old metropolitan centers of European culture. For all that the revolution is in its second generation in most of the western Soviet republics, a good deal of what a Marxist scholar would call the “petit bourgeoisie” attitude must still be well-entrenched. In those segments, the Doctor Professor and his learning are held in great regard, but most of the more talented young people would tend to enter the time-honored professions: medicine, law, civil service, or, in a more recent development, would try to get into party politics.

But what Russia needs most of all today, is not an abundance of farmers, miners, doctors, lawyers, or civil servants. What it needs is technicians, preferably in the physical sciences. These it must have, despite the tidal drag of an opposite cultural orientation.

Therefore, Mr. Yefremov, and, we presume, the other Soviet science-fiction writers in the sixty-odd magazines specializing in the subject within the Soviet Union, are constantly making these points:

The territory of the Soviet Union contains innumerable discoveries waiting to be made and resources to be discovered. (Mr. Yefremov's heroes also easily invent new apparatus to further this end whenever the situation calls for it.)

Science is personified by dedicated men and women, most of them young, in the foreground of the battle for the supremacy of the "new way of life". It is a mark of distinction to be a Soviet scientist; everyone admires a scientist, and scientists are heroes of Soviet culture.

Science is exciting; science is a rush toward the future, an explosion of the adventurous, creative spirit, made possible by iron determination to win out over all obstacles for the sake of the Soviet Union.

And all this is said with the concomitant ability to make the reader *feel* it. It's a pile-driver technique, but, with no snobbery whatsoever intended, I rather think subtlety would be wasted on the young men and women of Uzbekistan or the youngsters in the Leningrad primary schools, where career choices are made early.

How effective is this technique?

It's hardly a clear-cut case. A number of other pressures in addition to the relatively subtler method of persuasion through science fiction must be in use. But, while an outside pressure can mold you, only the persuasion which gets you to see things for yourself can make you change your cultural attitude, and *want* to be a technician.

Russia is training twice as many engineers as we are.

June 1956

Who Killed Science Fiction?

A contribution to Earl Kemp's thus-named 1960 symposium about the perceived decline of SF magazines. [Ed.]

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Earl Kemp', written in a cursive style on a light-colored background.

Well, yes, I feel magazine science fiction is dead – in the sense that the great days of the magazine science fiction form *as we recognize it* are gone, never to return. This statement holds true, I think, no matter what particular days in what particular magazine are the “great days” to your mind. I, personally, have become reconciled to the fact that the 1940s *Astounding* is past all resurrection. At the moment, there seems to be a paucity of magazine editorial policies capable of exciting and attracting large audiences; even “large” in science fiction magazine terms. Whether this is because science fiction has become exhausted as a reservoir of exciting editorial ideas, or whether this is because the world’s English-speaking population has exhausted its capacity to be excited by science fiction among other things, remains to be decided, if it can be decided at any point between these particular two extremes.

I do not think a specific cause for this effect can be pinpointed. I am of the opinion that the first people to see this current lethargy coming were the editors – who have been roundly excoriated for espousing strange, unorthodox policies which, it is true, *may be one* of the causes of today’s difficulties, but at least represented an attempt to *do* something. Since we cannot see the actual causes – or at least, for the life of me, I cannot – I hesitate to advocate remedies, for fear that we might wind up in an alley equally as blind as the attempt to make *Galaxy* metamorphose into *The Saturday Evening Post*, or to make *Astounding* the standard around which the partisans of some worthy cause might rally.

The original paperback, by definition, cannot save magazine science fiction. The original paperback is the mortal enemy of the magazine, and, furthermore, occupying the newsstands in its present position, an enemy who

has won. But this is not the same as saying that the paperbacks – particularly but not entirely the original paperbacks – killed the magazine market. They may have – though the evidence for this fails at a few crucial points – or they may simply have moved in and occupied a vacuum. Phil Klass, Bob Sheckley, and I did some arithmetic on this a few months ago, and came to the conclusion that original paperback wordage just about equals the difference between magazine wordage today and magazine wordage before the advent of Ballantine Books and the start, in reaction, of the extensive general science fiction paperback publishing program. But what this means, exactly, is something we can't tell. I offer it to you for what it's worth. As for whether the original paperback can "save" science fiction – science fiction as something larger than magazine science fiction – the evidence quoted above does seem to indicate that it represents only a metamorphosis in form, and has little effect in either increasing or decreasing the amount of science fiction published. It does, of course, circumscribe the length, and so to some extent, the *kind* of science fiction for which a ready market is available. This may very well lead to a sharp division, on criteria of length, between paperback science fiction (I think we can forget about hardcovers except as library items in editions of 2,500 copies) and the magazine science fiction of the future. Because some of the technical effects of writing to given lengths are not completely understood, it would be an invitation to error for anyone to predict what the science fiction magazines would be like under this hypothesis, but they would not much resemble anything in the market today.

Attempting to answer these questions leads, I find, to larger questions. For example: What is there about magazine science fiction that makes it worthy of special concern more intense than any concern for science fiction as a whole? When I attempt to answer that question for myself, I find myself forcibly flattening my nose against the unkind fact that my concern for the magazines is either sentimental or provincial, but not rational. The science fiction I liked best, as an adolescent, was magazine science fiction – furthermore, as published in a particular magazine. And even by my objective standards – that is, my subjective standards dressed up in stiff collars – the flowering of the science fiction form occurred in the magazines. But magazine publication represents an eyeblink in the span of science fiction's existence, and there is really no reason to suppose that simply because it was there when we were children, and was acknowledged chief, it will still be there for our children. There *have* after all, been other presidents since

Franklin Roosevelt, though you could have gotten large bets against it at one time.

Then, again, one is brought to ask: Since there are still well over 60 issues of science fiction magazines published every year, representing, at rough count, at the very least some three million annual words, how does this square with the notion that the field is dead? It is true this represents an enormous come-down – magazine science fiction has now sunk to a volume comparable to that of the crime fiction magazine – but the next question fairly leaps to mind: Are three million words of readable *anything* publishable every year?

We tend to forget that even in the 1940s, when, for my money, the marks were being set, every issue of *Astounding* was matched by four or five issues of incredible crap turned out by men who have, some of them, become leading lights in the market today, but who were in those days interesting only to students of literary evolution and who were, in any case, swamped by the hackwork of literary plumbers trained to conform rigidly to standards low enough to make a subway platform guard disdain them. We hear a lot of folklore nowadays about roses that bloomed forlorn in the pages of *Stirring Science*. Examination of the work in question undeniably leads to pleasant surprises in the form of a well-turned phrase here, an unconventional character there, or a curious plot twist elsewhere, mostly at the hands of one man. But as a whole, even the best of these pieces are, as I've said, only the yearling stumbles of men who did not walk tall until much later, and the folklore stems from the same nostalgic phenomenon that leads 40-year-old businessmen to ascribe importance to the interfraternity politics of their college days. In the 1940s, magazine science fiction had an abysmal average standard of excellence; the memorable stories, which men like Healy and McComas, Groff Conklin, and others have skimmed off for all our enjoyment, come largely from *Astounding*, and come largely from a handful of men – run your eye down the contents page of the Healy/McComas anthology* and see how many individuals are represented – who, *in their contemporary setting*, were buried under a swale of John Russell Fearn. And who, furthermore, had no idea whatsoever that they would someday be referred to as standards.

* *Adventures in Time and Space* (1946) edited by J. Francis McComas and Raymond J. Healy. [Ed.]

We see the 1940s from a viewpoint created by the good writers of the

1940s, and the standards by which measurement of their excellence is made are the highest standards which *they* set. We are the convinced audience they created – “we” meaning I and anyone who thinks as I do – and it’s no wonder we cannot find others to equal them, or magazines as satisfactory as the one that published them. But when we decry the magazine science fiction of today, and concern ourselves with its deterioration, we’re missing the point of the old saying that the winners write the history books. We miss it because the proper word should be not “winners”, but “survivors”. Those people who survive as magazine readers, should the magazines survive in any form, may well find excellences, in the contemporary magazines, that you and I are totally unaware of; they may well idolize writers we ignore, just as a Polton Cross enthusiast of 1940 would have said: “Who?” to the mention of Robert Heinlein’s name. Ted Sturgeon has said that 90% of everything is crap. Maybe so – it seems unarguable to me that three million words of anything must be largely crap, which might be concealing almost *anything* from our eyes, but not to the eyes of those who, ten years from now, will be looking back from another viewpoint.

So I honestly think that much of the rife dissatisfaction with today’s magazines stems from a hopeless nostalgia as inevitable, and as inconsolable, as Sam Moskowitz’s yearning for the Gernsback *Amazing*. And I think also that whatever the causes of the deflated science fiction boom might be, they are only the latest causes of a condition permanent to science fiction and all other evolutionary organisms – the shedding of dead skin and the generation of new organs and functions. I think we expected the boom to last, and I think we feel cheated that it didn’t because we feel that science fiction *deserves* to boom. But by what rational thinking can it be said that it does? Simply because it is “better” than the crimezines? By whose standards? When you come down to it, what service does science fiction perform for the average magazine reader that is not performed as well by a dozen competing specialties?

In looking over this essay, I realize that I haven’t done what I, as a convinced fan, desperately hoped I would do – assign some simple cause to the current (unfair) decline of magazine science fiction, and having done so, recommended a straightforward and obvious (if somehow up-to-now overlooked) remedy. But though I could snipe at editors and publishers – and, were I an editor or publisher, snipe at writers and readers – I would only be adding to the surf of backbiting that surrounds the rock of our mutual

affection for science fiction as a whole. I have, God knows, done enough of that in the past to see its futility.

I think it quite likely that the frustration many of us feel at our failure to slay the dragon is that, as so often is the case, there is no dragon and we know, deep inside, that the broadsword we hold poised is only going to give us one hell of a case of bursitis. I am sorry I haven't done what I'd like to have done, just as I would be pleased to see that despite my best rationalization here, someone else *has* found the dragon I overlooked, and slain it. But so many people have gone over the ground – cries of a lack of soul-searching are, to be kind about it, based on a misapprehension so ludicrous as to be past laughter – that I cannot for the life of me imagine where the beast might be, that it should have evaded such persistent detection.

I think science fiction will continue, in one form or another, slowly increasing its readership in direct proportion to population growth, despite our best efforts to lead fresh horses to water or to express our discomfort when the stream changes channels. Science fiction is, I think, a literary form that springs inevitably from the mind of a certain kind of person, and appeals to a certain kind of person. That's the only certainty I have on this point – I couldn't begin to define what I mean by "a certain kind", except negatively: Fans are NOT Slans... nor are they Ted Sturgeon's only non-telepath in the world. But matters of form are only matters of form, and while an inquiry of this nature will inevitably bring a number of valuable small things to light, the large decisions will, it seems to me, be made by the surviving readers of perhaps a decade from now.

May 1960

dubious

1

Sweet friends, I pray you press no subscription monies, in cash or kind, upon us. The last time we folded one of these, certain funds remained unaccounted for, and remain so to this day. We are here but for a moment of infinity, and may be gone again any second now. I warn you... when we go, we leave no tracks.

dubious volume 1, number 1
a wlistzine press publication

a.j. budrys
631 second avenue,
long branch, new jersey

Marr Vellam stencils, Olympia portable typewriter, courtesy
Lawrence T. Shaw and the makers of Fox's U-Bet Chocolate
Flavor Syrup

Our editorial policy is simplicity itself. You are going to get copies of *dubious* as long as new ones are produced, until such time as we enter FAPA.* Requests for removal from our mailing list, if received through the U.S. mails, will be acted upon with commendable dispatch. Meanwhile, be welcome into the sweet, simple, somehow loveable mind of y'r complicated servant

a.j. budrys

* The Fantasy Amateur Press Association. [Ed.]

croggle:

It is not necessarily true that a professional writer, in order to be convincing, must be himself convinced. We speak now of Robert Heinlein. Even if he says, at some point, somewhere, that he always has an axe to grind, this is the kind of thing writers are always tempted to blurt out at library luncheons. However the case may be, in this case of which we speak, the fact remains that almost nowhere outside the – loosely defined – Anglo-

Saxon countries would his thesis have brought about much furor, even when taken to be an exact, complete statement of a policy intended to be put into immediate effect. England and her children seem to share a cultural optimism which denies the possibility of war in our time – whatever that particular time might be. Those of us who know what it is to live in cultures governed by a perpetual, overt need – real or faithfully believed-in; it makes little practical difference – for the systematic application of power politics, seem to be unable to find anything particularly outrageous in the philosophy of this book. Extreme, perhaps, but not outrageous, and certainly not unrealistic. This is not to say that this corner earnestly hopes the next administration makes Heinlein its Secretary of State; I would be happy to have him for Lithuania, if there ever is one again, but I fear there'd be very little to work with. Whatever moral may be drawn from all this, let me rapidly say that if we ever get out into the stars under conditions which place an appreciable degree of power in our hands, we will certainly go through an epoch in which Mr. Heinlein's philosophy will prevail, and in that light this book must stand as an excellent example of that neglected sub-form, political science fiction.

And, incidentally, the cutting this book received in its magazine publication* had probably little to do with either a lack of integrity or any other moral question. I fear that *F&SF* has never been able to get its readership to take to long serials, or even long serial installments. Bob Mills is merely applying a lesson Tony Boucher learned. Furthermore, it is time we reconciled ourselves to the fact that Tony, however much we may miss him, is not coming back – and that since no one could hope to assume his individuality, it is only normal that Bob Mills, an individual in his own right – and a literate and interesting one – should take the magazine on new tacks. Now and then he seems to be accused of not being Tony Boucher. He can hardly deny it, but if any of you out there are thinking of hitting him, why not hit him someplace where it hurts, instead?

* The unidentified book is Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959): a cut version had been serialized as "Starship Soldier" in the October and November 1959 issues of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. [Ed.]

memoirs:

Late in 1947, I climbed aboard the East Coast Champion at 30th Street Station in Philadelphia. I kissed my mother and father while standing in the vestibule, then went to find my seat. There was a foul-up about it, and we were on the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac before the conductors

stopped moving me around from one vacant spot in the coach to the next. I was on my way to the University of Miami.

Once in Miami, I caught the bus to Coral Gables – only to find that I had to re-trace my way to downtown Miami, and there take a South Miami bus which deposited me, after twenty miles, a thousand yards down U.S. 1 from the Coral Gables bus line terminus. There I caught a University bus to North Campus – five hundred yards from the you-guessed-it – and registered. Thence to another University bus, and down U.S. 1. And down U.S. 1. And down... At Rockdale, an hour's ride out of South Miami, the battleship-gray Navy surplus bus took a sharp right over a grade crossing, and pitched down upon a narrow coral-rock road heading straight into the Everglades. We passed, ultimately, through a gate guarded by armed men in khaki uniforms, to be confronted by a sign:

U.S. GO'T PROP
– All damage to premises under
F.B.I.
Jurisdiction –

This was N.A.S. Richmond, or, in University parlance, South Campus.

N.A.S. Richmond had been a lighter-than-air base. It consisted of a score of weathered, dry-rotted barracks, warehouses, sheds, and service buildings housing a cafeteria, a fire house but no fire company, a recreation hall, and a Bachelor Officers' Quarters, which had become the women's dormitory. All these things stood under towering turpentine pines, exactly as they had been left by the Navy after the war. Out beyond the buildings lay the longest, broadest expanse of blazing white concrete I have ever seen, lightly streaked by rubber from the landing gear of blimps gone by. Surrounding it, like the palings of a fence for monsters, towered pylons of silvery gray concrete. Once, these had been the gateposts of airship hangar doors. But during a hurricane in the early 1940s, some tidy officer had ordered the doors of all the hangars tightly closed. The air pressure dropped. The hangars did not – they rose, with a great wrench of sound, and then fell only in the form of their component parts, which lay dissolving in the rain, strips of roofing sailing forlornly into the air, borne off by the storm in a windrow which, they tell me, was distinguishable from the air for years afterward as a fan-shaped coarse black snowfall stretching for miles across the pine barrens and hydroponic tomato farms.

Now only the pylons and the pines remained, and the sun burned into my eyes so that all this expanse around me danced with blazes of colored light and washes of unformed shadow. I put my hand on a celotex warehouse wall for support, and the humid mass parted like fresh bread, so that my arm disappeared into it up to the shoulder. I clutched a bannister, and the wood crumbled into powder under my fingers.

“My God!” I said, “my God, where have I come?” My eye fell on the footlocker piled next to mine. Lettered on it was the name Austin Hammel. I clutched at an aquilinely handsome young man standing with one foot on the trunk. “Austin Hammel!” I cried. “I read your letters in *Planet Stories*, and I had a letter of my own published, and I want to be a science fiction writer, and I never *dreamed* I’d actually be going to school with a big-name fan, and you *are* the Austin Hammel I mean, aren’t you?”

“Sure,” he said, “But, say, listen – are you hep to Dixieland jazz?”

I shook my head and went back to staring at the pylons. I wondered if anything could ever make them fall.

When Ellison goes by at night
The haunted fans arise,
And all lost, wild perjoratives
Are staring from their eyes.
– S.V. Benet & A.J. Budrys

big brother is watching you:

– No, Bob Silverberg does not have sandy hair and was not at that long-ago fan gathering. I do, and I was, and how do you do, Astra? The tall, lanky fellow with glasses next to Silverberg – that is, next to me, if you follow me – was Joe Kennedy. O.K.?

– 8000 words and a novel are not a serious attempt to earn a living in any case. They are particularly not so when they’re done for the hell of it, simply because I want to do them. I enjoy writing whatever I write, but I don’t always want to write what I’m writing. Clear? The novel is, by the way, a Gold Medal book to be called either *The Death Machine*, *The Armiger*, *Halt, Passenger!*, or else something else entirely, and will be at your second-hand magazine store late this year. Also, thru no fault of my own, Ballantine has cobbled together a collection of my short pieces, to be called *The Unexpected*

Dimension (sic) and released about June, but I can hardly be blamed for that, and it is emphatically *not* an attempt to earn a living. ...Come to think of it, I don't *know* what I'm doing to earn a living this year.

– *A Propos du Borean* means “Let's all have a drink, quick, before she notices her pelisse has slipped.”

– Anybody around here got a copy of the *Galaxy Novel* by Randall Garrett and Larry M. Harris forced to make love to... I can't go on. Go get one.

* The two authors' *Pagan Passions* (1959) has a famous blurb: “Forced to make love to beautiful women! This is adult science fiction at its best.” [Ed.]

– Austin Hamel is spelled with one “m”, and he's now Austin Hamel Associates, of New York City. How many “t”s in Garrett?

– Does anybody out there know whether Stuart Lake's Bantam-issued biography of Wyatt Berry Stapp Earp is to be taken as definitive? He's made to sound exactly like Hugh O'Brian, and it worries me. Also: was Wyatt Berry Stapp an ancestor of the Colonel Stapp who works in aeromedical research these days? Anybody who can give me crisp answers to these questions is entitled to ask me two soggy questions in return.

– I don't know as *Analog* will be as doomed to disaster as all that. What in hell, after all, is a *Galaxy* science fiction?

– You would think this was just a page of fillers, except that you know I'm too tricky for that. Actually, I suppose this page is as close to mailing comments as I dare to get, because, after all, like, *whose* mailing? Of course, somebody could send me some fanzines to read – somebody aside from the nice people who are already doing so, that is. I write infrequent letters, particularly of thanks, but – thanks. aj

Your name either is or is not mentioned herein. That's the way I am, and there is *no* help for it.

May 1960

2

dubious, Volume 1, Number 2. A wlistzine press publication. a.j.

budrys, 631 Second Avenue, Long Branch, New Jersey. Speed.O.Print Sovereign stencils, Smith-Corona electric portable typewriter. Touch-typing courtesy *Typing Made Simple*, Made Simple Books, \$1.00. Typographical errors courtesy No-Doz Awakeners. Faintly-printed “g’s” courtesy the inherent shortcomings of the stencil process of duplication.

Once again, the management wish to acknowledge their continuing debt to Lawrence T. Shaw, Esq., none genuine without the brown far and the picture of Shirley Temple on the label.

The Curious Bear

Once, long ago, there was a happy land far, far, away, where all the people were people except for one, who was a bear. He lived in the village with his mother and father and all the other people, and for some time he was a good citizen of the community.

One day, however, he was standing around and watching a bird fly over the village, when he noticed something.

He said: “I notice that the bird has flown away over the mountains that surround this village. What’s on the other side of the mountains?”

“Mountains,” answered the Mayor, who was standing nearby. “And villages much like this one.”

“How do you know?” asked the bear. “Nobody ever leaves the village, so how do you know, really, what’s on the other side of the mountains?”

“It stands to reason,” the Mayor replied, and the other villagers nodded their heads, saying: “There, now, he really put it in a nutshell.”

The bear scratched his head. “Maybe I’ll just amble up over those mountains and check your reasoning,” said he mildly...

“Oh, no you don’t!” the villagers cried, pouncing on him and wrapping chains around him. “We need you to do the Spring plowing!” And the bear wasn’t allowed to say anything.

Late that night, however, the bear managed to pull and rub at the chains until he was able to scrape out of them, and without saying a word to anyone, he limped off down the road and across the fields to the mountains.

When the townspeople awoke in the morning, they saw the bear had rebelled against their authority, and sent dogs after him. In a while, they could hear the baying and snarling and barking far away like music on the mountainside, and after a while a few of the dogs came crawling back to the

village with patches torn out of their hides and bits of fur stuck between their teeth. And there was no further news for several days.

Then the bear could be seen coming back across the fields, and everyone rushed to meet him. “Well, Mr. Smarty-Pants, what’s on the other side of the mountains?” everyone asked as the bear came into the village and sat down to rest his feet for a minute.

“Mountains,” the bear said. “And villages like this one.”

“Ah hah!” the people said. “Didn’t we tell you?”

“Mm, yes,” the bear admitted unhappily. “It looks now as if I’ll just have to find some way to be contented here.” And he ate them all up.

Ah, sing a song of postage;
Snag fingernails on staples –
Postal Regulations as thick as sugar maples!
When the sap is rising
Toward Form 3547,
Bow to Arthur Summerfield
But roll your eyes toward Heaven!

memoirs:

The Rollo Transit Corporation – “Roll with Rollo” – services the New York-Asbury Park bus route, on which I dwell seemingly no matter where I move to, and which is an infinitely better way of getting to New York than the God-damned railroad.

Some years ago, when the figure known to me by hearsay as “Old Man Rollo” was still living, all Rollo buses stopped at an inn and curbside-hamburgery in Keyport, which is Rollo’s home base. The inn, of course, was also owned and operated by Old Man Rollo, and the Keyport hiatus was probably the only half-hour rest stop in the world to be scheduled into the middle of a two-hour run.

It was on one of these sojourns in charcoal-broiled purgatory that I happened to glance at the fellow in the seat across the aisle. Like me, he was probably too broke to take advantage of Mr. Rollo’s U.S. Patented process for carbonizing sausages. I saw, with a thrill of shock much like the one I feel whenever I run across someone else named Algis, that he was reading a paperback science fiction novel. Furthermore, one of the damned good ones.

Now I very rarely meet anyone casually who read science fiction before

1950, or who reads it now well enough to remember authors' names or the titles of their stories. In short, I've never met a real fan by accident – not since the War, anyway. So I wasn't about to start any conversations with this fellow across the aisle on the strength of boredom and a mutual interest that might not be mutual at all. But then, to my considerable astonishment, I saw him open an attaché case and take out a 1939 *Amazing* which he had evidently bought in a secondhand store earlier in the day and was now taking home to complete his collection, or something. I decided that the way to approach him was to let him know instantly that I had felt the same lash he himself had doubtless suffered under on many an occasion. Leaning across the aisle, I said: "Read that crazy Buck Rogers stuff, do you?"

He looked up, then stared thoughtfully down at the book and magazine in his lap, and said in a bemused voice: "You're right – the stuff *isn't* much good, is it?" He brushed the '39 *Amazing* and the half-read novel to the floor and, turning back to me, said: "Thank you." Then he sat there, his chin in his hand, gazing vacantly out his window, and the smell of burnt hot dogs was thicker than ever in the muggy air of Old Man Rollo's rest stop.

grot:

First of all, there is the overpowering impression of being a functioning organism. The accustomed silent indraw and out-push of breath is replaced by a hollow sigh and a wet rushing. As the pressure increases – and this is true even of the slightest upward inching from 14 p.s.i. – there is a tightening in the chest, and the consciousness of the need to breathe deeply and calmly – above all, calmly, if the distorted muscles of your mouth are not to let a sudden jet of water spurt into the back of your throat – increases toward a breaking point. If you cannot manage your way past this point, you must stop and go back up. If, on the other hand, you can train yourself to accept this new vibration in yourself as an ordinary and normal part of the universe, then you can go on.

Somewhere around six feet – the surface is still a silver mirror very near your head, and you can see yourself waiting up there to welcome you when you return – the squeaking in your ears begins. Now you press one hand over your mask, and blow out through your nose. There is a rush of snorting air through all the passages of your head, and suddenly you know, as you have never known before, how complex and cavernous this simple grinning skull can be. Then your ears bang open with the sound of a heavy door being unseated from its gaskets, and once again you are free to hear the welcome

reptilian hiss of your buddy's regulator, off out of sight somewhere beyond the constricting lip of your mask, but close enough to hear.

The currents in the water bubble past your ears. The stream of the exhaust from your single-hose regulator flutters the edge of your mask, and water seeps in. You roll over, press all but the lower left corner of your mask tightly against your face, and once again there is an explosion in your head as you snort into the mask and the water is blown out.

The handle of your knife tinkers against the rear weight on your belt. You arch your back to direct your narrow field of view toward the bottom, and your tank scrapes its bottom against that same weight. A little water goes down your throat from the corners of your mouth, and you cough into the regulator mouthpiece. More water bubbles in. You could blow it out, but this is river water, so you might as well drink it. The gulp of your Adam's apple pops your ears.

Down on the bottom, the rocks are rolling in the current, and somewhere far away – miles away, perhaps – there is a sound like a fishing reel spinning frantically. Later, when you come up, you'll forget to ask your buddy whether he heard it too, and what he thinks it might be. One thing it couldn't have been is a fishing reel, for the events of the air-enclosed world are shut out as soon as the water has closed over your head and the last dragged-in bubble of air has detached itself from your body and your gear and has gone singing up the short way to the top.

On the bottom, the buckle of your weight belt scrapes across a rock. You reach for a handhold against the force of the current, and sand grates as the rock stirs in its bed. You abandon the hold, and the rock thuds into place again.

This is the silent world... this place of fluttering and squeaking; this self-contained area of no-gravity, where every homely sound is menacing until identified and rendered harmless to the mind, and the one anchor to safety and the old, familiar ways of the loud, sane world of the air is the quiet, menacing sound of your buddy, somewhere out of sight but very close behind you.

The next day is different. The river is shallow, but running very fast, and it is about a hundred yards wide. The plan is to cross it on the bottom, tied together by about ten feet of line. Swimming is out, but by working from handhold to handhold across the rocky bed you can probably do it without being edged far downstream. Your buddy has a compass, and even though

the river is silty and visibility is about six feet at best, there shouldn't be any trouble. The line is looped around your weight belt and your buddy's, and when you tested it yesterday by pulling as hard as you could, the plastic sheathing of the braided cotton line cut into your palms, but never broke. Even if it should, there's no danger of any appreciable kind – the surface is near, a man will be up there with a boat, and the worst that could happen is that you might get swept downstream a few hundred feet before you re-took control of the situation. A safe danger – the best kind.

Halfway across, you feel slack in the line. You pull it in, and there is the empty loop that had been around your buddy's belt, like the shoe on the stairs with the foot still in it.

Now you don't want to surface. Now you want to lie hugging the bottom, under the worst of the current. The cold water has slowed your thinking, but you don't know this. You cling to a boulder with one hand, and reach behind your back. The knife is gone out of its sheath, and that's the last floating knife you'll buy. But still you stay under, for here in the water, with its accustomed ways and your clear eyes you can see, but if you surface you leave your unseen lower body in the water.

Slowly, it works its way into your head that this is not the Zambesi or the Amazon but the upper Delaware. You laugh outrageously, and the mouthpiece pops free. You catch it and push it back between your teeth.

But now you have a problem. Correct procedure for this situation is to blow out the mouthpiece with your exhalation. But you've already wasted that. Now your mouthpiece is full of water and you need a breath, but if you breathe you will draw water into your lungs.

Drink it. But you need the air *now*. You could surface, but with no air in your lungs your buoyancy is negative, and you might not make it in time, while the effort of kicking upward will burn out what remaining oxygen is still in your bloodstream, and you'll lose consciousness, under water in a strong current with a full mouthpiece.

Hit the quick-release buckle on the weight belt, then, and shoot up – well, not shoot up, but tumble up quickly, into the main force of the water, and hope to come up in time for a breath?

It all goes through your head, every bit of this, and then you simply reach up to your regulator and push a button. A blast of air comes down the hose, and the water's out. You breathe. A handy little device – a selling point, unique with the Snark II model regulator, which you've trained yourself

never to use because it wastes air. You surface, now, without dropping the weight belt – you hate to drop a good weight belt; you hate to drop anything into the water, because once you’ve done that, somehow anyone else can find it and keep it, but you can’t. You can look yourself blue in the face for it. Part of the rules.

So now you’re up, beside the waiting boat, and a hundred yards downstream you see your buddy, searching for you, and you look at each other like two Negroes in a crowd of ofays, across that distance. Later you learn your buddy’s quick release fouled on a rock, and he damned near lost his belt, and did lose the loop of line, but now, as you put one hand on the gunwale of the boat and it drifts downstream toward your buddy you laugh up at the people in the boat, because now you’re back in the safe danger again; this afternoon you can go and buy a new knife, and discuss the new technique you’ll use to cross the river tomorrow, but my God, man, don’t ever laugh down in the water again.

how’s that again?

Bob Lichtman tells me *dubious* had a predecessor in a SAPSzine named *Dubious*. Obviously, the two are nothing alike, but if the previous tenant objects, I’ll do something about it. Otherwise, no title changes are planned here for at least a year.

However, there is now a *new publishing policy* in effect. *Dubious* is going genzine, with no fixed schedule whatsoever, and the tentative plan to follow FAPA deadlines has been abandoned. New issues will appear as new material accumulates, and the bulk of it will continue to accumulate from me. Otherwise, all previous policy statements hold good.

Algirdas Jonas Budrys is the full legal name, and, occasionally, when pressed by red tape, I even use it. *Algis Budrys* is the most prolific of my bylines. Not *Algis J.*, not *A.J. Budrys*, nor any other variation. Just plain *Algis Budrys*, of which *Algis* is to *Algirdas* as *Joe* is to *Joseph*, only not so frequently. But *only* as a byline. My friends, including my excellent wife, call me *A.J.*, or *Ajay*, or *Ayjay* – I never know exactly which, until some of them happen to spell it out, and I don’t care which. I don’t like being called *Al*.

Gregg Calkins wants to know whether “*Door into Summer*” and “*Star Beast*” were also cut by *F&SF*, and how come Campbell gets his readers to go for long serials if Boucher/Mills can’t.

It seems to me, to answer the second question first, that *F&SF*’s

audience is inherently different from that of any other SF magazine. From the beginning, the appeal was to the literati, and, very sensibly, the appeal was in the form of short stories and occasional cautious novelettes. Sensibly, that is, if you agree with me (and presumably Tony Boucher) that the “serious” literary readership is more accustomed to seeing its fare in short form, as in the *Atlantic* and *Harpers*, where novels and longer pieces are excerpted, and short stories are the rule. I rather suspect that this readership is suspicious of magazine serials in full. In any case, a novel is much less likely, these days, to have literary merit.

This hard-core audience is, I think (and Bob Mills seems to think) still the backbone of *F&SF*’s readership. Tangential to all this is the reported fact that a marked drop in circulation resulted from the publication of *Bring The Jubilee* in one gulp. This could be taken to indicate that *F&SF*’s audience prefers stories that can be read in twenty minutes or a half hour sandwiched into a busy schedule – or a short retention span, if you prefer.

How much actual truth there is in all this surmising, no one knows. It is, however, a fact that “Star Beast” failed to raise the circulation. “Door Into Summer”, which lacked the virtue of being the first Heinlein serial in quite some time, also had no noticeable good effect. It may be as a consequence of these things that the first serial Bob Mills edited at *F&SF* was cut to two installments. I gather that Mills would just as lief publish full novels he thinks are publishable and interesting, but that he suspects the readers do not agree with this view. Accordingly, “Starship Soldier” may have been a test. *F&SF* is a special case in so many ways that it really can’t be considered the same kind of publication that *ASF* and *Galaxy* are... the suspicion grows that, except for fandom, they share practically no readers between them.

And I think that if you will read over the paragraph above once more, you will find that I’ve also answered the first question. One more thought occurs to me – but I warn you I’m not a disinterested party in the matter – which is that *Venture* may very well have suffered from being so closely tied in with *F&SF* and *F&SF*’s audience. This is not to say that it would have survived the current slump if the identical magazine had not been identified as a stable mate of *F&SF*. Nobody can guess about that, but I rather think it would not have. But it might not have died so young, or left such a good-looking corpse, in the light of the quality and nature of some of the prozines which did manage to stagger on for some time afterward. And I would much rather it had left a matured corpse, if it was going to leave one at all.

Bob Pavlat wants to know am I going to be at the Pittcon. I want to know, too. Nobody ever tells me anything.

Sid Coleman: Your quote from G. Rattray Taylor is a variation on a theme by Richard McKenna, not Budrys. And I warn you all, on Sid Coleman's experience, that sending me mail addressed to Long *Beach*, New Jersey, will get you nowhere, or, at best, to Long Beach, New York, where many a happy night of mine was spent in the parking lot behind the railroad station, but where I never ask for mail.

Wyatt Earp will be the subject of a brief little essay sometime in the future. Meanwhile, I am grateful to various contributors of valuable data, one of whom, a Mr. Ashworth, has taken advantage of my offer and asked me one soggy question in return: "What will the rockets push against out there, when there's no air?"

I must confess I don't know, but a search through the letter columns of the 1937 *Astounding* – Can that date possibly be right? Maybe it was a year or two later – will reveal that a Mr. Taurasi was also preoccupied with this problem, and the solution he suggested to Mr. Campbell was that all spaceships carry sand to scatter behind them. Mr. Campbell's reply was short and somewhat cryptic, but I commend it to you all far whatever it may be worth in the consideration of this baffling mystery.

Norman Metcalf asks whether I ever received some mail he sent me c/o Pyramid Books. The answer is no, but I wish I had. My advice to all of you is never to send anything but First Class mail c/o publishers, and even then not to be bemused when nothing happens.

Robert and Roberta Rucker have written one of their heart-warming letters in reaction to *dubious 1*, but are surprised to find me so hedonistic in its pages. So am I. I had no idea I was doing it. I can only say to any and all of you who are staying up nights wondering what's gotten into Budrys, that it's not worth it. I'm still, underneath it all, the same solemn fellow. (A *solemn*, of course, is a sorry *golem*. A sorry *golem* is defined as a tally scored by pure mischance, as by tripping and falling backward across the opponent's end-zone marker while attempting to run the ball in the wrong direction.)

Walter Breen: You may be right. However, while retreat into one's own mind, or into a colony of like-minded people, is a perfectly valid solution to the problem posed by the nature of the world – and a solution which I myself

have often been much inclined to apply – it is a personal solution only. It seems to me that the true liberal humanitarian – I assume the two words are nearly synonymous – must concern himself with applying practical solutions which effect the general case, rather than the particular. In order to do so, it seems to me, he must first have an exact idea of what humanity is, and of all the organizational schemes which might be offered to it. In that light, it is absolutely essential that the humanitarian liberal expose himself to as many repugnant social doctrines as possible, for any doctrine which is to his liking is, ipso facto, one which is comfortable to humanitarian liberals – a very small, atypical, and unrepresentative sampling of humanity as a whole. Any doctrine which pleases an atypical minority is almost sure to be displeasing to the majority, and vice versa. Consequently, repugnance is not a test of practicality. Applicability is, however, and I see nothing in the Heinlein body of work that is inapplicable to humanity as I observe it. Perhaps your observations differ, but it seems to me that the view from within an enclave such as the one which appeals to both of us is bound to be narrower than the one from the position I have outlined above. It is nothing against Heinlein if he makes such a scheme as attractive as he can, for it would surely be so presented in the real world. The only possible logical objection to his presentation would be to an instance of patent deviation from the logic of human psychology, and no such example can be found, I think.

New Products:

The Smith-Corona electric portable typewriter has apparently failed to storm the general market, and is consequently selling well below its list price. I acquired mine for \$120.00 plus my practically unsalvageable mechanical portable, and I could have done better if I had not insisted on time payments despite my zero credit rating.

I bought it because, after seventeen years of one-fingered typing, one-handed driving, and general refusal to use my left hand for anything but not knowing what my right hand was doing, my shoulder packed up and it was either learn touch-typing on an electric machine or go into the street-singing business. For my purposes – I do a lot of running around from here to New York to God Knows Where – and considering the prices on electric office models, the portable was the best answer. It may be likewise for you, too.

It seems to be a reliable, reasonably flexible machine. As a typewriter, it does not measure up to the performance of the Olympia portable, for one example, though it is at least as good as any U.S. portable. It does not have a

half-line space, or a half-character space. It has the highly impractical “page gage” method of determining how far down the page you are typing, but because of the presence of this device, the standard length platen is widened enough to take a business envelope without wrinkling it. Wider platens and special typefaces – not particularly well-designed ones – are available on order.

The carriage return is not powered. Only the keyboard is. As standard features, the hyphen/underline key and the spacebar repeat when held down. Any other key may be set up to do so. There are touch and impression controls – effective ones – so that a hard touch, can be combined with a light impression, and vice versa. Our laboratory recommends the use of silk ribbons, and our dealer recommends not depending on the red half of a black-red ribbon.

There is a universal tab including fly-off clearing, and other attractive features include a motor drawing only 44 watts, AC, and a very full keyboard. Annoyances, apart from the machine’s inability to keep from swallowing the last few sheets in a multiple carbon sandwich, are the sliding card tabs which cut half an inch off the effective length of the typing line, and the inhuman chuckle with which the motor’s idler pulley bounces up and down on the drive belt.

But it goes like hell when approached with the proper degree of skill, and you can go at it for hours without tiring. It may be damned useful to you.

service:

From time to time, *dubious* will carry an extra section under this heading. Whenever this occurs, the mailing list will be temporarily expanded to include an additional number of recipients for whom the included material may be of interest. Such individuals will find a checkmark appearing in the “service” box beside their names on the mailing wrapper. Permanent retention on the mailing list is available to anyone writing in and asking for it specifically. Any member of the permanent mailing list may ask to have the service section removed from his copy, and whenever the makeup of the issue permits, this request will be honored.

Two years ago, an analysis of 120 Gold Medal and Crest novels yielded the following common storyline:

– A mature, self-reliant hero trained in undercover warfare becomes involved in larger events through the agency of a close personal friend.

Shortly after the hero enters the story, the friend is killed and the hero sets off in pursuit of his killers. He becomes involved with a woman, a villain, and another woman, all of whom are at cross-purposes with him. One of the women is in league with the villain. The other will become the hero's property after he has killed the villain in personal combat. At least the villainous woman will meanwhile have slept with him. As a result of the working out of this personal story, the larger events will reach a satisfactory conclusion in accord with current U.S. mores. –

These novels, of course, were restricted to recognizable entries in the Foreign Intrigue category, and so this analysis represents only the particular sub-type of this category which Fawcett chose to market in this manner. Gold Medal is the original paperback line here, and Crest is the reprint label. In general, both publish the same kind of Foreign Intrigue material, but the Gold Medal stories are more recognizably constructed to these standards than are the Crest.

So far, so good. But this kind of derived formula can be useless or even misleading unless a number of other precepts are kept in mind. These are general observations of other essential elements, some derived from the same source and some from ordinary experience; unlike the particularized skeleton above, they are as applicable to other types of commercial fiction as they are to this particular category:

A unified frame of reference must be assumed and followed. That is, the writer must have a firm mental picture of the kind of world in which this story could take place, and must never violate the logic of that world. If he sees that world and its people as being totally amoral, then the only legitimate use for a moral character, motivation, or line of dialogue is as comic relief. Perhaps the simplest way to state it would be to say that the writer must make himself a citizen of that world.

Direct statement of motivation and objective is always the technique of choice. Subtlety may be exercised by the characters upon one another, but never on the reader.

Every incident and line of dialogue must directly advance the plot. Ideally, nothing should appear in the story which is not a dynamic and essential part of that story.

One of the most important things to remember in this connection is that *all* the important characters must have force and motion. It is of paramount importance to keep the villain moving as energetically and skillfully as the

hero, though it is of course not necessary to go into as much continuous detail in describing his movements. It is necessary that the villain have as legitimate a motive for his actions as does the hero, and that their clash be a motivational one. The villain, in short, must be an inverted hero – he cannot appear in the book only as a figure against which the hero may break lances of his own choosing.

To an appropriate extent, the same things must be true of the villainous woman *and* of the good one. Perhaps the only permissible exception to this rule is the character who plays the hero's friend. His function in the book is to die, and he must exercise it at the most advantageous plot-turn.

It seems to me that the paragraph above begs the question, and that in any case it is high time it was asked: Why? Why does the formula take these particular twists, and for what reasons do these general principles apply?

I don't know. That is, I have no assurance that I have isolated some great Universal Truth, and thereby accomplished a description of an absolute standard toward which all commercial novels of this type must strive. Or in other words, the following consistent analysis works for me, but is probably only a working hypothesis which may be of no use whatsoever to anyone else.

First of all, I assumed that this particular formula – being derived rather than explicitly stated by someone at Fawcett, but being clearly present in a number of successful books over a long period of time – fulfilled some kind of expectation on the part of the readership. If it is, indeed, a response to a demand, then it ought to be possible to examine it and extract the shape of the demand – to get at why this story satisfies a large number of people who buy entertainment in this form.

Well, since the commercial novel is intended to entertain – that is, to divert the reader – it likely follows that the universe pictured in commercial novels diverges from the universe in which the reader lives. And, since the reader of commercial novels shares the common human trait of being inherently logical, though not a logician, it follows that the universe depicted in commercial novels, whatever its relationship to reality, will be self-consistent; logical on its own terms, however primitive those may be. This study proceeds on the assumption that these two propositions are true. Now, if they are taken as true, then we can postulate that the universe of the commercial novel is probably in some kind of one-to-one relationship with reality, for several reasons: One, it would be an easy universe for the writer to

describe without faltering. Two, it would be an easy universe for the reader to grasp – and the less effortful his grasp, the better.

Working from that, we can proceed to a detailed description of the hero; the viewpoint character with whom the reader is to identify.

He is never at a total loss. By his very nature, he is largely independent of environmental pressure. He is never faced with a setback for which he has no response whatsoever. The initiative is never out of his hands for long. He is, for lagniappe, physically dangerous to other men, and attractive to women.

This man, we may assume, is the reader written larger. Not only larger, however, but much less complex. And it is the latter of these two attributes which may be the more attractive.

Anyone, after all, may acquire physical strength, a measure of dexterity, and training. But very few people are free to do so. They are tied to a routine which, if they are storekeepers, for example, prevents their having the time to learn judo. Or so, at least, most people might be inclined to feel. So it is the hero's freedom – underscored by his ability to manipulate his environment, but established by the nature of the less demanding world in which he lives – which is probably the key to what makes him a desirable object for reader identification.

If we find such a hero in these novels – and we do – and if we hold to the opinion that the universe of the commercial fiction story is self-consistent – and we postulate that it is, for it takes a rare kind of mind to follow and enjoy illogicality – then it follows that the universe is much like its inhabitant; more assured, better organized, harsher and more attractive than life. Its events will all follow logically and clearly from its basic premises, whatever those might be. Its inhabitants will all either always know exactly what they are doing or will have logical grounds for their errors. Nothing they do will be based on the universe that is. In a paper universe, it is insanity – illogic – to base an action on the ways and wants of the universe of flesh and blood.

This, I think, is the most important thing for the writer of commercial novels to remember; that once the paper world has been established, it is not permissible to touch upon reality. I have been jarred, time and again, by characters in Foreign Intrigue novels who regret their murders, except for practical reasons, once they have fairly moved into the world of Foreign Intrigue. I am always disconcerted to encounter genuine lust, or genuine love, in a novel of this type, when properly considered lust is what is to be done

with any woman, while love is an emotion with which the hero was once endowed, but which, he lost some time before the story opens. {Here, again, we see the reader, with his high school passions magnified into an epic of romance, but lost, now, in mundane, conjugal relations, and remembered fondly.)

So, ultimately, the most important choice to make in setting out to create a commercial, novel is the choice not of a protagonist, nor even of an intriguing setting, but, rather, of the *kind* of stage on which he is to move. The writer must, perforce, find a universe he can live with and believe in for the length of time it takes to write the book. I think this is why the most successful writers of this kind of book are usually a little at odds with reality – they can fall into alternate universes so easily that what is work for others is recreation for them.

a final page

Because this issue of *dubious* was much delayed, for various reasons, there's an accumulation of remarks that might as well be made now, instead of being held for the next issue.

With regard to the material on the **service** pages:

I've never found bare formulas either useful or attractive. But whenever I move into a new market I do something like the highly condensed version of the job I did on Gold Medal. I do it because any popular market has been shaped to suit its readers, and the assumption is that there is some pattern of logic to this shape. Once the logic is understood – and it can be understood a lot better once it has been reduced to a diagram – it ought to be possible to find viable variations on the established ritual which guides the choreography of the form. The ultimate aim of any study such as this one ought to be an arrival at originality, which is the most lucrative commercial asset of all. I say these things in prior reply to those who habitually trust in inspiration, or those who feel a writer should trust in nothing else. I hold no brief for inspiration as a trustworthy source of work, since it has never worked that way for me. I have enjoyed it when I had it, but I haven't had it more than three or four times in my career, and perforce I've become hyperanalytical in my approach to the trade. I find that very few people are visited by the muse with any frequency whatsoever, when it comes to having complete stories occur full-born. I also find that once a story has been roughed out by whatever means come to hand, little inspirations will occur in a continuous stream to carry the

structure into completed life. And so we limp along, my peripatetic muse and I, she on her concerns and I on mine, exchanging little get-well cards from time to time.

With regard to the (HAH!) letter column, and the (nonexistent) fanzine reviews:

Since I copyright the magazine, I'm loathe to include material by other people who might not care to thus turn over their rights in it to me. So, up to now, I've quoted no letters at any length whatever. However, what I can do, and probably will, is to include a separate copyright notice in the author's name with every piece of quoted material, and leave it up to him to register it if he chooses to. (Costs money.) So you may see some format changes.

I much appreciate getting fanzines from other people – particularly FAPA members who usually have few to spare. But if I launch into a large-scale program of reviews, I embed myself in a morass of time spent which will probably mean I have to cut out *dubious* altogether, or go broke. Once in a while, I'm sure to find something that piques me into an essay, but a systematic program of comment is impossible. So – you don't have to send me fanzines, or anything, unless you really want to, and if you do you may get a letter from me, or you may not – I *hate* writing letters. You'll keep getting *dubious* anyway.

What a lousy way to run a railroad.

August 1960

Chipping Gears

Editor's Note: Jeffries Oldmann is a man with a highly individual viewpoint on almost everything. We may not always agree with his comments on the automotive field, but we have – somewhat nervously – given him free rein to say what he thinks in this new department.

Not-so-Compact Cars are now going to emerge from Detroit as thick as deer fleeing the woods in hunting season. Apparently, the feeling among the Big Three automakers is that there's a great untapped market for a car which, to quote the Ford release on the *Comet*, is "not a small car... not a large car... nor... a compact car."

A careful second look at this example of the new Big Small Wave of The Future will readily confirm that, at least as far as the *Comet* is concerned, this description is certainly apt. It's a car designed not to be anything. Furthermore – though I'm sure *this* feature of its appearance was not designed on purpose – it's ugly. It has that fine, not-crisp-but-not-rounded-either appearance which seems to result whenever Ford tries to bolt a new brand car together out of artfully gathered pieces of its other lines. By and large, it seems to be the logical successor to the Edsel, and it looks from here as if Ford is going to eat another lemon.

The thing that really worries me, however, is that the trend toward producing a large variety of brand names and sizes will force all the manufacturers to resort to this kind of jigsawing. The cost of producing truly individual cars in a full range of sizes would be prohibitive. So I suspect that we're soon going to see a number of "new" cars on the whose rooflines were never designed with the fenders in mind, whose grilles look pasted-on, and whose publicity releases will out-do themselves in trying to find unique virtues for cars whose most outstanding attribute is their lack of integrity. And, remember, you read it here first.

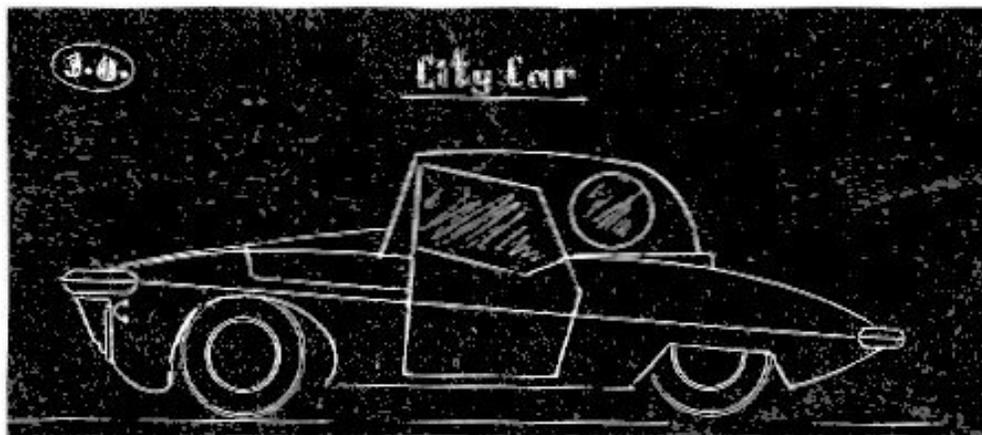
There's an interesting thing about the *Moskvich* four-bangers a Syracuse, NY, foreign car dealer is importing from Russia. While he and a Canadian dealer will be handling upwards of 10,000 of these items between them, over the next few years, the waiting-list time for one in the Workers' Paradise is two

years. And it costs 25,000 roubles which, at the official exchange rate, works out to a thousand more bucks than the U.S. price of \$1500.00. So it still pays to be a Filthy Capitalist, in case you've always wanted a *Moskvich*.

Some enterprising kart manufacturer ought to try producing a twelve or fifteen horsepower city car with a reasonably scaled-up kart type chassis and running gear, under a fiberglass shell.

Seems to me there's a market for a two-seater job of this kind, designed to run on pavement and haul people at a 40 mph cruising speed, repairable with a can of fiberglass gunk, parts off a hardware store shelf, and an adjustable wrench. It ought to do well in competition with scooters, package delivery cycles, and the city transit system. A \$500.00 retail price sounds like a reasonable target to me.

Having nothing better to do one dark and stormy night, I ran off the accompanying drawings for one proposed "city car" design.



Bumper-to-bumper length is around seven and one-half feet, with all dimensions proportional. Seating is for two passengers, period, with a small package compartment in the front end, and a light one- or two-cylinder air-cooled engine in the rear, chain-driving the rear wheels through a reversing clutch controlled by the floor-mounted lever in the passenger compartment.

Most of the space enclosed by the hood is used to provide leg-room for the passengers. The hardtop roof detaches at the top of the flat windshield and at the rim of the collar around the seat back. It is replaceable by a manually-operated folding top. A heavy roll bar arches up over the passenger's heads just under the roofline, and the main frame members, formed and welded from tubing, run under the body skin at its widest bulge, with elliptical braces located just in front of and just behind the door, where

the top of the rearward one forms the roll bar. Lighter members support the seat and engine mounts, and provide additional frame strength wherever required. I'm toying with the notion of a very light gauge tubing frame constructed geodesically, but haven't pushed the idea far enough as yet to work up drawings on it.

Remembering that the purpose of this vehicle is to run at moderate speeds and accelerations over prepared road surfaces, this design calls for springing only on the seat itself and at the engine mounts. Prototype tests would have to be made to demonstrate the practicability of this idea, but theoretically it should suffice to provide a comfortable ride on city asphalt.

Access for routine engine servicing is through the hatch in the rear deck. Access to the master cylinder for the four-wheel hydraulic brakes is at the left front wheel-well.

The body itself is molded in two or four major fiberglass segments, which curve under to form a belly pan and the floorboards, and which slip onto the frame from the front and rear, being retained in place by the bumper brackets. A portion of the heavy front bumper is disguised as a grille, and designed to flex stiffly both vertically and horizontally. The rear bumper and deck are designed to deflect a similar bumper, so that a rear-end clash between two such cars would result in the rear car's front end riding up and dissipating the impact, and then slipping back-downward and clear.

Access to the engine for major service or replacement would, of course, be obtained by simply sliding off the rear body component.

Now, a number of questions could be asked about this design, and I hope to hear from you by mail, at *Cars'* editorial offices, on the ones I don't deal with here. It's entirely possible I don't know all the answers to everything, and if that's true I hope you won't let shyness restrain you from calling me a jackass. Meanwhile:

Why is it so low, when it'll be run in traffic with trucks and full-sized cars towering over it?

Well, there's no hope of seating the driver high enough, in a vehicle of these design capabilities, to provide him with a line of sight *over* even something as relatively small as the average all-purpose private car. Seated as low as he is, in a car as narrow as this, he can, however actually see *under* freight trucks and between larger vehicles, while moving through traffic openings too small for anything else but scooters, motorcycles, and *Isettas*. This question of the small vehicle versus the large, in traffic, is usually

resolved not in favor of the vehicle with bulk, power, and high driver seating but rather in favor of the small car with agility.

How about collisions with larger vehicles?

For one thing, minor bumps and jolts, as in parking, are taken care of by the bumpers, which are set at the same average height as those of standard cars. Lateral collisions, as in making turns, are deflected from the passengers by the enclosing frame, and absorbed by the crushable body skin. Both the body and frame are designed to be easily repaired with simple facilities, and the frame, of course, is accessible in minutes. There is no hope of making an absolutely crash-proof car of any kind, short of building something like a military tank, and no auto maker tries to. The object is to preserve the passengers and to make mechanical damage as inexpensive and simple to repair as possible. This design, by the way, calls for the use of brightly pre-colored fiberglass, so that the car will not have to be painted, or waxed, or painstakingly washed, and so that minor scratches will be invisible, while body repairs will not call for a trip to the spray shop to cover them. Chances are almost anyone with some handiness could take care of most repairs himself, for the cost of the materials obtainable from the car dealer.

And remember this is only one possible body design: other bodies for various purposes could easily be molded to slip on to the same frame. This particular design was made up to look good to prevent the curse of stubbiness, which haunts most ultra-small cars, and to even provide a certain degree of elegance. A utility would be designed differently.

And I'm eagerly waiting for comments from you. Personally, after years of bucking city traffic, I can tell you there must have been a hundred times I wished I had something like this, and there was never a time when I felt that any of the cars I was driving were designed with the urban automobile age in mind.

A charming thing happened in Washington, D.C., the other day. It seems this man asked to borrow a friend's car, was given the keys, stepped into a nearby parked Ford, turned the key in the ignition, and drove away home and to bed.

Unfortunately, what he found out in the morning was that the Ford was a leased fleet car being operated by a Secret Service agent.

The way it was finally worked out, the fleet changed the locks in the Secret Service car, and the friend kept the original locks on *his* Ford, which, it seems, had been parked a little farther down the street.

So, all you car-borrowers: Watch Out!

The NSU Prinz will soon be showing up powered by the NSU-Curtiss Wright rotary-piston engine. This ingenious gadget, which has a total of two (2) moving parts according to the advance poop, actually has a few more than that, if you count such things as the centrifugal bearing-strips on the corners of the three-lobe piston. Even so, it's quite a package, full of bright ideas and possibilities. (For one thing, it shouldn't be much of a trick to use the drive shaft for an axle.) But I'd like to see some reports on the presence or absence of noteworthy gyroscopic effect on a car as light as, for instance, the Prinz.

Highway hypnosis is still killing people, particularly as the turnpike systems expand into areas where the local drivers are unfamiliar with the hazards of long, unbroken stretches of high speed superhighway. When the Federal highway program really gets off the ground, we'll probably have a temporary rash of mysterious rear-end collisions and cars leaving the highway on turns in broad daylight at normal speeds. It does take time for drivers to become aware of the problem.

My personal observations, gathered over the course of several years of almost constant turnpiking, have taught me the following things about what happens to me when I'm behind the wheel of a car rolling down mile after mile of concrete or asphalt ribbon with no stops:

If I start out fresh in the morning after a good night's sleep, eat lightly. *stay away from* coffee or wake-up pills, stop and stretch my legs every hundred miles or so, sit *comfortably* in the car, drive a car that's *easy to drive*, and quit when my muscles get tired, I'm all right. If I have to keep going after I begin to feel physical fatigue, a little coffee or tea and a candy bar will let me keep going for a reasonable period of time.

If I keep going after I'm really fatigued. I begin to get worked on by mental fatigue, as well. If I keep it up long enough, I begin to see fences, walls, and other obstacles across the road, and may be fooled into taking violent evasive action. So far, I've been lucky and never quite hit a ditch or an overpass pier.

If I start out fresh in the morning and take a lot of coffee or caffeine pills "just to be on the safe side", if I stop only for gas, make myself as uncomfortable as possible "to keep awake", drive a balky car and hold to a steady, grinding speed that roars the wind in a monotonous tune across the open edge of the vent windows, I will suddenly realize I've gone fifty or sixty miles with no memory of doing it, that I'm about to crawl up the back of a semitrailer with a load of pipe sticking out its tailgate, or that my foot has

inched down gradually on the accelerator and I'm doing ninety. change the contrast on the TV set, and suddenly realize I'm *not* sitting home in my living room watching myself drive down a road.

So far, I've managed to stay out of the newspapers.

August 1960

Why Is a Fan?

Like “Who Killed Science Fiction?” above, this was a symposium organized by Earl Kemp, who asked participants the following questions. Readers should know that “gafiate” (derived from GAFIA, Getting Away From It All) was the common term for leaving science fiction fandom. [Ed.]

- 1. In your family, are you an only child (or first born)?
- 2. Do you feel that this has any bearing on your being a fan?
- 3. Are you a 2nd generation fan (was there a retrograde reaction)?
- 4. At what age did you enter the fantasy world (and with what)?
- 5. At what age did you enter fandom (and how)?
- 6. Why do you stay in fandom?
- 7. What do you get out of fandom?
- 8. How long do you expect to stay in fandom?
- 9. What does fandom mean to you?
- 10. Why do fans gafiate, and are these reasons sufficient to make you gafiate?
- 11. What other pertinent remarks do you want to contribute to the study?

I was an only child, and I think this had some bearing on my being a fan, but not a second generation fan. I entered the fantasy world – if I understand the question correctly – in 1937. *Young America*, an offshoot of *The American Boy*, reprinted “Masterminds of Mars”, by Carl H. Claudy, and was distributed through the New York City school system. I was six. Actually, I’d already been impressed by Buck Rogers in the Sunday funnies, because I’ve recently found the four-panel strip I drew in imitation, and entitled BRGA because those were the only four letters I knew at the time. Unlike my more recent works, BRGA was high on action, but very low on self-revelatory monologues. Anyhow, from then on it was continuous, except that I didn’t find my first prozine until 1942, by which time I’d already run through the library books and was writing my own. (*Planet* bounced stories of mine for ten years, finally bought one, and immediately folded.)

However, back in ’46 they had printed one of my letters, and the N3F

WelCom took it from there. Subsequently, I published three issues of a crud, crud, crudzine called *Slantasy*, the first mimeoed by Ron Maddox the WelComer and the other two pan-hectoed by myself. I also joined the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society for a meeting or two, went to the '47 Worldcon, met Joquel Kennedy, with whom I'd been corresponding, and got on the SAPS roster. Thereon I went off to college and never published a thing. (See my remarks under Gafia.)

After two years of college, I went to work swinging a pick, which lasted until I got hurt... whereon I began writing again, aborted half a dozen fanzines, began letterhacking again, went to work for American Express as an investigations clerk, acquired a lot of stationery and typewriter ribbons, quit to go to Columbia to study writing, sold a story, and quit Columbia. Also fandom.

This wasn't gafia, which is an involuntary process, (See further.) It was a cold-blooded policy decision – the only one I've ever made about science fiction or fanac – to put myself on ice until I stopped being a pro. I think it was a proper decision.

Now I'm back. There are times when apprehension shakes me, but I expect to go on being a fan for a long time. Why?

Well, to answer Questions 6, 7, 8 and 9 in one fell smush, I'm a fan because certain factors operated on me when I was a child, and no contrary factors have operated on me since or can be seen approaching from over the horizon. What factors?

Well, let's try these generalities;

From observing my own kids, I'd say the "normal" pattern of activity for a child in our society is one of physical group activity involving some imagination – Cops and Robbers, Cowboys and Indians and the like. I think, furthermore, that a child learns more from his older playmates than he does from either his teachers or his parents. He learns what is permissible and what is not – he acquires, in other words, an absolute social code, children being ruthless. This "normal" child then can grow up to be almost anything – even a science fiction and/or fantasy reader, and God bless him.

Now. If you isolate a child from that environment, he is left to get his world-view from certified teachers, and from his parents, who are anxious to make Junior a select citizen of the world they would like to see. Such a child will never, I think, touch ground quite as firmly as do his socially accepted contemporaries.

Such a child is in a state of potential fannishness – call it a profanoid state. How? Why? We’ll get to that in a minute, along with gafia, which I think is a key to his condition. Let’s go back to what isolated him, for a moment.

Being an only child will suffice, if there are no other kids in the available environment. I think being the oldest child will suffice under the same external conditions, and being a younger child with a profanoid older sibling in a childless neighborhood will surely have some effect – I couldn’t detail it; nor am I at all sure how this works for girl children – I wasn’t one, and my three ain’t.

In a child-populous neighborhood, being socially unacceptable will suffice, of course. What makes a profanoid so?

The commonest cause, I think, would be a difference in intelligence. Now, mark this; a difference in intelligence, not a difference in the level of intelligence. Bright, stupid and mediocre kids gang together all the time. Every gang has its Leader, its Grand Vizier and its Buffoon. Profanoids – and mark *this*; not fans, yet – appear because they simply do not organize their impressions of the world, or draw conclusions from them, in the same way their contemporaries do. Nor does this imply star-begetting. It means a city kid moving into a rural community – he comes equipped with an entirely different set of basic data. Substitute “Catholic” and “Protestant” for “city” and “rural.” Other pairs: “educated/ordinary”, “Middle Class/Proletarian”, “culture-conscious/Yahoo”. Make your own. On purpose, I made these last three from adult vocabularies, because a profanoid often finds himself going to adults for words to (mis)describe childhood situations. (All pairs are interchangeable as to position in the sentence.)

There are, of course, exotic cases of intelligence differences. The brilliant child in the community of ordinary people – that great favorite theme of science fiction and some science fiction fans – does occur, though not on every hand. However, even here, most of the cases are not genuinely profanoid. There are remorselessly analytical minds – these are the seed of the chess prodigies and the twelve-year-old physicists. There are the minds which grasp music intuitively. There are the kids with extraordinary hand-and-eye coordination and the sense of spatial relationships. These are the artists. By and large, these kids are not profanoid, because they have skills they can exercise and concentrate on. Some of them become fans too, but mostly fringe-fans, I observe – they’re too busy, and soon enough they attract

enough attention, even if it's adult attention, not to be so hellishly lonely.

In all events, I think the average profan displays some of all kinds of talents and predispositions, and, should he go on to become a fan, will continue to display them or their evolutions. But he will be first and foremost a fan, even if – in fact, regardless of the likelihood that – he may lose his taste for science fiction or fantasy as reading matter. This will be true regardless of his IQ, his occupational specialty, or any other factor. Fans are available in all shapes and sizes – possibly in enough shapes and sizes to suit any theory you care to concoct about them. But we're working on this theory now, and it remains to supply the step between the profan, who is merely disposed toward becoming a fan, and the fan he becomes. Come with me now into the Land of Oz. Follow the yellow brick road:

Observe the profan – there, that kid, standing at his back door and watching the other kids play cowboys and indians. He wants to play, too; his body is growing explosively – he teems with hormones. His mind is a splendid mechanism – never mind what brand – coming to awareness in a world full of explicable but unexplained data. But if he tries to join the gang, only heartbreak will be his lot. So he goes back into the house, or into a secluded corner of his yard, and plays with toys. He plays cowboys and indians, with toy cowboys and indians, not with other kids who have minds of their own. He has to supply all the dialogue, and all the plot. He has to patiently move all the pieces.

His physical tensions combine with the mental strain. He gets the fidgets. Boredom sets in. He wants to quit – but he has nothing else to do. His cowboy-and-indian plots begin to develop variation; he's casting about for some new approach to the problem. Soon enough, his plot is a melange of all the action-stimuli he's ever been exposed to. He evolves a Superindian, whose Magic Arrow destroys the block-castle at a touch. To counter Superindian, he develops a Flying Cowboy.

But this is no good, either – not for long. The Indian is only a static figurine. Even when he strides fearlessly through the forest, he remains fixed in his kneeling position. Flying Cowboy flies with his feet firmly fixed in a base of green-painted lead. The tools of profan's imagination are too clumsy for their motive force. He tries to do something about this; he snaps off the Cowboy's base; he breaks away the Indian's kneeling leg. (Offstage noise: "That kid! You buy him something and ten minutes later it's broken!")

At this point, profan still has a dozen avenues of progress to choose

from. He could turn into a juvenile delinquent, I suppose, though I don't know what makes juvenile delinquents. He could stare down at the broken toy, heartsick at what his "other nature" has done, and take the first step toward becoming a physician.

His father could show him how to repair it – they could create a path of communication involving handicrafts, and have it eventuate in a philosopher-mechanic, or just a plain mechanic.

But suppose this child discovers books? And suppose those books involve stories of Superindians, Flying Cowboys, carpets, brooms, ships? Now he's got a direct coupling between his senses and his imagination, with no intermediaries.

I would say that, at that point, it would be infinitely harder to keep him from becoming a fan than it would be to help him. I would say that this is at least as broad and beckoning a prospect for profan as any other that may be open to him.

There are auxiliary factors to help him along. If, for example, he runs into disapproval for his bookishness, or scorn for his kookiness, this will only reinforce his choice of direction. Why? Well, for one thing, nobody in what he reads disapproves of him. Whoever heard of a book telling its readers they're no good? Anybody who tries to stop him is not as attractive as his book. But, more than this, I think, is this: The only environment in which he knows anything about handling himself is one in which he encounters opposition, distrust and scorn. Give this kid unquestioning acceptance and he has no idea of how to act. Argue with him, and he's in his element, however unattractive it may look from outside. He dives into his reading; he loves it; he loves everything about it – even the need to tear the covers off his prozines, or smuggle them into the house – he's the best book-smuggler on his block, and he knows it.

And so we have him, now – Trufan, the avatar of profan. And happy about it, sometimes and in some ways more than he knows.

He has his moments of melancholy, and because he is aware of his special status – though not always of its exact nature – he ascribes them to it. Maybe correctly. But everybody has troubles; not everybody has his clear and present ascribable cause. I have found fans who remind me of the occasional Negroes and Republicans who can explain their entire armamentarium of traumas by their possession of those single qualities. And I have met fans who ascribe, like some Negroes or Republicans, all their

excellences to that same single cause. (And now we edge up on gafia, but only edge.) Fans as they grow older and more aware will make decisions to quit the whole silly business, or, conversely, to carry it to the topmost heights their total energies can command. Whatever happens, it is rarely permanent.

Now: if his environment changes – if he discovers to an impressed world his talent for place-kicking a football, say – if he discovers girls, and girls discover him – if he goes off to a college – if he gets into a politically-conscious group, or a sex-conscious group, or a dance-conscious group, and shines in it – then he may shift the emphasis of his drives toward these things. He may gafiate. Remove that environment; graduate him from school and send him back home; get him married to a woman he rapidly learns to ignore, or to another fan, and his gafia, being environmental gafia, will leave him. In most cases, engafia is not permanent; where permanent, despite shifting environment, it is so because the environment continues to be a Genvironment; where permanent in a fannish environment – or Fenvironment – it is because his engafia has imperceptibly become a true and persistent gafia. He has passed through the Pergafic Crisis, and when his fever broke he was no longer the same man. In the immortal words of Adolf Eichmann: Let me explain that.

First, we backtrack a little. One of the persistent theories about fans is that they are People Who Never Grew Up, and for a while there, I bet some of you thought that was my thesis. Not so.

A. Nobody knows what Growing Up is. Some people know what it feels like, but even they cannot prove that the condition they have attained is anything more than the sense of well-being that comes to a sardine when it has finally found its niche in the can.

B. Nobody knows when Time To Grow Up is. Some people have an idea – usually one that flatters them. The law says you take responsibility for yourself at a set chronological age – set in the days when Jack Kennedy would have seemed just the right age for his job – not as disastrously old as Nelson Rockefeller.

C. The concept of Growing Up, and the importance attached to it, either as a goal or a bugaboo, is a product of society. Well, society lost its hold on Trufan back in the dim ancestral days of protofan.

Nevertheless, there is such a thing as a climactic period in life, which occurs in the lives of some individuals, and that can be labelled Growing Up. The visible effect of the process is usually the creation of a Life Plan, the

assumption of an Identity, and lots of other indexed manifestations. During this process, which usually is triggered by some radical shift in the environment which forces the affected individual to give up his accustomed methods of dealing with the universe, a fan must inevitably come to his Pergafic Crisis. (You see, now, how going to college and gafiating can create a confusion between engafia and pergafia. Becoming an expert necker is not in the same league, though in extraordinarily proficient individuals it can be.)

During this period in his life, the fan must decide whether his life plan and identity can properly contain fanac. Being human, he does not do his deciding that cold-bloodedly; the cells of his identity, crystallized into their new arrangement by the shock of what has happened to him, do it for him. He can go back and discover the reasons later, and find them good – what butterfly ever quarreled with its cocoon-shedding technique; what eunuch has a pleasant word for sex?

This is the critical period, as far as fanac goes. If the individual finds things in fandom that will permit him to enrich himself in ways no other medium can offer, then he will emerge from his Crisis a better, more reliable fan than ever. If he does not – if his fanac was an escape from himself, rather than a fulfillment – he will probably, almost certainly, pergafiate and vanish from our ken. If he hangs on at all, it will be a practical matter only – obligations to fulfill, a stock of stencils to be used up... and then, one day, from him only silence deep and dreary.

One test for engafia/pergafia is usually reliable. Your pergafic will rarely make a dramatic point of his departure from the fannish glade. He merely goes. Some engafs, not knowing what is happening to them at first, will subside in similar manner. But they almost always cry out once – They grew increasingly bored with fanac, and now that they've had a semester at good old U and seen the world, they realize this was because they were growing up and out, and now must leave fandom behind because it's really all pretty abstract, isn't it?

Take heart – they'll be back. Your true pergaf says nothing; he has found the world of the cowboys and the indians, and the little gray home is already out of sight – if Mother calls for supper, he must not hear her, for Superindian will surely catch him then.

So you ask me Questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and I tell you: I was a profotafan and became a fan; I became the best book-smuggler in my entire county; I engafiated, I – We need a word here, don't we? – I refanned, I took a vow of

silence and fulfilled it, I passed through my Pergafic Crisis, in which I kept fanac and did not keep pro science fiction, I stay in fandom because it is part of my identity – whose acquaintance I am pleased to make – and I have no additional pertinent remarks to contribute to the study. Thank you.

15 April 1961

Notes on Storytelling

The previous discussion in these pages* concerned itself with the original paperback suspense novel as it was constituted some five years ago. Since then, of course, the James Bond story has heavily influenced the field, to the extent that narrative detail – what *kind* of fast car pursues the villain; *who* tailored the hero's impeccable evening attire; *which* room of the most exotic casino in the world is stained with the good friend's blood – has become more important. More important with it has become the Fu Manchu touch – the introduction of not-quite-believable technology, only a hairline past the common technology of the day (or a baroque distortion of present technology, such as Dr. No's armored-car flame-throwing dragon or the naval periscope from the Istanbul sewers to the baseboard mousehole in the Soviet embassy). Added to these are Bond's Simon Templar personality slightly cut with essence of Spillane, as if the scientist who bred the Saint's giant ants had gotten Sebastian Tombs and Hoppy Uniatz partway melded in a rosewood matter transmitter. The result has its roots in all these sources, as do Matt Helm and the earlier Shell Scott, and the whole school can be related back through Sax Rohmer and Leslie Charteris – and Eric Ambler, and Geoffrey Household's *Rogue Male* – to John Buchan, E.W. Hornung's *Raffles*, and even the antiscientific, misogynistic fiddling viper of Baker Street, who got the warms only for fallen women. But all that is only persiflage; within actually narrow limits, the plots and their twists remain much the same; whether the current preference is for lemon twist or a mint garnish, the basic mixture is always nearly as before.

* The pages were those of the fanzine *Yandro*, which had reprinted [the service section](#) from *dubious 2* above. [Ed.]

I still cannot tell you why, except that this is the way the readers want it – and, perhaps because of a universal human attribute, is the way writers feel it best. It therefore behooves would-be commercial writers to be knowledgeably aware of it.

Understand me, now; we are neither discussing nor excluding art. We are discussing a particular kind of literary creativity called storytelling, which constitutes the major bulk of day-to-day activity among working writers. This form of activity may or not be intended primarily to make money. Certainly

the majority of even highly-paid writers would not write if there was not some sort of continual satisfaction in it for them. Some are compulsive writers; some consider systematic hackwork an art form in itself, perhaps the same sort of art that popsicle stick skyscraper models might be. Some genuinely believe there is no higher literary art, and that such prose expositors as are called “literary artists” by the book reviews are in fact emotionally-overwrought post-adolescents writing for the grandest school bulletin of them all. Some, especially in recent years with the model of Graham Greene before them, take the commercial story for the base on which to construct “genuine” novels which might be called paracommercial stories... The range of motivations among writers is wide. The public, however, does not seem to care a fig; writers are constantly discovering that their most devoted readers do not buy the finished product for any of the reasons that created it. And, of course, it is the “literary artists” who frequently make more money with one book than an average-good, medium-popular, securely entrenched storyteller can earn in a lifetime’s good living. There is nothing more interesting, to a man who has been called a shameless hack more than once or twice, than the sight of a literary artist assiduously cashing in on his one slim book with personal appearances on TV, autographing parties, lecture tours, ephemeral magazine “featurettes” printed for the sake of his byline at high prices and, ultimately, the Hollywood scripting and story-consulting job, or the fiction editor’s berth on some prestigious masthead.

Please understand me again – all I am saying is that some of the damnedest things turn out to be commercial writing, for the damnedest reasons, and no mere human being can presume to judge the Universe in which they occur. If, however, you reading this are interested in a systematic approach to the problem of writing for sale, then it is time, and past time, for me to abandon all this personally enjoyable commentary and proceed to the business of explaining how I believe it can be done, with some attention to why it should be done.

Original paperback novels are of course only one aspect of this whole artifact, and at this point we double back to the basic handful or bricks; the elements without which no piece of writing is a “story” by strict craft definition.

These are three. A story must have actors, the actors must have actions to perform, and these actions must occur on some stage. In the jargon of the

trade, what we are talking about is characters, plot, and locale: John struck Henry in the arboretum. // With a mighty convulsion of his muscles, John lashed out. Henry, reeling under the impact of the flashing fist, fell into the ailanthus. // The blow was short, sharp, and immediate. John hardly seemed to have moved at all, but Henry lay sprawled against the yielding trunk, which bent gradually under his weight so that he slipped lower and lower, his limp hands trailing into the ferns. //

And so on, through greater and greater elaborations, variations in prose technique, scenic details, &c. // Struck, Henry reeled; sapling ailanthus yielded; Henry sprawled, and all this while John seemingly moveless stood. Why? //

And so we come to rationale; the reasons why John and Henry are the way they are; the reasons why John struck Henry; the reasons why they are where they are. I believe the accurate overall term for this is “story line”, or alternatively “storyline”, as distinguished from “plot” or, perhaps, as from “plotline”. Some of these jargon distinctions are obscure, and/or vary from region to region; script writing, for example, has its own terminology using some of the same terms as well as others, and the terminology varies from East Coast to West Coast scripting, as well as from TV, radio, and motion picture writing. For our purposes here, there is a distinction between plot and storyline, plot being the pattern of action, storyline being the pattern of motivated action.

The rationale of character is called characterization. Who is John, what is he, that Henry should be struck by him? And who, and what, is Henry?

The rationale of plot is called plotting. Where is John now, what has led him here to strike Henry, and where shall he run to?

Plotting and characterization together are the simultaneous cause and result of motivation. Why is John such that he struck Henry? What purpose, what need, has slung Henry upon the insubstantial frame of the Tree of Heaven, and when John flees on his further pursuits, will Henry follow in tears or laughter, should Henry follow at all?

The rationale of setting, or locale, determines a story’s “category”. If John struck Henry in the Martian arboretum, we know what kind of story we have here; we know which markets will consider it for publication, and we know who will read it. In other words, incidentally, it is an organic part of storytelling, not mere peddlary, to have one’s audience and market well in mind; without these things having been decided beforehand, a completed

story is theoretically impossible.

Simple “John / struck / Henry / in / the arboretum” has stopped being an easily diagrammed structure of nearly independent segments. What we have now is a three-dimensional webwork with the beginnings of the multiple cross-connections and various but, ideally, balanced tensions on which the façades of the story will be hung. It is really still simple; at no stage does it become truly complicated; like the step-by-step illustrations in the instruction booklet for wiring a hi-fi component kit, the diagrams grow increasingly difficult to follow when looked at cold, or from the middle toward the far end, but in actual practice the kit is wired, the component usually functions, and most of the actual work is simple, in fact sometimes tediously so, and for the even moderately practiced hand, much of the work is automatic and the relationships are established un- or sub-consciously.

It is time now to talk about what is a “practiced hand” and thus to include the writers we all know who simply sit down at the typewriter, tap out a lead sentence, and then settle back in a sort of appreciative detachment, reading what they’re writing as their fingers do the rest of the story seemingly out of thin air.

Well, a practiced hand is a writer who is past his first half-dozen or so sales in reasonably close succession. If making the first sale is traditionally, and correctly, known far and wide as a difficult enterprise, making the second, third and fourth is equally, though differently, difficult. There is such a thing as the one-story author – the writer who has somehow gotten hold of one story so unique that he is able to write and sell it despite a variety of personal incapacities which will subsequently prevent him from ever writing a saleable story again. There very definitely is such a thing as a writer who is so overcome with the various effects of his first sale that he subsequently renders himself incapable of continuing. And there are many writers who suffer from these conditions to some degree, so that they sell only at widely-separated intervals. It is a sad fact of life, discovered by all neophyte professionals, that one sale does not entitle a writer to full membership in the professional freemasonry. There are very few functional social barriers between the usual author of a dozen published stories and the usual author of several hundred, but some professionals have very much taken to heart the fact that every season sees its flock of promising rookies, and its rookie-of-the-year, who may never be seen again after the first snowfall except as increasingly pathetic nuisances at parties.

This is not in fact an instance of snobbery, though of course some people may gladly seize the excuse to practice it on respectable and intelligent individuals who just don't happen to be the right color inside their heads. It is the professional's reaction to the would-be fellow craftsman who has never owned his tools or has pawned or lost them. There is a direct parallel for this behavior throughout the skilled trades generally; an auto mechanic is expected to bring his own kit, and to have it stocked with the appliances necessary to the job he has signed on for. Only one exception is made to this automatic – and nearly helpless – process of withdrawal from the “semi-pro”, and that exception is made for the writer who has successfully, over the years, “let the story write itself”. That is, to the apparently empty-handed mechanic in whose presence engines spring to life of their own accord.

This figure is a recognized phenomenon in professional writing. He is a distinct personality-type – actually, I can think of two, one in the great majority, just offhand – whose finished product is generally indistinguishable from that of the conscious craftsman, but who, either boisterously or very quietly, expresses great contempt for discussions such as the one we are committing right here. I am not referring to the literary figure who sneers at hacks – this is a horse of another type – but to the working, steadily-earning writer who simply has something in the back of his mind that automatically produces saleable stories popular with the same people who buy the stories of the conscious workers. I make no attempt to explain him. I suggest he may intuitively be going through precisely the same processes undergone by his equally rare polar opposite, the man who has to cover reams with notes and actual diagrams before he can turn to Page One of his manuscript. But this suggestion sounds like a cop-out to me. It may be valid, nevertheless; in either case, that sort of individual cannot be learned from, and does not need to learn. He has left this essay at some very early stage and is fulminating at the waste of space this piece represents. I wish him well; I envy him; and you and I must go on, because for us there is no royal road.

It isn't enough to plot, characterize, set, and rationalize – not ordinarily, though professional writers will limit themselves to these elements from time to time. Consider this passage:

John faced Henry in the arboretum. Here was the man who had despoiled his sister on nine planets and countless asteroids. He felt his massive chest heaving for breath. The muscles of his torso corded slowly into

bulging bands of living steel. The bands writhed, and his arms flew up without his conscious will. There was the sound of work-hardened bone and cartilage on the gaming-room pallor of Henry's face. Henry lay entangled in the ailanthus sapling, staring glassily up at him...

And now, let us try this:

Scene IV: Henry is discovered on the arboretum set. John steps from behind a fern.

JOHN: "Hole-Card Hank, you've despoiled my sister on nine planets and countless asteroids!"

John strikes Henry, who falls into a tree.

Despite such examples, there are uses for dialogue. As you know, some writers have developed this into so multifarious a device that they have been able to write successful novels using dialogue only:

"Hank! Hank, wait up, God damn you. Don't you move! No use runnin', I'll get you."

"All right, Jack; so you've caught up with me. What about it?"

"Hank, you lousy bottom-dealing interplanetary bum, you done it to Sis on Mercury. You done it to her on Venus, Earth, Saturn, Jupiter, Neptune. You been to Pluto with her. You treated her like a dog. Now you've got her stashed out in this here arboretum thing, here, and you're fixin' to do it again. You cut it out! You just cut it out, hear?"

"Same to you, square."

"Take that!"

"Ouch! God damn it."

"There, That'll fix ya. Now I guess I can go back home to Ma and satisfy her you're gonna do right by Sis."

"Wait! Aintcha gonna help me git out of this tree?"

But between the extremes of the writer who uses nothing but dialogue, and the equally rare but real bird who uses none at all, lies the area in which the writer of prose is in fact a playwright.

Oddly enough, I have never seen a manuscript by any writer, except the most conscious craftsman who has evolved his craftsmanship over many years, which did not betray an immediate awareness that prose dialogue is an artificial, working part of a conscious creation. In fact, the mark of the amateur is his artificial-sounding dialogue, as distinguished from the practiced hand's "real-sounding" dialogue which is actually performing even more work than the amateur's plainly is.

There are probably as many estimates of the proper balance between dialogue and narrative as there are writers. This characteristic estimate is normally one of the surest clues to the real authorship of pseudonymous pieces, along with sentence lengths and rhythms, which are, again, a sort of dialogue between writer and reader. But we are talking about an applicable standard here; one which the beginning writer can use until he is ready to modify it to his individual needs. And for those purposes, as good a guide as any is that characters and settings should be described in action and appearance whenever this would be more succinct than doing it in dialogue, and characters should speak those things which can be succinctly expressed in speech. Generally, it is pointless to include “I see you’re wearing a brown sweater” in a speech between John and Henry. Generally, no useful purpose is served in narrating that John could see Henry was in the mood to sneer rather than admit to the reasonableness of John’s position. And the handiest way to arrive at this running series of decisions is to visualize the characters on stage before an audience; to narrate what the set designer and director have done, and put in quotes what the dialogue director has done, alternating these passages in the order of their importance to the senses of the audience. The audience will see Henry’s brown sweater before it hears John speak. It will turn its attention away from the visuals as the exchange between the two characters reaches a climax, it will return to the visual element of the tree as Henry impacts upon it, and the crash of broken branches will come to it an instant later.

You have all heard the good advice about speaking your dialogue aloud to yourself as you edit your copy, and about fully visualizing each scene as you describe it. This need for balancing speech, action, and setting, based on the storyline and characterization, is why this is good advice. Though you may find it easily possible to speak dialogue aloud within the outer silence of your mind.

It is also a good idea to remember that this is not, in truth, an actual play, and certainly not the last bad play you saw in the high school assembly hall; certain conventions of cramped stagecraft, such as the First Act maid who answers the ’phone and conveys the family history while incidentally telling the caller that Modom is out, may safely be discarded for somewhat less condensed alternate techniques.

However, it is also necessary to remember that the ideal play is fully and satisfactorily concluded at the precise instant the final curtain comes down.

This goes by the name of “resolution”, but in order to arrive at the resolution, certain prior conditions must have been met, some of them before the first word went down on paper.

It is necessary for you – if you are still with me – to have a satisfactory story plan. You must know what story you are going to write, why this story is more worth writing now than some other story, and how it is going to come out. If you know these things, and can keep them under control as you proceed, the right resolution will arrive properly, at the correct time. The number of specific know points in your plan will depend directly on how many complications you plan in the plot, and indirectly on the character and locale elements. The more complicated your characters, and the more characters you have, the more people will have to be satisfactorily accounted-for at the moment of resolution. The nature of the general locale, the number of specific sets you are going to need, and their physical distribution, must in part be determined by your need to confine your resolution to an easily-seen locale. It is not *vitally* necessary to know all these things before you sit down to write, of course, or few of us would ever write very much. But you had better have put yourself in the way of learning or determining them rather early in the game, or you will find yourself, like at least one nevertheless excellent and successful writer I knew, having to find valid reasons for killing half your characters before you can manage a resolution for the remainder.

Now, all this, like most things about writing for sale, can hardly help but sound more complicated than it really is. (There is, by the way, an excellent out-of-print book, called *Writing to Sell*, by Scott Meredith, which is worth the effort of being looked for or obtained through a dealer. Mr. Meredith is the agent for a great number of highly successful writers; and also offers a manuscript-reading and criticism service on a fee basis. Mr. Meredith is not my agent. *Writing to Sell* is the only valuable book on commercial writing I have ever read.) Parenthetical aside completed, I remind you that you have one great advantage over an intelligent ailanthus tree which might be reading this essay in earnest study. That is your shared humanity with your reader. What seems reasonable and attractive to you will seem the same to a great many other people. What excites you, what arouses your curiosity and draws you deeper into a story, will, if you transmit it, do the same for your reader. Furthermore, once you have arrived at even the faintest glimmering of even one element of what could be a good story; a character, one situation, one scrap of dialogue... almost anything which could subsequently prove to be a

functional piece of a genuine story... your brain will begin searching for its significance and its relationship to other things it might know or dream, and your story will begin to snowball into motion. Your difficulty will not be in generating additional plot twists, characters, speeches, or settings. It will be in keeping the storyline from tangling itself in offshoots and false scents. A writer is his own first editor, and let us now go to meet an editor, from the inside.

Like any other reader, an editor can have only accidental insights into a given writer's motives or methods, and usually has no interest in them. He is concerned only with what can be found in the actual manuscript itself. If he is a senior editor, and his duties include maintaining good political relations with writers and keeping close contact with them, he may indeed have an abiding interest in their personalities, but even then he will close the door on that compartment of his mind when functioning as a reader of manuscripts. It is his job to determine whether or not a piece of prose is really a story, and once that has been decided, whether it is a satisfactory story. As the editor of a commercial publication, he will rarely think in terms of "good" or "bad", though he will lapse into this sloppy idiom when actually discussing the story. When thinking about it, he thinks in terms of "useful" and "useless", and his grasp of degrees within these opposing categories will be precise.

All right now – presupposing a commercial publication for a general audience – that is, presupposing ninety percent of all publications – what things the editor considers most useful will be these, and in this order:

If his is a category market, is the story in his category?

Does it compel his interest from beginning to end, engaging his attention immediately and resolving itself satisfactorily?

Why can't it be either bought immediately or bounced summarily?

This is the order of importance, and it is the last question, and the manner in which he arrives at useful solutions to it, that makes the difference between editing and working in an editorial shop. If stories were either good or bad, there would be a better excuse for the generally low scale of editorial pay. The fact is that most stories fall somewhere in between total uselessness and an acceptable degree of usefulness, and therefore much of an editor's time is spent in examining the story and testing it against an additional set of standards; asking of himself the same questions that the author should properly have asked of himself before considering the job done, or, even more preferably, before sitting down to commit the story to paper.

The basic standard definition of a useful story might well be:

A narrative, complete in itself, containing an immediate problem of importance to the reader, and culminating in a dramatic, valid solution to the problem through a continuous series of increasingly interesting steps.

This definition, we might note in passing, is nearly as applicable to nonfiction as it is to fiction, and translates easily whether your narrative is in verse, on stage, or on film. But it does require some further definition of individual terms.

“Complete in itself” simply means that the main title for your short story, novel, serialized novel, trilogy, tetralogy, or Five-Foot Shelf, should describe some one package which can be seen to have a beginning, middle, and end.

“An immediate problem” means both a personal problem and a problem which makes itself manifest early in the story, before the reader’s initial interest has been lost. In fiction, by far the most common way of personally interesting the reader is to give him a protagonist he can strongly identify with, and then impose the personal problem on the protagonist. The protagonist can be a hero or a villain, but he has got to possess attributes which will connect with attributes the reader finds within himself and either wishes to see magnified or is afraid of, or both. One of the common cries about commercial fiction is that the writers always work to please the reader. This is both the concealed whole truth and an obvious half truth. “Pleasing”, in the phrase “pleasing to the reader”, is properly defined as “possessing the quality of responding to pleas; to be in accord with the secret wishes of the suppliant irrespective of his expressed desires”. In commercial fiction with villain protagonists, “pleasing” is a frequent *antonym* for “desirable”.

“Culminating... through a continuous series of increasingly interesting steps” is usually accomplished by plotting the hero along a chain of increasingly dangerous and discouraging situations, each of which proves in the end to have represented one real step forward toward the “dramatic, valid solution to the problem”. Drama does not have to be melodrama; it does have to be an onstage happening of manifest importance and proper intensity, in accordance with the storyline, at whose conclusion the previously stated problem is clearly solved or the villain is clearly defeated. John, having followed Henry across the Solar System and through the hideous perils of the Martian wastes, finally intercepts him as the result of unremitting determination, good deduction as to his whereabouts, and advantageous use

of John's inner resources. His fist impacts on Henry's jaw, and Henry falls down and does not get up. In the next, and final scene, John's sister will see Henry for the bluff he was, and return with John to the bosom of their family. Or Ahab and the whale will meet at last, and the *Pequod* will go down, and only a coffin, and a man, will be left bobbing at the center of the fading ripples.

When an editor encounters one of the majority of stories that cannot be bought or bounced immediately, and which therefore must be thought about much more efficiently than any story at either of the extremes in this range, he cannot stop to go into motivations or other extraneous matters. The day is hurrying by; the retailer is waiting for the finished publication. The wholesaler is waiting for his bundles so he can throw them on his trucks. The national distributor's warehouse crew, circulation manager, comptroller, traffic manager and promotion director are waiting. The freight car is waiting at the printer's siding. The binding machinery is waiting. The presses are waiting. The engravers and typesetters are waiting... and every one of them is draining pay while the editor ponders. In the case of a national publication with two million newsstand readers, a subscription list of half a million, four regional editions carrying a total of three full pages of advertising at thousands of dollars per page, each placed against a guarantee of audience and on-sale date, every ticking second is the further onset of disaster. Even for a pulp magazine damned near hand-printed on old butcher paper and produced in a total run of 35,000, the disaster is equally real to the publisher though the fallout radius will not be as great. Accordingly, the editor rapidly but methodically takes the story apart, searching for the absence of any of the vital elements and qualities defined above, or for weaknesses therein should they all be present. On his findings, he bases his decision to now bounce the story cold, bounce it with a note, bounce it with a letter, bounce it with a letter suggesting a revise at the author's own risk, accept it on the condition that certain specific revisions will be made, or accept it outright with the proviso that minor repairs will be made in the shop. Where revisions are made, they will be evaluated purely in terms of their usefulness, not in terms of the writer's feelings.

This is the professional writer's life, with all that it implies – the need for discipline, for an acute self-critical faculty, and as much of a tolerance as he can develop toward editorial foibles which may seem, or may even be, stupid. It is also the professional editor's life, with exactly the same

implications and exactly the mirror-image of the heartache potential in changing another man's work. It is not, popular opinion or surface appearances to the contrary, a free, unfettered life lacking in care or the need for devoted courage. It is also not mechanical or otherwise crass, but of this I have never been able to convince anyone whose opinion was to the contrary. Nor is commercial writing necessarily the best and most valuable writing of all, though I have not had much luck with the partisans of that position, either.

And all this long, long while I have said nothing about the need to understand the language in which one writes, and the need to use and transmit its felicities on behalf of the story while avoiding or transforming its weaknesses. This faculty, like intelligence, is necessary to editor and writer alike, but I have come a fair way down a sorry path to discover that they can never be acquired or taught, and can be schooled only by those who have them and possessed their potential at birth.

August 1964

Mind Control Is []Good []Bad (Check One)

Over in the corner of a cage sits the glowering Boss Monkey. Around him is a foot or so of inviolable territory, unmarked, but the other five rhesus monkeys in the cage – dangerous, aggressive little animals – step lightly around it. The Boss Monkey is at the top of the rhesus’ autocratic society; he’s usually bigger, stronger and meaner than any of the other members of his little bailiwick. But there is something different about this Boss: he has an electrode implanted in his brain, and from outside the cage a scientist, studying these creatures, uses a radio transmitter to send little jolts of electricity into the Boss’s brain. Suddenly the Boss assumes a what-the-hell attitude; he no longer bares his teeth. Intermittent electrical stimulation has, for the moment, changed his nature. The other monkeys get the message; they circulate more freely through the Boss’s territory. His minions begin to crowd him. Then the scientist turns off the electricity; within a few minutes the Boss is his old irascible self again – growling, barking, taking out his aggressions on the weaker monkeys. What does this prove? It proves that the mind and the social behavior of monkeys can be manipulated. It implies that the same thing can be done to the mind and the social behavior of human beings; indeed, it already has been done, though not quite to the same degree.

Mind control is a fact. It doesn’t matter how it is accomplished, or even who does it. By artificially stimulating the electrochemical action of the brain, scientists have learned more about the mind in the past two decades than ever before. They can initiate and control motor action chemically or electrically; they can now switch aggressiveness, pleasure, rage, hunger, or sleep on and off, experimentally, and someday will be able to do so therapeutically and, ultimately, socially – for good or bad purposes. Electrical stimulation aside, there are literally hundreds of chemicals in use which can affect the mind and the emotions of man; the so-called tranquilizers, psychic energizers, hallucinogens, depressants, analgesics, and drugs which apparently increase learning power. It is no news that men can be conditioned in a random way; but now we can be conditioned with a purpose by “brainwashing”, a more sophisticated manipulation of the brain than most of

us would think.

Even more fundamental is the most significant control point of all, the genes, which predetermine what sort of animal one will be as well as one's ability to deal with life. Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA for short) is the substance whose molecules make up genes which carry characteristics from parent to offspring. DNA has a specific structure which, if manipulated, might pass on desirable traits, whatever those may be – moral, ethical and spiritual considerations notwithstanding.

While a lot of us are gloomily anticipating tomorrow's Brave New World with its bottled, programmed people, mind control is here. Hundreds of laboratories around the world are conducting experiments on animals, ranging from the lowly and ludicrous-looking flatworm to human beings. Some of this is clinical work, some is purely scientific, but wherever one may cast, the experiments continue. In this country the most important work is going on at Emory University, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Michigan, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard and Yale. At each, the scientists are jockeying for position in the mind race.

One of the men out front is Michigan's Dr. James Olds. He is credited with having confirmed that rats have specific cerebral pleasure centers, and his contribution came about by a classical conjunction of accident and insight, one quiet day in October, 1953. At that time Olds was a new postdoctoral psychology student who had just been taught a technique for implanting miniature electrodes in rat brains. He had outlined a research program involving the use of rats prepared in this manner and expected the program to reveal something about the causes and effects of animal behavior. Before he could proceed, however, Dr. Olds had to know whether his animals would show adverse emotional reactions to his techniques.

"So I went up to the lab one Sunday, afternoon," he says, "and took the first rat I had ever prepared with my own hands. Every time the rat walked into one corner of the testing table, I turned on the electricity to see if he would avoid approaching that spot thereafter. Instead, my rat *liked* it!"

Dr. Olds, now a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, is one of the world's best-known researchers into the neurophysiology of the freely behaving animal. Even so, when he describes the discovery of the pleasure center, there is still incredulity in his voice. One can hardly blame him. One hundred seventy-five years ago, such giants of science as Luigi Galvani, Alessandro Volta, and Alexander von Humboldt had been deep in

learned, acrimonious inquiry into the exact nature of the galvanic force that could make a dead frog's leg jerk when an electric current was applied. Reports of the discovery of such a force inspired Mary, wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley, to write *Frankenstein*. But no one in real life showed any visible success at hemstitching homunculi out of assorted parts and then bringing them to life with a great spasm of electricity.

Meanwhile, through the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, research into bioelectrical effects had evolved along with psychology and biology. By 1950, techniques had been developed that could provoke the body movements of living animals through insertion of delicate electrodes directly into the brain areas controlling motor activity. Emotional reactions such as rage and fear also could be aroused through similar techniques applied to other centers. Generally speaking, the animals were indifferent to the small electrode sockets implanted in their skulls. They plugged along as they always had – solving mazes and pressing levers in response to simple, old-fashioned rewards like food or water. The modern advance was that the animals' brain activities now to some extent could be correlated with their gross physical responses.

But what Dr. Olds had found was a unique place in the brain that responded blissfully to stimulation. Not only blissfully, as it turned out, but with fanatical thirst for more of the same. Subsequent investigations in scores of laboratories produced animals that would rather get a few milliamperes than eat, sleep or love. (In one experimental setup a rat was provided with a self-stimulation lever. It pushed the lever nearly five thousand times in one hour.) Performance scores in standard tests soared when this uniquely modern joy was substituted as a reward for being a smart rat – that is, for achieving the goal set by the experimenter. It became possible to wonder whether the same thing couldn't be done to people. Considering the speculative structure a nineteenth-century poet's wife had created around the reflex of a dead amphibian, it did not seem too great a leap to believe in the possibility that we all soon would have our minds controlled by science. Furthermore, that we would all love it, whether we liked it or not.

The thought of such Frankensteinian intrusion into our own skulls is undeniably appalling, despite the fact that more than twelve years after Olds's discovery most men are not walking around with electrodes in their heads. It becomes particularly unsettling when the scientists themselves tell us, however, that mind control is coming. At the most recent meeting of the

American Association for the Advancement of Science, psychologist Dr. David Krech said in a widely reported speech:

“I don’t believe that I’m being melodramatic in suggesting that what our research may discover can carry with it even more serious implications than the awful – in both senses of the word – achievements of the atomic physicists.”

Such a statement, and similar remarks by other researchers to audiences great and small, seems to remove all doubt. But it would be useful to consider first the immediate situation in the field of brain research, and the manner of man we might expect to become the master of all we survey.

José M. R. Delgado, M.D., for example, is an associate professor of physiology at the Yale University School of Medicine. At fifty, Dr. Delgado is quick of wit and movement, unfailingly self-possessed and gracious. And he has the trait of doing exactly the logical thing to improve his work or test his findings. He recently studied electrical engineering for a year, so that he might be able to communicate more efficiently with the technicians who build the equipment he designed. In 1964, he implanted electrodes in the brain of a fighting bull, got into a bullring with it, and, having aroused its instincts by flirting a cape at it, stopped its charge within a few feet of him, when the bull trotted away as if it had forgotten all its former hostile intentions.

The public fancy was caught not only by the dramatic setting but by the fact that Dr. Delgado used a small hand-held radio transmitter to control the animal. In more conventional laboratories, Dr. Delgado has made findings of extreme importance to anyone who believes it possible to detect the differences between controlled and free behavior. For example, long ago he located the particular area to which the application of a small amount of electrical stimulation would make a cat raise a hind leg. Although the cat performed this act smoothly in response to stimulation, it showed no more distress than if it had *chosen* to raise its leg. It continued to stand, purr, and rub its head against the experimenter’s hand. When the same stimulation in the same area was applied in a variety of situations, the cat would shift its balance as required, or complete a jump from a tabletop to floor and make a normal landing, without carrying out the stimulated activity. Although there was a motor response to outside stimulation, the animal was still able to exercise control of the act whenever it was in conflict with something important to cats, such as not falling down.

A monkey wearing one of Dr. Delgado's wireless receiver packs will show considerable evidence of free will while stimulated. Here is a typical behavior pattern Dr. Delgado can evoke: the monkey turns its head, walks a few steps, jumps to the back wall of its cage, holds on there for a few seconds, and then jumps to the floor and returns to the original starting position. It will do so indefinitely – once a minute for ninety minutes, say – if stimulated to do so. If it is doing something important when stimulated, such as making love, it will complete that activity before going through its controlled pattern. Similarly, if something interferes in the course of the response – such as another monkey crossing its path, or any normal presentation of the stimuli that go on all the time in monkey cages – it will react exactly as it would have in a free state, and then go on to complete the artificially stimulated pattern.

In all animals these imposed activity patterns occur in response to a few seconds of electrical stimulation. The patterns continue to work themselves out long after the stimulation has been cut off. Neither the stimulated animals nor other animals sharing the society show any discomfort, constraint, or distrust of each other.

Delgado, of course, has considered the question of applying such techniques to human-mind control. In a recent lecture he asked:

“Would it be feasible to control the behavior of a population by electrical stimulation of the brain? ...Fortunately, the prospect is remote, if not impossible, not only for obvious ethical reasons, but also because of its impracticability.... This technique requires specialized knowledge, refined skills, and a detailed and complex exploration in each individual.... the application of intracerebral electrodes in Man will probably remain highly individualized and restricted to medical practice.”

While investigators like Delgado were doing intensive and controlled research with animals, a number of notable observations were made on people. Often, as in Delgado's case, the observations were made by the same men. But they were usually made in these researchers' capacities as clinicians; that is, as medical doctors or psychologists treating individual patients with problems involving the structure of the brain, as in cases of epilepsy.

Epilepsy is sometimes caused by functional failure of some surgically operable portion of the brain. One standard method for locating the defective structure and thus determining whether it can be removed is to implant

electrodes and take readings of unusual electrical activities. The purpose is to pinpoint the source of trouble and thus remove a minimal amount of tissue in the course of the operation. As a collateral effect of these location techniques, however, many neurophysiologists and surgeons have reported behavioral changes. There have been cases of spontaneous recollection of events in complete detail, as if the patient were experiencing them right then and there, while he was at the same time fully conscious of the immediate actual situation. There also have been cases of hallucination and of a marked shaking off of inhibition in the behavior of normally withdrawn people. Most important of all has been the gathering of evidence that human beings, too, have “pleasure centers”. This, of course, would seem to indicate a fruitful and direct route to control of the human mind.

Fifteen years ago, one of the last resorts in dealing with psychotic humans was lobotomy, the severing of most of the connections between the bulk of the brain and the forebrain. In some part of the cerebral cortex – exactly where is not perfectly known even today – lie the structures with which people exercise control and judgment over their actions. Psychotic behavior might be called symptomatic of actively bad judgment and assertively erratic control. In the early 1940s, the continuing search for an alternative to putting these people away forever had gotten as far as this massive surgical technique of cutting away their means of making any judgments at all, bad or good. In most cases, the patients merely became irresponsible, forever.

At Tulane University Medical School, Dr. Robert G. Heath with his colleague, surgeon Lawrence Poole, developed the procedure of topectomy, the removal of sharply defined, minimal portions of the frontal tissue. Heath’s share of this work was the definition of those portions. Topectomy preserves a great many more useful functions than lobotomy ever could. Nevertheless, even this technique was not really attacking the causes of psychosis. In the course of this work, Heath made the postoperative observation that although the patients’ thinking and planning had been altered, and certain symptoms improved, basic emotional disturbances, such as schizophrenia, were not changed.

Dr. Heath became more and more determined to identify the exact places in the brain where specific functions were located – and thus eventually the dysfunctions that concerned him. Studies with implanted electrodes seemed to offer the best promise and it was with this technique in

mind that Heath created Tulane's Department of Psychiatry and Neurology. Heath's team of specialists were able to make a series of observations on the activity of specific brain areas in humans, including areas which neither lobotomy nor topectomy touched. Among other things, Heath's group learned that electrostimulation of specific brain areas in schizophrenic patients would bring them out of their dreamy, detached state and make them alert, even move them to laughter and repartee. Working with psychotic patients on whom all conventional treatments had been exhausted, Heath implanted electrodes in the brains of several of them. Some of the patients were provided with the appropriate wires running to battery packs and switch buttons they themselves could use; with this equipment, they were able to interrupt their own attacks of various disorders. (For example, narcolepsy – the unpredictable onset of sudden sleep.) The self-stimulation devices, Dr. Heath reported, also were efficacious for schizophrenic and epileptic patients exhibiting withdrawal and depression. But the effect of this technique was not lasting. The length of time an electrode can be left implanted in a human brain is limited, the response to stimulation is brief. What had been achieved was a means of temporarily getting around a malfunction, but there was no workable therapy, certainly nothing like a cure.

Dr. Heath, quite definite about his primary motivation, says the purpose of all his research is to discover whatever facts and techniques are needed to help people with specific illnesses. In particular, and in common with other researchers, he was struck by a unique aspect of schizophrenia. Although electrical studies of the schizophrenic brain show abnormalities, there is still no way to correct them electrically, for any useful length of time. But since each burst of electrical activity in the brain is accompanied by chemical changes, Heath turned his attention to a search for unique factors in the metabolism of schizophrenics. In due course, his teams reported that the blood serum of schizophrenics in the test tube often broke down adrenalin with abnormal rapidity. But so do the blood constituents of people with some other diseases. A great deal of work went into fractional analysis before Dr. Heath reported the isolation of a serum component he dubbed taraxein. This, when injected in normal animals and human volunteers, produced the symptoms characteristic of schizophrenia. Since taraxein is a chemical, the development of a hypothetical anti-taraxein might amount to a pill for schizophrenia. A conceptual step or two from this is pharmacological control of the mind through use of "behavior pills" which would do all the work of

precise electrical stimulation, but which would do it in a controllable and continuous way.

Most of the brain's chemistry, however, remains to be understood. The brain deals in minute amounts of evanescent compounds which come and go like will-o'-the-wisps as the functions they affect snap on and off with the speed of electricity. Taraxein could not at first be reproduced by other research laboratories, nor could its exact nature be determined even by Heath's team.

"We've now gotten good confirmation from a number of labs," Heath says on the first point, but still no one is sure what taraxein is, although Heath's team has just reported work indicating that it might be an antibody. An early hypothesis that it might be an out-of-kilter enzyme has been discarded. Dr. Heath looks forward to a day when blood tests for schizophrenic psychosis are routine and will help uncover it at a stage when it can be treated with appropriate drugs. He is proceeding with research in that direction. If you ask him about potential mind control, his reply is always that he is concerned only with therapy.

Given the still relatively primitive state of both Delgado's radio-stimulation methods and Heath's chemical experiments, whence this concern about mind control not only among laymen but among scientists? Is there some reason to believe that control of the brain, an electrochemical organ, is possible through techniques other than precise uses of electricity and chemicals? And are the implications of this hypothetical method more wide-ranging than anything to be derived from the actions of a delighted rat?

The man to consider, then, is James McConnell, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, and also a research psychologist at the Mental Health Research Institute, which is in a new, efficient-looking building across the campus street from Dr. James Olds's laboratory. McConnell is best-known to the public for his startling work with the learning process, which catches the eye because his primary experimental animal is a worm, and because his work has led to serious consideration of transmitting learned information from one organism to another via chemical injection. But it is in his capacity as an educator that he raises exactly the kind of ethical questions involved in any contemplation of any kind of mind control.

"I teach a course," Dr. McConnell explains, "called The Psychology of Influence, and I begin it by stating categorically that the time has come when

if you give me any normal human being and a couple of weeks – maybe a couple of months, but I don't think so – I can change his behavior from what it is now to whatever you want it to be, if it's physically possible. I can't make him fly by flapping his wings, but I can turn him from a Christian into a Communist and vice versa.”

Brainwashing is control of the brain through control of the body and all major stimuli presented to the senses. Anyone who has read or seen *The Manchurian Candidate* knows all about it; many people can trace its evolution from the behavioristic research and conditioning experiments of Pavlov. In its purest form brainwashing breaks down the subject's identity and then reconstitutes his behavior. It does so by placing him in physical confines which bear little relation to any familiar environment and give him no opportunity to express himself. The subject is stimulated along a predetermined line, using a barrage of unfamiliar but intriguing sights, sounds and smells in impressive and arcane array, involving as much obviously knowledgeable jargon as possible so as to establish the operator's superiority in every way.

There is no essential difference between control or the inputs and physical stimulation of the brain itself, except a practical one: at the present time brainwashing is somewhat more sophisticated and has more reliable effects on the behavior of normal people. From the point of view of behaviorist psychology, whether Pavlovian or as promulgated by Harvard's highly influential B. F. Skinner, brainwashing goes on all the time. All the classic conditions are fulfilled many times during the day of the average citizen. The *unconfident* person enters an environment not his own, addresses an obviously superior figure with intent of receiving information on an urgent point, and is given an obviously intelligent but incomprehensible answer. His conclusion can be only that he has something to learn, and the operator proceeds to teach him. It makes no difference in the effect on the response-learning functions of the subject's brain that the operator may not think of himself as a dangerously inept psychological inculcator, but only as a solid citizen of his society. The mind is being molded, either way.

McConnell says: “The odds are one in ten that you will end up needing psychological help sometime in your life, or even hospitalization. And we will have alcoholism; we will have juvenile delinquency; we will have crime rates that will continue to soar as the cities grow bigger and we build up more psychological pressures on people. You will have all these bad things

happening that probably can be prevented with the kind of preprogramming that scares the hell out of people when they first hear about it.”

One of the most interesting areas for the sort of preprogramming McConnell speaks of is one in which he himself is deeply involved. McConnell’s laboratory animal, the ordinary flatworm, is a stream-bank-dwelling predator about an inch long, with a scientifically useful digestive system, dual sexuality and an arrow-shaped head bearing light receptors that resemble slightly crossed eyes. Flatworms are teachable, apparently. They will run appropriately constructed mazes, exhibit body movements of predictable sorts in response to stimuli, and appear to retain conditioning. Several years ago, McConnell reported that he had chemically transferred learned responses from trained worms to “naive” – untrained – worms, and that the transfer agent was apparently ribonucleic acid (usually called RNA).

Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is known to be the substance whose molecules form the genes. The presence of appropriately formed genes in the sperm is the thing that permits rats to give birth to rats rather than baby elephants. In this context, DNA is the transfer agent of genetic memory, and through its action each species is able to continue producing its own kind, with its own kind of brain structure and extensions, and thus with the necessary predispositions to the forms of behavior that are instinctive to its species.

Many behaviorists expect a time when systematic manipulation of DNA will permit preconceptual selection of all these inherited traits, including sex, physical form, and personality potential. This seems quite possible in the light of present research, and would eliminate birth defects and hereditary diseases as well as shortages in the various social talent pools. But genetic manipulation would be far more than twice as effective if at the same time we had discovered and learned to use the mechanisms whereby individuals store acquired learning in their bodies.

DNA is not confined to the sperm. It exists in the nucleus of every cell of the body, bone and brain, ordering the structure and growth of that cell. It accomplishes this by manufacturing RNA, which acts on the rest of the cell and shapes it. Acting as DNA’s agent, RNA does this principally by synthesizing protein. Some researchers have speculated that perhaps the way experience is stored in the cells of the brain – or perhaps of the whole body – is through the actions of RNA. The way RNA responds to effects which make it shape the protein in distinctive ways affects in turn the

electrochemical response of a particular cell. On the premise that each experience coming into the brain is recorded in a consequent structural change in a cell, it is conceivable that an appropriate electrochemical sweep through the cells might enable a brain to restimulate the characteristics of an experience. To borrow a McConnell analogy, you would have a tape-recorder theory of memory.

From there, one can go on to speculate that there might be a way to dub a copy tape from an original, and thus eliminate the need for an intervening live performance. It might be possible to edit, to superimpose, to splice tapes from a variety of performances and fiddle with the gain and tone controls, thus shaping not only a person's genetic predispositions but his finished personality. However, like most other brand-new research suppositions, this one is a long way from practical application. Although the RNA hypothesis is still subject to serious and considerable doubt in many quarters, such researchers as Dr. Allan L. Jacobson of U.C.L.A. have begun to report findings indicative of RNA memory transfer in rats, and Abbott Laboratories has announced that experimental rats learn "four or five times faster" while being given a drug known to stimulate nucleic-acid production.

The trouble with electrode and direct drug stimulation methods and contemporary brainwashing is the cumbersome size of the human mass, and the diminishing returns to be achieved in any attempt to get the whole world to hold still while you work on it. If, however, genetic preselection and subsequent personality and education-shaping techniques can be introduced into even one generation, then the human race will never be the same. Perhaps it is an awareness of these possibilities (and others which may occur unexpectedly) that makes all this a matter of great concern to scientists as well as to the rest of us. It lends a kind of enigmatic dignity to the reflex contractions of a lowly worm clinging to the edge of its Pyrex laboratory dish. Furthermore, it lends point not only to the words but to the diverse moods expressed by the scientists concerned about the subject.

Dr. Delgado has also said: "Brain research has expanded rapidly in recent years... but this field should attract even more of our intellectual and economic resources. Human behavior, happiness, good and evil are, after all, products of cerebral physiology. In my opinion, it is necessary to shift the center of scientific research from the study and control of natural elements to the analysis and patterning of mental activities. There is a sense of urgency in this redirection because the most important problem of our present age is the

reorganization of man's social relations... the precarious race between intelligent brains and unchained atoms must be won if the human race is going to survive....”

In discussing the reports of his warnings about mind research to the scientists assembled at the A.A.A.S. meeting, Dr. David Krech says: “I want to make it clear that I don't think the scientists should do all the thinking and worrying about it. I think the scientist should take the public into his confidence, and whatever [mutual] solutions come out should be social solutions.”

Dr. McConnell says it in a different way. Having shocked his students with his opening lecture, he leads them through the course and describes the various techniques used. And he ends by telling them:

“Look, we can do these things. We can control behavior. Now, who's going to decide what's to be done? If you don't get busy and tell me how I'm supposed to do it, I'll make up my own mind for you. And then it's too late.”

May 1966

The Politics of Deoxyribonucleic Acid

The recombinant-DNA issue went popular between 7:15 and 7:30 p.m. on Monday, March 7, 1977. Over the past several years a great many national media had carried surveys and think-pieces on the controversy, but Jeremy Rifkin and his People's Business Commission crystallized it for the general public on that night.

The site was the auditorium wing of the National Academy of Sciences, where a three-day forum of distinguished scientific opinion was about to open. The intended subject of discussion was the safety and merit of biological research involving life forms with artificially combined genetic structures. At about 7:15 p.m., members of the People's Business Commission began distributing an alternative agenda for the forum, which was open to the public. Other PBC members – apparently undergraduate types in worn jeans or corduroy suits and sweaters, many carrying shoulder bags – had taken seats inside, just after 7 p.m. “*We shall not, we shall not be cloned / We shall not, we shall not be cloned / Like a tree that's standing by the wa-a-ter / We shall not be cloned!*” they suddenly stood and sang. The TV cameras perked up, swivelled around, and panned into the crowd. Jeremy Rifkin is a short, balding man who radiates energy. He is a graduate of the Wharton School of Economics and holds an MA from the Fletcher School of Diplomacy. He was active in the antiwar movement. He formed the People's Bicentennial Commission in 1971, and in due time transformed it into the People's Business Commission. He writes in periodicals and books on the general subject of radical economics. Rifkin demanded that the entire agenda of the NAS forum be changed to reflect the concerns of his group. The NAS officials, eager to please, agreed to give him five minutes at the beginning of the proceedings and to let his followers participate in discussions from the floor.

The printed Forum agenda represented the NAS's thoughts on how to deal with an intellectual problem. The topics for the opening evening were How Scientists Interact with the Public: Historical Perspective, and Overview of the Research with Recombinant DNA. Other topics over the succeeding

two days included Mapping the Mammalian Genome, The Dangers of Planned or Inadvertent Laboratory Infections and Epidemics and so on. Rifkin's alternative agenda had 10 points. DOES HUMANKIND HAVE THE NECESSARY KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM TO SUCCESSFULLY CIRCUMVENT THE EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS WITHOUT CREATING LONG-TERM AND CATASTROPHIC ECO-DISASTERS? WILL DECISIONS ON THE CREATION OF NEW FORMS OF LIFE BE LEFT TO THE DISCRETION OF INDIVIDUAL SCIENTISTS, BUREAUCRATS AND CORPORATIONS? Etc.

The message was reaching the people. The issue was not scientific. It was political, moral, religious. What might have been an involved, earnest, and perhaps polite discussion on such subtopics as the possible ability of SV 40 to toughen the survival characteristics of *Escherichia coli*.

The scientific facts of recombinant-DNA are complex and readily susceptible to exaggeration. Simplistically put, what has opened an unprecedented sort of controversy is a new research technique that permits transferring genes in a laboratory from one living organism to another, in a process involving the deoxyribonucleic acid present in all cells.

Normal processes of reproduction in nature are simply a means of creating offspring by replicating parental genes. In simple organisms the replication is direct; the organism splits into two identical replicas, or puts out a bud which is in effect the same thing. In higher organisms, such as vertebrate animals, genetic material from the two parents combines to produce a distinct new individual. Every cell of the child contains a packet of genes, which function to control the nature and life-activities of that cell. The cells then cooperate in order to sustain the health of the entire organism. If all goes well someday it will co-mingle a compact package, representing information on its complete genetic structure, with a similar package from the opposite sex. Natural combinations will take place, and a fresh individual will be created. But that fresh individual will contain, faithfully copied, genetic material that it has inherited from every previous ancestor. In the sense that there is a direct chain of replication, every living gene represents immortality.

The carrier of this perpetual message is the DNA double helix, which specifies exactly how each cell will go about its business. In the ordinary course of life, the DNA structure thus assures continuity of species characteristics. The unknowns of genetics still far outnumber the accumulated precise knowns (although the human race has been commercially processing single-celled organisms at least since the invention of beer and leavened bread, cheese, pudding and yogurt. The modern pharmaceuticals industry is

built on these relatively straightforward techniques). But so much more is known today than was known 25 years ago, or even five years ago, that it can be made to sound as if all the secrets of life will lie open next year. Five years ago, for example, Stanley Cohen of Stanford announced a practicable method for transferring genetic information across species. By taking genetic material from one organism, in the form of a DNA fragment, and inserting it into the genetic material of another, it is now possible to create organisms with characteristics they could never have inherited. Once created, these organisms will breed true. DNA recombination is done on single-celled organisms, which reproduce by dividing (that is, which clone).

This is a sensational advance in science. It is a research tool with exciting possibilities for someday defining exactly which genes in a cell do what, something we know almost nothing about now. When it has all been mapped out – not next year, nor next decade; God knows when, possibly – there will be time to start saying that biology understands life. Like any popularization, the preceding summary can be expanded on a more complex level, only to break through into even more complex detail. And each detail in turn may require study of some researcher's entire life's work in order to be understood. Understanding is even harder because of what contending scientists, let alone contentious laymen, have done in talking about these discoveries.

The event that marked the beginning of the controversy over recombinant-DNA within the scientific community occurred in 1971. Paul Berg, at Stanford Medical Center, began an experiment that involved combining genetic material from SV 40, a virus known to cause cancer in monkeys, with *Escherichia coli*, a very common and familiar bacterium. His objective was to find out whether SV 40 cancer can be activated by material from *E. coli*, a process that some cancer researchers suspect may occur in nature. Using a very early recombinant technique, he worked with a standard laboratory *E. coli* strain, K-12. K-12 is a hothouse variety. It has lived away from the real world, in glassware and on a laboratory diet and apart from the thousands of other strains of *E. coli*, for so long that many biologists believe it could not flower in the wild. Tests have been made which seem to substantiate this. Nevertheless, *E. coli* as a genus – as a race – is the symbiotic inhabitant of every creature with a gut. Encounters with unaccustomed local *E. coli* strains are what cause Tourist Trots.

A certain uneasiness cropped up among some scientists who heard about

Berg's experiment. The assertion arose that K-12 *E. coli* with the SV 40 gene might get past laboratory precautions, might survive outside, might enter the ecosystem, might make *E. coli* SV 40 the first virus known – as distinguished from suspected – to cause cancer in humans, and thus might produce an immortal, ineradicable plague.

A similar proposition is applicable to almost any recombinant-DNA experiment if one wants to make it, and became frequently heard in the science community after Cohen's announcement, and an announcement by Herbert Boyer of the University of California, San Francisco, that he might be on to a method of getting *E. coli* to produce insulin. Since *E. coli* is a spectacular multiplier, such a pharmaceutical process could readily meet an increasing world demand for insulin that is expected to produce a shortage in a few more years. But an insulin plague – if such a thing could occur – might be as dangerous as a cancer plague.

Berg was persuaded to drop his experiment and autoclave – pressure cook – his materials, thereby destroying them. More than that, he set up a series of meetings among scientists on recombinant research. The scientific community was on the brink, and then over the brink, of doing something it had never done before. It was submitting to a broad self-examination of whether certain kinds of research should be done, and under what precautions. It was considering whether a scientist's basic research should be limited by the community even if all his training and insight told him there was no danger.

Guidelines were established, during a moratorium on certain kinds of research. These guidelines were adapted and promulgated by the National Institutes of Health, the federal agency whose grants pay for most life-sciences research in the nation's universities. Many scientists were willing to work with guidelines, but were concerned that rules about airlock doors, iodine showers for personnel, air filters and automatic or semi-automatic disinfecting and autoclaving system; would make recombinant research appear more dangerous than they themselves felt it to be. Others felt the guidelines were a sop; that precautions were a sham, and that in any case they were porous to both mechanical and human error, or simple human cussedness. The controversy surfaced in July 1974 with the publication in *Science* magazine of a letter to the Academy, signed by prominent researchers, asking the NAS to conduct a thorough general study. From the appearance of the letter onward, the controversy was accelerating toward the

streets.

Observers often have commented that the science community is parochial. Scientists tend to feel that the way to act on the general public, or on politicians when necessary, is to reason with them by presenting impressive data. Where the data are contested, scientists tend to fall back on their academic credentials and a sense of self-worth that has been nurtured by a system in which a fruitful researcher attains tenure, acquires grants and a staff of assistants, and in effect becomes a contract freelance at a university. Al Vellucci, Mayor of Cambridge, is a different sort of man. Cambridge is one of the oldest American cities. The East Cambridge section, where Alfred Vellucci was born, has saloons where the conversation stops when someone from out of the neighborhood steps inside. Al Vellucci and his East Cambridge neighbors frequently express the opinion that all Cambridge gets from its two great universities, Harvard and MIT, is pollution. Sandra Graham is a black third-generation Cantabridgian, and uses that word. When she was elected to the city council, five years ago, she was on welfare. Now she is in the Massachusetts legislature.

In mid-1976, Sandra Graham received an evening phone call from someone – no one now recalls his name – who introduced himself as a scientist and asked her if she was aware of the serious public dangers posed by a forthcoming P-3 level recombinant-DNA research facility being built at Harvard. Did she know MIT had a P-3 lab at present? Was she aware of the sloppy work habits of laboratory personnel – the tracking into the outside world of pathogenic bacteria and viruses trapped in the hair and clothing, the pouring of biological materials from experiments directly into the city sewers, and housekeeping so untidy that when materials spilled on the floor, the technicians wouldn't even go get a mop to wipe them up? Graham called Vellucci. He had just finished reading an article in the Boston *Phoenix*, a weekly newspaper, on the topic of recombinant-DNA work. It seemed to him that there was a clear and present danger, and he was taking immediate steps to gather informed opinion. The *Phoenix* article also attracted the attention of the Cambridge branch of Science for the People. SFP is another permanent outgrowth of the antiwar movement, like Rifkin's People's Business Commission. In recent years it has concerned itself with hot topics in science with broad social implications, such as the heritability of IQ. The "genetics group" of the Cambridge SFP had about 20 members at that time, and they began calling city council members at home immediately after the *Phoenix*

article broke.

Vellucci called a series of council meetings to be addressed by scientists and others on both sides of the question, and formed a citizens' review board to take testimony and help formulate a Cambridge city ordinance on recombinant research. Meanwhile, the city council enacted a temporary moratorium on all recombinant research within the city limits.

Listening to the parade of distinguished researchers who spoke to the council and the review board reinforced Al Vellucci's entrenched conviction that all scientists are hot for the Nobel prize and will do anything they think will get it for them. It left Sandra Graham, she says, with the suspicion that some sort of recombinant-DNA bug might come crawling up into her toilet.

The citizens' review board, after months of patient listening and an extension of the original six-month moratorium, submitted a report which caused the Cambridge city council to vote, 9-0, to permit certain levels of DNA research under strict regulation. What the NIH calls level P-1 is harmless. P-2 research is at the level of any hospital pathology laboratory, using proven standard precautions, P-4, which would work with organisms adjudged to be highly dangerous in themselves, let alone in recombination, was not even proposed by any Cambridge research institution, and is prohibited. P-3 research is permitted, with safeguards. It is confined to work with organisms adjudged not to be dangerous in themselves.

Sandra Graham says the board decided almost at the outset that since the political clout of the universities would eventually prevail, the question was not whether to permit research but under what circumstances to permit it. A number of councilors, she declares, are "owned" by the universities, and she is deeply disappointed in the board, which was composed of the usual citizen types to be found on most blue-ribbon panels. Daniel Hayes, president of a family heating oil company and chairman of the review board, says that the board came to its unanimous conclusion for different reasons. Some members, he says, felt that the research was inevitable because it is so easy to do that a total prohibition would be unenforceable. Others, he says, were convinced by the scientific merits, particularly after the board was told by epidemiologists that they were generally unconcerned about possible dangers, and were certain that safety measures could protect the public even if there were a dangerous accident in the laboratory.

The recombinant-DNA research debate has split the Cambridge scientific community, representatives of which testified before the city

council and the citizens' review board on both sides of the dispute. Mark Ptashne, a young Harvard biologist, and George Wald, the Nobel laureate in biology, work along the same corridor at Harvard; both were active in the antiwar movement. Now Ptashne is in charge of Harvard's P-3 laboratory, while Wald is a leader of the anti-recombinant forces. Wald says Harvard can't even protect its science buildings against an infestation of Egyptian red ants. Ptashne insists that the ants have been eradicated.

At the NAS forum in Washington, Jeremy Rifkin said, "The real issue we are facing here is the most important issue that humankind has ever had to grapple with." He pointed out that the Forum program listed six pharmaceutical companies among the nine financial supporters of the event, and he asked: "How many of you scientists and the corporate executives of the pharmaceutical companies in this room believe they have the moral right and the authority to proceed on this experimental path before the American people – all 200 million – are fully informed about all – *all*, good and bad – *all* of the long range implications of this research? ...How can a company claim the right to patent a new form of life? What does that mean 10 years from now, if they can patent a new micro-organism today? What does it mean 20 years from now? You ain't seen nothin' yet. The press here, the critics, think that this is a question of the public interest groups versus the scientists. Wait 'til the Protestants, the Jews, and the Catholics, the Methodists, the Presbyterians and the Baptists all over America start to realize the long-range implications of what you gentlemen are doing here tonight!"

Rifkin's group put on a technically standard performance for an activist group. A wire service features writer in the audience said he considered it mediocre as a demonstration, taken in the context of other demonstrations on other topics elsewhere. Nevertheless, he filed a story that called for many more public discussions by citizens' groups concerned with the moral and ethical questions raised. After Rifkin left the podium, he was immediately taken up by electronic media reporters, who began taping extensive question-and-answer sessions along obvious lines, and who began arranging subsequent interviews. The media coverage of the NAS forum, and of Rifkin's interference with it, built day-by-day, and it appeared to be a great media triumph for the forces attempting to politicize the recombinant-DNA issue. Unfortunately for them, however, the Hanafi Muslims chose the last day of the forum to take over three buildings in Washington and to shoot a

young journalist and a Washington city councilman. So at the moment they expected their greatest triumph, the forces of politicization found that their conduit to the great lay public had disappeared.

April 1977

Introduction: “Walk to the World”

My first three fiction sales occurred almost simultaneously; “Walk to the World” for Lester del Rey’s *Space Science Fiction*, “The High Purpose” to *Astounding*, and “Protective Mimicry”, which I had called “The Frightened Tree”, to *Galaxy*. They all sold in March, 1952, and the first two appeared in the Fall of 1952; “Protective Mimicry” was ushered into print by me in my 1953 role as Horace Gold’s assistant editor. “The High Purpose” was pretty badly chopped up, to my mind, by *ASF*’s copyediting rules, which operated without respect to sentence structure or phrasing rhythm. They were purely mechanical, intended to ensure there’d be no hanging words alone at the tops or bottoms of columns, and that the story fit a layout exactly – i.e., symmetrically. This still happens, and it’s one of the things that writers are not steeled against in Creative Writing courses.

“Walk to the World”, which I have deliberately not re-read because I was very fond of it, seems in memory to be a pretty good story. It had a point to make, it made it at a decent rate of speed while travelling a reasonably straight course, and the point had some applicability to the human condition. I tend to feel that the presence of space travel in a story can have only two valid functions: to tell a story in which people are fundamentally changed by technology, or to tell a story in which a statement about human nature is made more valid by showing it as irrelevant to the level of technology. For “technology”, you can as readily substitute “social science” or any other factor which ostensibly transforms the protagonists’ world, but perhaps is just one of those Earl Scheib spray jobs the world tries on in its commitment to progress.

These days, I tell people science fiction is drama made more relevant by social extrapolation, which is the same thing said more cryptically. That’s one reason I still like “Walk to the World”, because that’s what it says, too, straight out of the back of my mind, which is considerably more useful than the front part. And I don’t want to spoil that opinion by wading through all the cliché writing about tough young naval officers and wise, home-making ex-secretaries, which is what quite a bit of science fiction was about in the

1940s when the front part of my mind thought it was learning.

“Walk to the World” came to me when I was twenty, and melancholy, and walking through the night fogs of Long Island with no desire to go home and take another lesson. I didn’t know I was going to write it; about two o’clock in the morning I got to my typewriter and began hitting keys. After a while, there it was, quite different from “The High Purpose”, which was the twelfth or twentieth draft of a story first written when I was seventeen, or “Protective Mimicry”, which was done to meet a writing class requirement at Columbia. Both of them are one-line gags. They persist in my memory only for the sake of the slim brunette who was reading my manuscripts on the beaches when I was a fraction less than one-and-twenty. A word that Pat invented is in “Mimicry”, and an image she liked is in “Purpose”. The rest is dross, so remember early in your career to build in some warm associations.

In case you haven’t noticed yet, I was a four pack a day man while in my twenties; I smoked Pall Malls, if I remember correctly, and my father, the colonel, smoked Players Navy Cut. You can make of that what you will; I certainly have. Smoking turned out to be less fun than it’s supposed to be, and I don’t do it any more. Its use as a symbol in “Walk” is not only transparent, it’s clumsy, and I wish I’d thought of something else. But in many another early story – in fact, in every one of my early stories – the protagonists smoked, because they could grind out the butts angrily, or pause to light up while I was transitioning the reader from one statement to the next, or puff lassitudinously, or hide their expressions behind a swirling blue cloud... I am flat-out amazed that Jim Blish never presented me with a count of how many matches I’d burned in the first 100,000-odd words of my career, and I did once write an article about it for Harlan’s *Dimensions*.

Even so, it’s interesting that the smoking in “Walk” does not primarily have these pseudotechnical functions, and is overtly symbolic as a thing in itself. I never write any story whose key scenes have not first played, in full detail, in my head, and I never bring out the box full of thumb rules and measuring sticks to apply to a piece of writing until after spontaneity has failed to produce a smooth narrative flow. Nevertheless, I’ve written a lot of wordage with my technical head fully activated, and I’ve written some – not much – that looked O.K. by all the rules even if the back of my head was holding its nose. (My attitude in those cases is that if your subconscious nevertheless doesn’t have the wit to tell you what’s wrong, hollering crap gets it no special points in Heaven.)

Most particularly with short pieces written after long walks or rides, something special happens, and the entire story emerges in one sitting, complete with good title and unexpectedly apt final paragraph, as fast as I can type it all out. Oh, I'm not in any mystical trance, mind you, but I don't notice I ought to get up and go to the bathroom, either. I assume the resulting prose is organized and coherent only because I decided at eleven that I was going to be a writer, and spent ten years hunched over typewriters before I sold *Word One*. Certain reflexes must have built themselves during that time.

The phenomenon still occurs, despite 25 years in which I have also written a lot of nonfiction which does require meticulous preplanning, and a high proportion of long fiction. It simply can't occur over the entire length of a novel; I'd die of gout. I'm happy to say that every so often, unpredictably, but usually out of some well of melancholy that sends me out on my feet or behind a wheel, I'll get the feeling. Or I won't get the feeling; I'll be working at the machine, under pressure, and sentence by absolutely certain sentence, without ever knowing exactly what's coming next, I'll have the scene with Martino and the tractor in *Who?*, or the Arthurian scene in *Rogue Moon*, or the migratory bird sequence and then, weeks later, the related poem, in *Michaelmas*. Or the joke about the aardvark and Shirley Temple Black.

That's why I still like "Walk to the World", as long as I don't reread it. It has these warm associations.

Summer 1977

SF Capsule Reviews 1978-1983

There are, of course, seasons among the stars. The supposed void of outer space in fact teems with tiny molecules swirling about in response to photon winds and gamma-ray showers. Over the millennia, we are told, these settle out and become the seeds of life. But such cosmic rhythms demand a very long patience indeed. Not many SF readers, paradoxically, are thus tempered.

Fortunately, the paperback publishers, running on their busier terrestrial clocks, have wasted no time. The racks are freshly in bloom with something for every science-fictional taste that may have been a-nurturing among the cabin malaises of dark February.

Those who have been waiting for C.J. Cherryh's next tale of high adventure and swashed bucklers have a particular treat awaiting them with her *Well of Shiuan*. Not only is it the pure science fantasy quill, with its roustings of mailed warriors and its tense deeds among the battlements of fortresses never erected on this Earth, but it is the promised sequel to her 1976 first novel, *Gate of Ivrel*.

The well, like the gate, is a spacetime passageway between worlds. Each world is inhabited by humans, but also by the humanoid ancient *qujal*, who are very cold of heart, and possessed of certain secret ways. Through the gates, world after weary world, comes blonde Morgaine, the enigmatic warrior woman, followed by outlaw princeling Nhi Vanye i Chya. She carries the fantastic sword which can swirl armies into oblivion and, more important, unlock and then shut the gates forever behind her.

Cherryh is the best writer of this sort of adventure tale since the earliest days of C.L. Moore and the prime of Leigh Brackett. Morgaine and Vanye fans will be fascinated by this new skein of development in the relationship between the two, as well as by the setting of her tale, so much like *Ivrel* and yet so different. Any reader who is willing to become lost in an alternate reality will find much to enjoy, and will take pleasure in Cherryh's explicit promise of further stories.

Fans of superscience – casually definable as the almost abandoned art of proposing some fundamental scientific breakthrough whose subsequent rapid technological applications allow a few right-minded physicists and engineers to make overnight sweeping changes in how things are – will have an

appropriately breathless time with James P. Hogan's *The Genesis Machine*. There has been nothing like this in SF since the days when John W. Campbell, Jr., was writing *The Mightiest Machine* and *The Moon Is Hell* out of the boundless technocratic optimism of the 1930s. Forty years later, the sub-genre is back again, appropriately at the hands of a gifted amateur with limited storytelling qualifications. Some will love it a great deal.

It was Hal Clement, more than any other SF writer, who made something more sophisticated and more literate out of superscience. He did it particularly with such novels as *Mission of Gravity*, which introduced the courageous, resourceful Mesklinite race. Eighteen-inch centipedes accustomed to fearful pressures and unthinkably high gravity on their home world, the seafaring Captain Barlennan and his crew of traders are among the most "human" characters in science fiction *qua* science fiction. In the newly reissued 1971 sequel, *Star Light*, Barlennan and his confreres are under contract to humans, exploring the giant world Dhrawn and encountering meticulously worked-out perils in the process. While not as satisfactory a story as *Mission*, this one nevertheless meets a rigorous standard.

Martin Caidin, the technology popularizer and occasional novelist – *Marooned*, *Cyborg* (which led to the *Six Million Dollar Man* TV series), etc. – has now produced *Aquarius Mission*, clearly an idea for a pilot film. As essentially implausible as *Cyborg*, but, if possible, worse written, this book will probably sell a great many copies. Its deep undersea race of essentially humanoid people – they have gills, but somehow that makes the females only more attractive to the crew of the *U.S.S. Sea Trench*, and webbed hands which couldn't possibly work – is a ridiculous supposition. That has never stopped Caidin from selling in the past, and I am prepared to bet on his track record again.

Night's Black Agents, a collection of Fritz Leiber's short work, is an outstanding bargain. Leiber is famous for being neglected. That is to say, periodically a critic discovers that this still-active master storyteller has been consistently ahead of his time over a very long career in SF. What matters truly is that, whether as a traditional fantasist, or a sword-and-sorcery writer, or an artist of "straight" science fiction, Leiber is unfailingly entertaining on a very high level. An updated, larger version of an early collection originally published by a small specialist house, *Night's Black Agents* is a sampler of Leiber at his best, and of the best that SF can attain in many of its modes.

The Best of L. Sprague de Camp is forthcoming in May and is available

now as a Nelson Doubleday hardback from the SF Book Club. A triumphant collection from SF's best-educated humanist, this selection of de Camp's witty, very literate fantasy and science fiction tells you, among other things, precisely what sort of firearm to select when on safari for Tyrannosaurus Rex, and why webbed hands are useless for swimming. (A mermaid demonstrates.)

For students of literature, and academicians generally, Oxford's second edition of H. Bruce Franklin's *Future Perfect: American Science Fiction of the Nineteenth Century* is a meticulous anthology. Taken from the short works of Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, London, Bierce, Washington Irving and others, it is buttressed as a piece of scholarship by Dr. Franklin's introductory essays. He sees science fiction as an evaluation of technology and an attempt to relate it to the remainder of human existence. Some scholars speak of a broader SF, containing a narrower science fiction among other sub-genres, and some of them might apportion some of Franklin's selections to those other segments of the spectrum. But this is a highly respected study, and obviously a viable one.

Suppose an alien spaceship set down in medieval England and carelessly left its landing ramp lowered. Suppose a successful charge up that ramp by mounted knights outraged by the demons and dragons inhabiting this mobile keep. What then? Spacefaring crusaders? Interstellar settlements by stouthearted peasant folk and their liege lords, innocent of internal combustion but operators of an awesome starfaring device? Why not? Why not, indeed, and for a lusty, brawling, and in the end magnificent account, see Poul Anderson's *The High Crusade*.

*The Sword of Shannara**, now being issued in standard news rack size, spent much of 1977 setting sales records in various other formats. The present edition retains the lush Hildebrandt illustrations, which add a nice decorative touch to this tale of elves and trolls, dwarves, the evil Skull-Bearers, and the ultimate struggle over the magical sword.

5 March 1978

* By Terry Brooks. [Ed.]

Here on planet Earth, the summer SF yields have been spotty. The publishers, some of them naive to farming the new lands of "sci-fi", sowed bravely – or at least with a generous sweep. Doubtless they were hoping that if they flung haphazardly enough, they might hit a fertile patch with something. So,

interspersed among the solid hectares of the canny old agronomes, there are those curious plots of raggedy stuff... a proportion of dry chaff, some growth that might even be wheat, and quite an amount of hybrid corn.

Regard, for instance, *Definitely Maybe* by the brothers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, one of Macmillan's "Best of Soviet SF" series. The Strugatskys are among the most Westernized sources of Eastern European SF, and normally their work thus rings familiarly upon the ears of the American aficionado. But competitive pressure from Poland's Stanislaw Lem has apparently sent them back in search of their roots. The result in this case is a story that combines the gloomy desperation of Yevgeny Zamyatin's seminal *We* with a Lem-like satirical strain expressed as slapstick humor.

The proposition is that the universe can sense attempted reversals of entropy – the grand thanatopsical running-down of all energy to the state of matter at Absolute Zero. The Strugatskys postulate that the universe wants it that way. Accordingly, whenever intelligent life begins making fundamental discoveries about how the universe works – discoveries which might have anti-entropic practical applications – the universe frustrates them. So far, so good, but by faking liquor orders at the grocery, sending nubile "cousins" to overwrought savants whose wives are on vacation, and causing mature trees to appear overnight in barren courtyards?

Zamyatin – a contemporary of H. G. Wells and, oddly enough, a spiritual father of Ayn Rand – finds his best Western reflection in George Orwell. What was passable in the early chaotic days of the 20th century in Russia, however, is not likely now. Nobody who lives there is going to publish a version of *1984* these days. Lem, a cantankerous and very self-aware personality, writes satires on human folly... carefully out of context. So it is perhaps inevitable that the Strugatskys' self-conscious universe is made frivolous rather than impressive, and that the principal satiric scenes feature drunken comic scientists declaiming at each other like dialecticians rather than like even broadly cartooned investigators of real things. *Definitely Maybe* treats a grand theme slightly. Dedicated thought by the reader will, with patience, reveal the book that might have been written. The human struggle against total obliteration has inspired more than one work of genuine SF literature. The theme awaits proper satirical treatment because the human presumptuousness involved in any contention with infinity is, in truth, good for a gargantuan laugh, as readily as it is for a tear. Few, however, attempt that ambitious, mode, preferring the clichéd up-and-at-'em treatment usually

given it by conventional SFnists. A pity that circumstance – or something – frustrated the Strugatskys here.

Donald R. Bensen writes more about a little less, and the result is literate, witty, and – to the extent of the potential profundity of the idea – profound.

Bensen has for years been a major SF editor. Who knew he had such a novel in him? *And Having Writ...* is, like the Strugatskys', not so much a genre story as it is a “mainstream” entertainment that non-fans can grasp as much as dedicated SF readers can. And in this case, the grasp is worth the reach.

The basic idea is simple. The crew of an interstellar spaceship finds itself about to crash on an uncharted planet. There is no hope. One of the four individuals aboard, however, has a device which enables him – on a one-time basis – to throw the vessel into an alternate reality in which it does not crash. So, while the “real” ship goes on to become the Tunguska meteorite, the alternate vessel manages to land relatively undamaged, sinking off the shore of San Francisco in the last months of Theodore Roosevelt’s administration.

The remainder of the story follows the adventures of the very well characterized humanoid aliens as they attempt to boost Earth’s technology to a level which will allow, them to recover and repair their ship. But what Benson does with this is to introduce Roosevelt, Taft, Thomas Alva Edison, H.G. Wells, King Edward, Kaiser Wilhelm and Czar Nicholas as characters, while the aliens hurry about the world, secretly trying to start World War I. They are marvelous characters all – in particular Wells, but also Edison who, as America awakens to the potential technological bounty the aliens represent, supplants Taft as the presidential nominee, wins the election, and then reveals a crusty, mean-tempered side to his personality. He is, in fact, the villain, selfishly sequestering the aliens and sending relentless agents to recapture them when they escape with the aid of an archetypical drunken reporter.

The resulting hugger-mugger chase scenes deliberately owe more to Verne than they do to Wells. But the quality of the denouement is notably higher than the level of mere adventure writing, and the offhand observations tossed out by the aliens as they career, around the world are the observations of a first-rate commentator on matters human. Highly, and delightedly, recommended.

Frederick Turner’s *A Double Shadow* is one of those unfortunate things

that happen when an outsider steps in to show everyone what can really be done with the SF medium. A British poet and a teacher (of something unspecified) at Kenyon College, Turner is the author of several books of poetry and “two critical works”, according to the publishers. Like many academics before him, Turner enters SF dragging behind him various culture-tags, secondhand insights, high-flown prose verging on the euphuistic, and satiric conventions he is sure were never heard of by readers of *Captain Future*. He is perhaps right, but the point is that he is addressing SF readers of 1978.

I’d venture to say that he in turn has never heard of Stanton A. Coblentz, the poet, who in the 1930s, wrote better stories for the SF pulps than this. Like Coblentz, Turner has postulated an outré society (in Turner’s case, on far-future Mars) which serves simply as a convenient distorting mirror for observations on temporae and mores. Sophomoric.

The Two of Them, by Joanna Russ, in contrast to Turner’s work is a knowledgeable attempt to serve a real and intelligent audience, and although it has a major fault for some readers, it is a creation from the hands and mind of one who knows what the conventions of the genre are, and what might be done to exceed them fruitfully.

The story concerns itself with the developing sympathy between galactic secret agent Irene Waskiewicz, once recruited as a youngster from a small town on Earth, and Zubeydeh, the rebellious pubescent daughter of an Islamic culture among the stars. Both persons are about to become organically different from what they’ve always been. Irene, increasingly disillusioned with manipulating less powerful cultures, differs very little from Zubeydeh in that respect. She fights the realization that her interim supposed maturity has been nothing more than dressing up in Mommy’s clothes. In that reluctance to attain full self-awareness lies only a partial victory for the two of them.

Russ is a master crafter. She has lately taken to attacking the reader with prose devices whose major purpose is to keep the author interested, but unfortunately here these do not actively occlude comprehension. Russ is also an intelligent, feeling person, and what might seem a slight theme is in her hands a powerful composition whose emotional nuances raise this book well above the level of the cloak-and-rayknife fictions which it incidentally satirizes. But readers who do not accept *imprimis* that all men are beasts and all authoritarian establishments are father figures will have a little difficulty

falling in with Russ's mood. Still and all, the stridency of her previous *Those About To...* is muted here, and consequently the feminist orientation of this much rounder story is capable of its potential power and its full freight of reasonability.

Poul Anderson's *The Earth Book of Stormgate*, at \$10.95 and 381 pages, appears a massive value. It would be equally massive in lesser physical dimensions. Anderson is a storyteller equal to C.S. Forester or Nevil Shute by any objective measure. Because he has chosen to be an SFnist – while his occasional works of historical fiction demonstrate that he is without living peer as a more usual sort of storyteller – he has largely confined his audience to those who can also follow the scientifically grounded speculations on which so much of his writing is based. The more treat for those of us who can make the attempt.

Ostensibly compiled by the winged Ythri race of Stormgate, this book is actually a collection of Anderson's Polesotechnic League tales, part of a complex future history he has been writing for a quarter century. Included is his complete novel, *The Man Who Counts*, which introduced Nicholas van Rijn, a character whom Horatio Hornblower would have played whist with and relied on.

Berkley/Putnam has been conducting a long-term effort to give us as much Anderson as it can, an astute marketing decision. In this volume, which contains 11 stories in addition to the novel, the product turns out to be pure unadulterated intelligent enjoyment. Anderson's history has not yet occurred, and his characters can not yet have lived. But the work belies reason; for readers of the rousing tale well-told, this is the genuine, the hand-grown, the texture and the flavor as remembered.

3 September 1978

Fortunately, 1979 begins with a superlative crop of science fiction books. Certainly *Tomorrow and Beyond* (Workman, \$19.95 hardcover, \$9.95 paper) is a masterful treat for the eyes and the imagination. Editor Ian Summers, executive art director at Ballantine Books, has put together the definitive book of recent SF full-color art.

The 158 pages of this 9-by-12-inch volume display hundreds of excellently reproduced paintings by scores of science fiction and fantasy artists. Much of the work is in full-page plates; the remainder is grouped up in smaller sizes, but all of it almost hypnotic in its ability to evoke the mood

of wonder.

Summers bows to a few of the older names in SF illustration, from the days of cheap ink, warped presses and cheap rates. Their work here is shown properly for perhaps the first time. But the major emphasis is on the newer artists exploiting the new prosperity that is making SF a major graphic medium.

Joe Haldeman is best known for his novels – *The Forever War*, *Mindbridge*, and *All My Sins Remembered*. His new story collection, *Infinite Dreams* (St. Martin's, \$8.95), may come as a very pleasant shock to those who never knew how well he can handle shorter forms. Ranging from the disquiet of "Tricentennial" to the chug-a-lug pacing of "The Mazel Tov Revolution", or "All the World in a Mason Jar", this new book showcases one of SF's outstanding newer talents.

Haldeman knows a lot of ways to entertain you and strike a responsive chord in your intelligence. Any writer who can produce stories like "Counterpoint" or "To Howard Hughes: A Modest Proposal" is a writer to cherish.

It's not too late to find a copy of *Empire* (Berkley Windhover, \$19.95 hardcover, \$9.95 paper). This is Samuel R. Delany and Howard V. Chaykin's super-comic book original, scripted by Delany and painted in the round by Chaykin, using a 9-by-12 format and well reproduced color. Splashy, exciting, told in the typical comic book hurly-burly manner, *Empire* (not to be confused with the early Asimov novel) dashes from panel to panel with rare verve.

Some of the plot transitions are a trifle abrupt, and it seems characteristic of this kind of story that the brave revolutionaries overthrow the interstellar oppressors rather easily when all is said and done. But the saying and the doing are first-class.

Fans of Robert A. Heinlein, and all appreciators of the pithy saying and the pragmatic philosophy, will respond with delight to *The Notebooks of Lazarus Long*, illuminated by D.F. Vassallo (Berkley trade paperback \$4.95).

Calligrapher and illuminator Vassallo has made suitable for framing or contemplation, or both, such useful aphorisms as "Always Store Beer in a Dark Place" and "Taxes are not Levied for the Benefit of the Taxed", or "Never Appeal to a Man's 'Better Nature'. He may not Have One. Invoking his Self-interest gives you more Leverage." Lazarus Long, of course, is Heinlein's immortal character who has wended his way through several tales,

obviously acquiring and expressing distilled wisdom.

While not quite up to the standards of H.L. Mencken or Mike Royko, Long makes a thought-provoking and totally irreverent commentator. Anyone who has said: “A Poet who Reads his Verse in Public may have Other Nasty Habits” can’t be all bad.

Some reservations have to precede any general endorsement of *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (Mayflower, \$16.95)*. Another 9-by-12 and very pretty book, dressed up with many color illustrations, this “reference” guide to SF does an excellent job of reviewing the history of the genre.

* Consultant editor Robert Holdstock; a 1978 coffee-table book, not to be confused with the 1979 *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* edited by Peter Nicholls. [Ed.]

It will certainly give any new reader a coherent view of where it all came from and where it might be going. But it reflects, single-mindedly, the theoretical orientations of the British SFists who are largely responsible for its productions. By and large, their traditions are somewhat different from those in the U.S., which experienced the 1940s “Golden Age” directly, instead of in hindsight after the end of World War II restored access to American pulp magazines.

A persistent over-readiness to vilify the pulps marks British SF thinking, and thus loses breadth of concept. But there have been many worse attempts to give a panoramic view of SF, and not too many better ones.

14 January 1979

The packaging on Phyllis Eisenstein’s *Sorcerer’s Son* (Ballantine/Del Rey, \$1.95) is good enough, but what’s inside is not your standard heroic fantasy novel; it’s gentle, beautiful, and moving. If young Cray were to succeed in finding his longed-for father, he would not actually have found him. And if he did, he wouldn’t like to know it. This story’s pages turn not because of its plot-events but because the development of the emotional ties between the reader and Cray, and Gildrum the fire-demon and the wan mistress of Castle Spinweb.

Speaking of black holes, a new anthology by Jerry Pournelle (*Black Holes*, Fawcett Crest, \$1.95), will tell you everything factual and fictional you might care to know about them. The many short stories come from top writers in the field, or from people eligible for that status. The facts come from Pournelle himself, who is not only a best-selling author but a fully

qualified science writer. Appropriate dashes of humor enliven the book's tone. All in all, a most satisfactory volume.

Yargo, by Jacqueline Susann (Bantam, \$2.50), is the novel the author could not sell in 1956. It is "a space-age love story and romantic adventure set on Earth and exotic distant planets". By now you Jacqueline Susann fans – what are you doing reading this column? – will have savored it. Marc Jaffe, Bantam's president and editor-in-chief, has said it "thoroughly reflects the romanticism of the young Susann and is written in a style inimitably her own". Those of you who have not yet read it are thus tactfully warned it's awful.

27 May 1979

It was once fashionable to say that the novelette – the compressed, simplified plot of a novel, told in a quarter of a novel's wordage – was the "natural form" of science fiction. That was also back in the days when SF was often described as "a literature of ideas". What this meant was that "ideas" were implicitly defined as notions for interesting opening situations and the ingenious plot twists that followed them.

By those standards, thoughtful thematic development and characterization did not stem from "ideas"; only plot devices contained "ideas". That makes the same kind of sense it makes to buy a suit for the sake of the free coathanger.

Several consecutive years featuring the appearance of a large number of very good SF novels have pretty much put the kibosh on attempts to stuff the genre into a straitjacket. In fact, we've since gone through a spell in which the conventional wisdom was that short-length SF was dead or dying. I don't imagine it was ever even mildly indisposed. But what has happened to it, for whatever reason, is that the ideas are now visible where they belong. They're in the thinking which leads to rounded, frequently perceptive, often lively short stories and novelettes displaying a diversity of approaches and a high general standard of intelligent entertainment.

A very good anthology that illustrates the point is *Universe 9*, edited by Terry Carr (Doubleday, \$7.95). The Universe series has always presented the best original SF stories Carr could buy at his rather good rates, but this latest may be the best in the series.

There's a little of everything – Bob Shaw's "Frost Animals", a grisly and unfailingly ingenious SF murder mystery; Paul David Novitski's

“Nuclear Fission”, a highly literate story about the breakdown of family life in the not too distant future; Gregory Benford’s “Time Shards”, a technology jape; Marta Randall’s “The Captain and the Kid”, a piece of freewheeling characterization; “Chicken of the Tree”, a marvelously insane piece of work by new writer Juleen Brantingham, and four other stories each different from any of the others.

There’s very little similarity of styles or orientations. You’ll doubtless like some stories more than others, but I’m pretty sure you’ll like the book.

The same thing can be said for Donald A. Wollheim’s *The 1979 Annual World’s Best SF* (DAW Books, \$2.25), the most prestigious of the several annual “best” re-print anthologies. Gathering from a broad set of sources (*Universe 8* in one case), Wollheim and his assistant, Art Saha, have included C.J. Cherry’s poignant “Cassandra”, Greg Bear’s “Scattershot”, whose opening sentence is “The Teddy Bear spoke excellent Mandarin”; James Tiptree Jr.’s “We Who Stole the Dream”, which makes moody thematic sense of an action plot, and seven other top-flight stories, including John Varley’s “The Persistence of Vision”, which is not simply among the best SF of the past year but a candidate for literary permanence.

New Voices II, edited by George R.R. Martin (Jove, \$1.75), is part of a series reprinting stories by recent nominees for or winners of the annual John W. Campbell award for best new writer. This volume contains five novelettes from Lisa Tuttle, Spider Robinson, Jesse Miller, Guy Snyder and Thomas Monteleone. Tuttle’s “The Hollow Man” is superb; Miller is a writer who cannot tell any story conventionally, and something similar is true of Robinson. As far as I’m concerned, this volume is marred by the inclusion of Monteleone’s “The Dancer in the Darkness”. I think Monteleone is subliterate and this story is an overdrawn, bathetic bore, but it did receive a Nebula award nomination. Even if I’m correct, that’s only one outright clinker out of 24 stories in three books.

Much of the energy in any literature derives from short-length work in which novices try their sometimes very strong wings and mature practitioners get back into contact with the joys of thinking deep because they cannot ramble on at length. I think maybe SF is a literature.

Major paperback bargains of the month are represented by re-prints of these classic novels: Hal Clement’s *Mission of Gravity* (Ballantine/Del Rey, \$1.75) and *Needle* (Avon, \$1.95) and Fritz Leiber’s *Gather, Darkness!* (\$1.95), all three of them part of the basic library of SF.

Other goodies are paperback re-print editions of Anne McCaffrey's *The White Dragon* (Ballantine/Del Rey, \$2.25), Poul Anderson's omnibus *The Earth Book of Stormgate* (Berkley, \$2.25), and Frederik Pohl's memoir, *The Way the Future Was* (Ballantine/Del Rey, \$1.95).

13 June 1979

Meanwhile, let me recommend *Windows* by D.G. Compton (Berkley/Putnam, \$9.95). Compton, a British author with a very high reputation in our ghetto, postulates a future in which a TV sob-story reporter has had his eyes exchanged for wireless video cameras and is thus very deft in doing intimate documentaries.

After quietly, gently giving his audience a closeup interview with a terminal cancer victim, he finally gets up the resolve to short-out his eyes, and at that point the novel begins. The story is about how the now-blind reporter's world reacts to his insult to its tastes, and how he and his divorced wife try to endure through it long enough to rebuild a life with their young son.

It's a very good, not quite superb book which gets increasingly better as literature after some rather sudsy writing toward the beginning. Of course, one mustn't mention literature in connection with genre fiction, but if you had to bet on which of the three preceding works actually makes meaningful, effective contact with the human condition, and might even be around for a few years, I know where I'd put my money.

* The earlier part of this column, excerpted in *Beyond the Outposts*, dealt with Doris Lessing's *Shikasta* and Robie Macauley's *A Secret History of Time to Come*. [Ed.]

And I'd devote a little more to George Alec Effinger's *Heroics* (Doubleday, \$7.95), a kind of sequel to his *What Entropy Means to Me*. In a far future world, Irene, an 82-year-old Kentucky lady, wanders on foot in search of fabled California, across the unending Teflon plain that stretches from Dubuque to the Rockies. If James Branch Cabell had never lived, Effinger would be unique as a creative artist; as it is, he comes close. Some people are just better suited to SF than others.

22 October 1979

Here are some unusual and unusually good science fiction books.

One of the most impressive picture books in a long time is *Alien*

Landscapes, edited by Robert Holdstock and Malcolm Edwards (Mayflower, hardcover and paperback). Measuring 11 by 11 inches in the perfect-bound paperback version, this volume lavishly and in nicely engraved color depicts famous SF locales: Anne McCaffrey's dragon-decked Pern; Hal Clement's super-heavy Mesklin; James Blish's anti-gravity-equipped Scranton, PA, tearing free of the bedrock and taking flight in a stunning John Harris painting that is nearly in Dolby stereo.

Other landscapes dear to the heart of the aficionado are Arthur C. Clarke's Rama, Frank Herbert's Arrakis, Isaac Asimov's Trantor, Larry Niven's Ringworld and several more.

Holdstock edited the text; Edwards is the art director. The artists, in addition to Harris and Edwards, include Jim Burns, Roger and Linda Garland, Tony Roberts, Terry Oakes and Bob Fowke – many of England's best.

Each seems particularly well suited to his chosen milieu. Roberts's Mesklinite vessel forging through its seas puts one in mind just enough of a Japanese woodcut; Fowke's Hothouse world, from Brian Aldiss, is steaming and green, green, green.

The best SF novella of the year is contained in Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's *Far Rainbow: The Second Invasion from Mars* (Macmillan), a two-story volume.

"Far Rainbow" is a straightforward, at first deceptively calm account of the events on the last day of a total planetary disaster. Somebody has made a gigantic technological mistake, and the entire surface of the colonized world of Rainbow is disintegrating. The population – technicians, scientists, administrators, schoolteachers, schoolchildren – must be evacuated aboard totally inadequate transport.

That's the plot outline. The depth of insight into human behavior and motivation, the sure depiction, the deft choice of scenes and dialogue exchanges – those are what tell you some powerful things about human beings. We prove to be rather more admirable underneath than one might usually believe, but we retreat only stubbornly and complainingly into that last-ditch position.

The other story is Gogolesque satire in the mode of the Strugatsky brothers' 1976 novel *Definitely Maybe*. Having failed to conquer the Earth with heat rays in the H.G. Wells classic *War of the Worlds*, the Martians have returned with cash, gradually suborning all human dignity.

A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction, edited by Baird Searles *et al.* (Avon), is a pretty good reader's guide to all branches of modern speculative fiction, which means it's the best there is. Scores of SF bylines are represented by thumbnail descriptions of their work, and each such entry suggests other writers with assertedly similar orientations.

There's also a reading list of books for a basic collection, a brief history of the field as it flourished in its specialized magazines from the 1920s onward, plus several other useful features. Chatty and idiosyncratic, wide open to contrary opinion, but hardly ever questionable in its facts, this is a handy starter kit for the SF newcomer.

Schrödinger's Cat by Robert Anton Wilson (Pocket) is that metaphysical creature which can neither exist nor not exist. Wilson, former Playboy editor and co-author of the Illuminatus series, here presents us with a book cast as two mutually exclusive novels by somebody else, containing a character named either Robert Anton Wilson or Robert Anson Wilson.

For those who will settle for nothing less than speculation on the very existence of existence and who admire rapid-fire wit and sly educated humor, this is definitely the thing.

Finally, for your sword-and-sorcery fan, try Victor Besaw's *The Alien* (Fawcett), in which Godranec the Nyarlethu, abducted as a child, eventually finds his way home in an epic flight from human oppression. Pointy-eared, horned and chunky, Godranec nevertheless makes a highly acceptable hero figure for human readers, while the humans make villains nasty enough so that we know they're not really meant to be taken seriously, or, perhaps, well, uh...

6 January 1980

Consider Roger Zelazny – bright, charming, educated beyond the norm, uncommonly articulate, above-average inventive, and a little bit nuts. A magic formula for a major science fiction writer, and Zelazny embodies it with grace, most of the time. At other times, as in his Amber series about the nine fantastic princes, conception can outrun accomplishments. But his successes...

They range from the highly attractive to the stunning. Somewhere in the middle of that range is his latest, *Roadmarks* (Ballantine/Del Rey, \$8.95).

Assume a superhighway that runs through time rather than space. An actual roadway whose exit and entrance ramps are sometimes disguised as

country lanes and obscure turnoffs, or sections of paving closed for construction. Assume travelers, most of them headed upstream but some of them able to loop backward and dart on and off the highway.

Then there's Red Dorakeen with his pickup truck, a legend in his own nontime, running guns to the battle of Marathon. And hunted not only by the highway patrol but also by a succession of assassins, one of whom is a destruction machine left by an interstellar race. They may be doing it for his own good.

I will tell you little more. If the concept intrigues you, you need no more. If it doesn't, well, there really isn't much one can say, is there?

The thing about SF is that it's always potentially literate. Zelazny, for instance, is the intellectual if not the chronological peer of Theodore Sturgeon, which makes him the younger brother of Ray Bradbury and the nephew of figures such as John Collier and Lord Dunsany. The lineage is clearly traceable.

These are all artists whose minds engage more of the universe than is encompassed within the simple action plot. As a result, although a work like *Roadmarks* is liable to drop in a scene featuring combat between a dragon and a dinosaur, it may very well have its wry reasons for doing so. You get a little hint of that from the hero's having a computerized companion named Flowers; he's a book called *Fleurs du Mal*, and most of the "time" he drives the pickup.

For the visually orientated there's *Pile* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$7.95), a large-paged thin volume crammed with intricate pen drawings by Mike Wilks, illustrating an epic poem by Brian Aldiss.

Most SF poetry is still doggerel, although there's a reason to hope. However, Aldiss, educated in English universities and equipped by nature with a mordant wit, knows his classics and keeps a coherent saturnine view of the human condition. *Pile* traces the last days of the great ultimate megalopolis, the downfall of Prince Scart in all his overweening pride, and his ultimate transfiguration.

The meticulous and eye-bending artwork is no more delicately shaded than Aldiss's saga. It's a kind of "Pilgrim's Retrogression" or, more accurately, a strong attempt at "Paradise Won". And it's a very pretty book.

On the other hand, there's Richard C. Meredith's Timeliner trilogy, which has just been published over three successive months in paperback. The volumes are called *At the Narrow Passage*; *No Brother, No Friend*, and

Vestiges of Time. They're from Playboy Press at \$1.95 each, and they have no redeeming social value whatsoever. They are in fact terrible as literature. But they swing.

Meredith's hero is a mercenary soldier hired by the Krith – a mysterious, repulsive-looking race that can cross time sideways, and act on various timelines in an attempt to change the future. In other words, it may be 1880 on the Christian calendar, but in some probable worlds the Carthaginians beat Rome or the Albigenians won their theological dispute, or the Saxons settled America.

It is a running gunfight across intriguing scenery, with time out for sex and some absolutely impenetrable ratiocination about how time works and what the Kriths really want. But, by golly, while it's not as good in its way as, for instance, vintage Keith Laumer, it has its charms, and who says there aren't times when you profit from throwing your brain into Idle?

Let me also recommend *The Best of New Dimensions*, edited by Robert Silverberg (Pocket, \$2.30); *The Science Fictional Solar System* (Harper & Row, \$11.96), edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin Harry Greenberg and Charles G. Waugh; and *The 13 Crimes of Science Fiction* (Doubleday, \$12.50) by the same trio. These are three outstanding reprint fiction anthologies, each very individual in its own way, all together offering a very good slice-through-the-middle picture of what can be done in SF – for the mind, for the heart, and now and then for both.

28 January 1980

The big, livable-in novel is now the rule rather than the exception in SF. The trend is clearly toward a large cast of characters in a sprawling locale, pursuing some quest that takes them hither and yon through a multitude of perils.

There are several ways of producing a work whose sheer bulk makes reading it an experience of several days' duration, rather than an evening's diversion. One of them is simply to bring out a big, big book that numbs the arms to hold. Another is to publish a trilogy, or even a tetralogy, each volume of which is sometimes a big, big book. A third is to produce sequels to a book that did well, whether or not the story was ever intended to extend past what appeared to be its natural ending.

In other words, some books contain stories that require a long narrative, in whatever guise. For example, Simon & Schuster has just published the first

of four volumes by Gene Wolfe, a first-rate writer in anybody's literature, and the four books, while each independent, will dovetail into a major, organically functional and probably very attractive whole. The tetralogy is called "The Book of the New Sun", and the first book is *The Shadow of the Torturer* (about \$13.95). I've read it, I'm impressed as all get out, and when it's released, I'll review it with pleasure and admiration.

But also in those same other words, not every one of the recent multi-tiered confections is really cake. A fair number of them are five pounds of frosting and one ounce of cookie. And even among the good ones, It's sometimes possible to feel that 300 pages might have sufficed, in place of 385.

A little of this feeling attaches itself to *Lord Valentine's Castle* (Harper & Row, about \$15.95), Robert Silverberg's first new novel in years, and certainly his longest ever. Now and then, the itinerant juggler Valentine, who may also be the deposed Lord Valentine, temporal ruler of the giant planet Majipoor, seems to be taking a wholly unnecessary detour.

Majipoor itself is a brilliant concept of the imagination; no book since Jack Vance's 30-year-old *Big Planet* has so successfully populated a huge world with its necessarily diverse cultures and landscapes. And the story of the amnesiac Valentine's attempts to find himself and resume his rightful place is a surefire page-turner. I have to think that under other market circumstances Silverberg might have couched this work differently in some respects, but there's no doubt in my mind that there's a lot of good reading here.

This is traditionally the time of year when the major books begin to appear. Now is the time to order your copy of Larry Niven's *The Ringworld Engineers* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, about \$12.95). This is the sequel to Niven's blockbuster, *Ringworld*, of 10 years ago, and returns nearly all of the original cast of characters to the title locale – an ungraspably extensive artificial world built in a continuous strip around its sun.

For new readers, there's fascinating adventure in plenitude. For old fans of Niven's Known Space series, or of the original volume, there are all the fine, characteristic touches that delight us Niven fans, and which support his reputation for uncommon wittiness and fast narrative pace. But like the last month's sequel to Frederick Pohl's *Gateway*, this is a book the author never originally intended to write, and there are places where you can't help thinking it shows.

9 May 1980

Major trends in speculative fiction are represented in this mixed spacebag. Most indicative of the outstanding tendency is Gene Wolfe's *The Shadow of the Torturer* (Simon & Schuster, \$11.95); it's science fiction in the mode of fantasy. The fact that it's volume one of a tetralogy is even more typical of Gene Wolfe.

The move toward hefty or multi-volume works began with young sword-and-sorcery writers influenced by Tolkien. Heroic fantasies are today's Gothics, and as easy to generate.

But with a market for long stories established, older and more experienced hands are dealing themselves in. It's taken them a while to convert from techniques born of the 60,000-word magazine serial, but they're beginning to arrive.

Gene Wolfe is at their head. He may very well be our best technician – an attribute subsumed by so many additional gifts that it's not difficult to call him science fiction's best genuine novelist. It takes a born artist even to propose a sympathetic story about an apprentice torturer's passage toward manhood, in a culture so intricately evolved that it no longer cares what starships were for. Wolfe does it in a style that combines the flavors of James Branch Cabell at his most picaresque and Guy Endore at his most somber; again, an accomplishment that must justify itself by nothing less than total success.

What results is a sometimes risible yet page-turningly tense and ominously dark narrative. No one could have thought of an approach like this before Wolfe demonstrated it. By the time the fourth volume appears, this Nebula-winning author will have become unchallengeable in a reputation as one of science fiction's most potent names. Editor Dave Hartwell is to be congratulated for this uniquely powerful underpinning to Simon & Schuster-Pocket's ambitious new science-fiction line.

"New" writer Robert L. Forward is new in the sense of being the latest in a series of scientist-essayist-novelists fostered by Judy-Lynn del Rey. Like James P. Hogan and Tony Rothman, Forward does "hard" science fiction that calls for rigorous scientific speculation to back its exotic locales and picturesque aliens.

Unlike some others, Forward writes not in the crude "superscience" prose developed in the 1930s, but in the best Golden Age manner that evolved from it. The principal narrative thread of *Dragon's Egg*

(Ballantine/Del Rey, \$9.95) makes epic heroes of an astonishingly sympathetic alien race living on the surface of a wandering neutron star. Hal Clement at last has a peer. Del Rey trade books are showing immense promise.

Alfred Bester's *Golem*¹⁰⁰ (Simon & Schuster, \$11.95) is the latest novel from this master wordsmith. It fully supports his reputation for pyrotechnical incident and typographic trickery. (In this case, artist Jack Gaughan does the pictures that carry major plot developments onward). What is not like the Bester of old is that this tale of hideous murder and unconventional pursuit in a future New York abandons all adherence to the magazine-science fiction plot dicta that called for closely resolved structure. Other old masters who originally proved the effectiveness of those rules are also beginning to discard them abruptly. This will be even more evident in Robert Heinlein's new novel from Fawcett Columbine later this year.

An interesting entry from Dell's paperback science-fiction line is *Beyond Heaven's River* (\$1.95), by Greg Bear, a talented and serious new writer. The protagonist is a Japanese naval aviator, snatched from the Battle of Midway by enigmatic aliens and made immortal. Taken to a distant planet where he is allowed to reconstruct and repeat Japanese history from its beginning, he grapples for centuries with the question of individual responsibility.

Found at last when human civilization reaches star-traveling levels, he becomes both a tester of essentially Western cultural biases and the subject of crucial psychic pressures from "us".

Well done, with an unusual yet attractive central character beset by a fresh and thoughtful problem, this book shows where the Gene Wolfes of the next decade will come from. Dell's Jim Frenkel is doing the future a service with this sort of selection.

Norman Spinrad's *Songs from the Stars* (Simon & Schuster, \$11.95) represents the latest in science fiction's growing number of countercultural novels, which attempt to reconcile inner and outer space. Not as mystical as last year's *Stardance*, more ambitious than this year's *The Sheriff of Purgatory*, the story follows a post-World War III couple representing the best of a culture founded on the ecotechnologies of muscle, sun, wind and water. Some how, they must bring to their people the transcendent interstellar messages found by practicing the forbidden art of rocketry.

The moral dilemma is meticulously established and dealt with. The

dialogue is hip, deriving exactly from the late 1960s and thus intersecting squarely with the largest demographic population segment. It will be highly revelatory to follow how this book fares both in sales and at award-giving time, and to compare its performance to its immediate predecessors.

Incidentally, in case you doubted it, audience reaction to the new *Star Wars* film, *The Empire Strikes Back*, fully justifies the tie-in novel of the same title (by Donald F. Glut, \$2.25) from Ballantine/Del Rey. But I wouldn't hold up Glut as an exemplar to any science-fiction writing classes.

22 June 1980

English writer M. John Harrison will never be accused of writing straightforward tales of entertainment. His novel of several years ago, *The Pastel City*, was set on a degenerating Earth so far in the future that it might as well have been on an alien planet. Its sequel *A Storm of Wings* (Doubleday \$8.95) is out now and can be read as an independent book, and it is just as intricately apocalyptic.

Not to put too fine a point on it, Harrison is a maniacal, allusive writer of very serious intentions whose vision of the dying Viriconium culture will leave you in an enjoyably depressed mood for days.

3 August 1980

A rich variety of science fiction is represented by our various entries this time. All but one are paperbacks, so what we have is an inexpensive sampler for those who'd like to increase their acquaintance with the breadth of the field. Old buffs will also recognize that most of the writers listed below are among the best at doing the kind of thing they do.

Roger Zelazny, for instance, has a deft, charming touch with fantasy. In the case of *Changeling* (Ace trade paperback, \$6.95, copiously and beautifully illustrated by Esteban Maroto), what we get is science-fantasy: a 40,000-word compressed novel set in a universe where magic long ago triumphed over technology. It's a medieval, rather stable culture, with the evil magicians destroyed, their castles ruined, and all their dragons and trolls slumbering under a good magician's spell. Well, you know that can't last, and it doesn't.

Out of mercy, the principal black magician's infant son wasn't killed after the climactic battle. Instead, he was taken away to an alternate universe – our own time and place – and, to keep the mystical balance, surreptitiously

exchanged for the infant son of an engineer. Adopted by a peasant family in the magical kingdom, the Earthly infant soon grows into an inquisitive, energetic, tactless tinkerer with the forbidden laws of science.

Only one desperate measure can save the world: the other child – who has grown into a cafe folk balladeer with a mysterious ability to hold an audience – must be brought back to fight him. I will say no more; Zelazny knows how to do this sort of thing very, very well.

In *Naked to the Stars* (Ace paperback, \$1.95), Gordon Dickson tells the story of Cal Truent, invalided spacewar veteran, who is put into the Contact Corps. The Corps is non combatant. More than that, its members are present at the interplanetary battles while they are taking place. Their job is to make contact with the alien enemy, shorten the war as much as possible, and as quickly as possible establish relations on which a lasting peace can be founded. That's a proposition met with suspicion and anger by almost everyone outside the Corps. It might well take several additional centuries before any such thing could be put into actual effect But Dickson makes it seem possible.

Star Driver (Ballantine/Del Rey, \$1.95), is by “Lee Correy”, the fiction pseudonym of maverick engineer Harry Stine. Stine is among the hard-headed technologists who sincerely feel the Establishment is check-reining potential major lines of development for politico-economic reasons. His fictional presentation of the case involves the invention of a reactionless – non-rocket – space drive in the engineering labs of an old-line New England company. NASA, with its huge investment in conventional aerospace, might not welcome it with open arms. More important: will the company's own conservative board of directors accept this piece of wild boat-rocking? At the very least, a highly readable piece of rich fiction is one result.

The Best of Destinies (Ace, \$2.25), is itself a sampler of the best selections from Ace editor James Baen's paperback “magazine”. *Destinies*, which appears on the racks every so often with new fiction and illustrations by topflight contributors. Among the collected authors are Zelazny, Joe Haldeman, Larry Niven, Poul Anderson, Spider Robinson and Jerry Pournelle. Nonfiction pieces include essays by Charles Sheffield and Frederik Pohl, as well as Harry Stine. Good stuff, much of it, wide-ranging and thought-provoking.

The late Tom Reamy was a highly original writer who might have grown into a noteworthy figure in American letters. But before dying in his

40s, Reamy produced some outstanding and award-winning science fiction stories with an uncommon touch that readers of his posthumous 1979 novel, *Blind Voices*, will prize. That short fiction – and an outstanding introduction by Harlan Ellison – is now collected from major magazine sources as *San Diego Lightfoot Sue and Other Stories*. It can be ordered in a beautifully made trade edition (\$14.95, \$25 slip-cased) from Earthlight Publishers, 5539 Jackson, Kansas City, MO 64130, through your bookstore.

We would also like to note the passing away of Dr. Joseph Samachson of Oak Park, IL, in June. He was an ornament to research medicine and husband of critic Dorothy Samachson. As “William Morrison”, this gentle, brilliant man wrote some of the best short science fiction of the early 1930s, a time when memorable work was being done.

10 August 1980

Let me tell you a brief tale, if not about a ghost, then about a spirit – a geist, if you will; a Zeitgeist, the spirit of a time, and how it lingers....

Isaac Asimov Presents the Great SF Stories, Vol. 4: 1942, by Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg, editors (DAW Books \$2.50), is heavy freight for one title to bear. But it turns out to be a thick, new, handy paperback anthology of just exactly what it claims to be.

Collected here are 13 stories first published in 1942 by nine of the great names of SF – Frederic Brown; Lester del Rey, who is now half of the Del Rey imprint from Ballantine Books; Asimov, who not only actually participated heavily in the editing of this volume but also actually works, hard, on each monthly issue of *Isaac Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine*; Alfred Bester, who went on to write the classic *The Demolished Man* and *The Stars My Destination*; A.E. van Vogt, who had already written *Slan*; Hal Clement, who would write *Mission of Gravity* and *Needle*; Anthony Boucher, who would found *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*; Lewis Padgett, who was the pseudonym of Henry Kuttner and Catherine L. Moore, in her day the first lady of SF; George O. Smith, of whom more later, and Donald A. Wollheim, now publisher of DAW Books, with one of the most memorable, snap-ending SF stories ever published.

The stories are either really first-rate or at least unforgettable – Brown’s “Star Mouse”, del Rey’s “Nerves”, van Vogt’s “The Weapon Shop” – and if some now read crudely, that’s not as important as the vigor with which they brim. The year 1942 lay squarely at the heart of the golden age of magazine

SF; a time when a young pantheon of highly intelligent and, as it turns out, remarkably talented amateurs had been recruited by a Promethean editor named John W. Campbell Jr.

They were busy inventing a new professionalism whose imperatives toward excellence still drive even the youngest, latest neophyte in the field. More important, they were writing the fundamental stories, laying down the ideas and exploring the modes that now lie at the core of contemporary science fiction. The field has gone farther and wider since then, and in literary terms it has gone deeper, but there is no way it could go deeper in the thing that counts most in art – the boundless creative confidence that comes from being at the heart of a time of major discovery.

If, in the above volume, part of a series that will march up through the Golden Age year by year, you respond well to George O. Smith's "QRM – Interplanetary", then you will surely want *The Complete Venus Equilateral* (Ballantine/Del Rey, \$2.25). "QRM", published at exactly this time of year in 1942, was the first of Smith's 1942-1945 series about the interplanetary communications satellite from which the series got its name. An Arthur C. Clarke introduction stresses Smith's technological predictions; fair enough.

In his daytime job, Smith was responsible for major radar research developments. But he wrote before the days of solid-state electronics, so all his vast vacuum tubes, and his electronically driven spaceships, now seem quaint to the average reader. But it wasn't so much the futuristic electronics that made "QRM" an overnight sensation. And it wasn't his prose style, which remains to this day less highly evolved than his imagination. It was the immense joy of living, the energy, optimism and good humor that permeated his work and that still radiate enormous, paraphysical power.

In his introduction to Craig Strete's collection, *If All Else Fails...* (Doubleday, \$8.95), Jorge Luis Borges also speaks of power, "the power of genius". It may be the same power. In these tales, whose copyrights run from 1974 through 1976, we see it at the hands of one of the new writers to whom the Golden Age is a tradition, not a memory. Actually, there's more to it than that – the author is a Cherokee Indian who uses other pen names as well, and this collection originally appeared in Europe in 1976.

"Strete" is the author of such stories as "Who was the First Oscar to Win a Negro?" and "To See the City Sitting on its Buildings". At first blush, you would think him no relative of Smith's at all, or Asimov's or del Rey's. But that is not so; they are his ancestors, nonetheless so just because they are still

alive and well and working. Our generations traverse swiftly, and we are all still in sight of each other.

And if you doubt that, try John Varley's *The Barbie Murders* (Pocket, \$2.25), yet another anthology that comes at a time when all the SF publishers are saying they're not doing books of stories. Varley's particular expertise is in biology, and he was born in 1947.

Otherwise, when you peel away the difference in prose styles and vocabulary, you are struck by the perpetuity of the thing that was essential to Smith's success: stories that, whatever their scenario and technological decorations, set out directly, and in the joy of exploration, to fine-comb the question of what's the most satisfactory way to live. We all have different answers, but if we are in SF at all, we all search. And even the pessimists among us are optimistic about the eventual results – still, after all these years, and, I think, forever.

16 November 1980

It's that wonderful time of the year when nobody has the leisure to read books, but you have to reach decisions on what books to buy for your literate friends. You wander through the stores, opening and closing, skimming the blurbs, trying to recall snatches of reviews, attempting to parse out how much of what you've heard was meretricious. In fact, what you're going through is what I go through all year 'round. So, trust me...I know what you're feeling.

For your graphics-oriented friends, Putnam's has started a new line of eye-popping art books called Perigee Books, within which occurs something called the Paper Tiger series. These are beautifully produced 8 three-eighths inches x 11 three-eighths inches paperbacks of 96 full-color pages each, each \$10.95, and worth it. There are four of them so far: *Solar Wind* displays the SF art talent of Peter Jones, an unusually various master of technique whose broad range of subjects extends from crisp, hard-edged space battle to the classic blue-skinned ape carrying off the green but otherwise clearly nubile maiden.

Philip Castle's *Airflow* is something else: impeccably rendered airbrush fantasies in which voluptuous mechanical Valkyries vie for airspace with F-14s, Marilyn Monroe is nipped daintily in the teeth of a grille fit for two Hudson Hornets back to back, and Dolly Parton is not to be believed.

Then there's *Rick Griffin*, by Rick Griffin, one of the masters of druggie pop, memorable for surfer art, album covers and underground comics. And

finally there's *3-D Eye*, by Michael English.

3-D Eye contains what I think is the most draftsmanly, most assertive airbrush work I've ever seen. English delights in the bravura performance – crumpled cigarette packages, floating ketchup bottles, a discarded candy wrapper windborne across a stone slab. His highlights, particularly on liquid, are super-glossy; just this side of cartoony, and sometimes closer than that. He's in the business of riveting the onlooker's attention. If you want one book to stop its recipient cold during the package-unwrapping, look no farther.

For your word-oriented friends, there's *The Ghosts of the Heavyside Layer and Other Fantasms*, a new collection of stories by Lord Dunsany from Owlswick Press (\$20). Illustrated by Tim Kirk and introduced by Darrell Schweitzer, it is a new compilation of short work and two plays by this classic fantasist. To give it is to flatter your friend's taste.

For stocking stuffers, Del Rey has just released, at \$2.50 each, the paired paperbacks *Gateway* and *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon*, by Frederik Pohl. *Gateway* of course won every available award; the other is its sequel. Both are hardcore contemporary science fiction by an uncommonly good writer and dazzling thinker.

At \$6.95, Ace's trade paperback *Direct Descent* had better be reserved for diehard Frank Herbert fans. It's two stories – one of them from a 1954 *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine – and both are classically “modern” SF as that term was then understood. But even with Garcia illustrations (which seem to feature Paul Newman in the leading role), this is a purchase to weigh carefully.

For an SF sampler, there's *The Great Science Fiction Series*, (Harper & Row, \$16.95), edited by Frederik Pohl, the prolific and ingenious Martin Harry Greenberg, and the indefatigable Joseph Olander. It's a terrific idea for an anthology – one story each from 20 different story series, ranging across the board from Brian Aldiss's “Hothouse Planet” on through James Blish's “Cities in Flight” and “Pantropy” series, through Ferdinand Feghoot and Gavagan's Bar, Simak's *City*, McCaffrey's dragons, Cordwainer Smith, Fritz Leiber, Larry Niven – on and on; something for every taste, every mood, every level of involvement in the field.

14 December 1980

It is difficult to prove who the good artists are. We speak of “achieving

recognition”. Implicit there is an acknowledgment that much of what is said about artists, as distinguished from what is felt from artists, is at some level of popularity contest; a crapshoot (pun intended).

For instance, I can tell you that Gene Wolfe is as good a writer as there is today. Some of you will sniff and say “Well, among SF writers, possibly.” All of you are entitled to ask “How?”

One fairly reliable test is in whether an artist appears likely to leave his medium fundamentally different from the way he found it. You can look in Wolfe’s *The Claw of the Conciliator* (Simon & Schuster/Timescape, \$11.95) and come away with the impression that not only speculative fiction but also prose itself are being transformed in there.

Claw is the second of four volumes in Wolfe’s ongoing “Book of the New Sun” tetralogy. The first, 1980’s *The Shadow of the Torturer*, is up for every possible SF award and will soon be out in Pocket Books reprint. *Claw* continues the maturation of Severian, apt young man of a million years hence who’s making an artwork of his life as an itinerant member of the Torturers’ Guild.

If you expect to extend some prior acquaintance with the writings of de Sade, you’ll have to do most of that work yourself. If, however, you’d like to see how writing can be both innovative and lucid, how a setting and a social order can be both imaginary and palpably realistic, Wolfe can provide. What he assuredly provides is one hell of a good read, a fact beside which all this foregoing taxonomy pales to its proper degree of importance.

Wolfe is astonishingly, marvelously literate. The unfolding tale of a young man gripped by his extraordinary lost love is permeated with the compelling narrative power of great writing. However one may define that thing, it clearly announces its presence. I feel a bit like a musical contemporary attempting to tell people what’s good about Beethoven.

Many people take SF seriously. Not all of them are equipped to do so, but among the mount of expository verbiage that so many earnest SF essayists are currently taking to the bank, there is, here and there, some genuine value. Southern Illinois University Press is producing a great deal of that notable increment.

Fantastic Lives collects new autobiographical essays by Harlan Ellison, Philip Jose Farmer, R.A. Lafferty, Katherine Maclean, Barry N. Malzberg, Mack Reynolds, Margaret St. Clair, Norman Spinrad and A.E. van Vogt. Maclean, Reynolds and St. Clair are each, in their own way, important if not

popularly first-ranked figures in the movement of American SF out of the pulps and into university presses. Each of the rest is a cranky genius; kooky in some cases, the author of landmark work in all. The essays are variously informative and in some cases offer memorable insights into speculative creativity.

Bridges to Science Fiction contains 10 scholarly essays written for the first Eaton Conference on Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, held in February 1979 at the University of California, Riverside. Bearing in mind that not all SF scholarship is uniformly pellucid, and that conference chairman George E. Slusser can only reproduce what was submitted by the conferees, this is nevertheless a recommendable book.

The Science Fiction of Mark Clifton, edited by Greenberg and Malzberg, collects the work of a prominent 1950s writer who was not himself a major innovator – although he wrote some very readable high-grade pieces, all included here – but who was convinced that there was no reason why SF could not be remarkable, not simply as a thing in itself, but as literature. And who was right.

The most fascinating volume so far in this “Alternatives” series from SIU Press is the hardcover facsimile edition of *Astounding Science Fiction, July 1939*. Made by offset reproduction from a copy of that seminal pulp periodical, the SIU book also includes a few words of comment and reminiscence but is largely content simply to bring us the original package, truss ads, blotchy illustrations, filler features and all.

The stories include “Black Destroyer”, which catapulted A.E. van Vogt to prominence; “Trends”, which was Isaac Asimov’s first published story in *Astounding*; and “Greater Than Gods” by one of the best writers of that time in SF, Catherine L. Moore.

28 March and 19 April 1981

I don’t know what should be done with Ace Books’ proofreaders. One of the hidden scandals of contemporary publishing is that the audience often gets only a rough idea of what the author intended. But Ace is notable even in that company, and *Federation* (\$5.95 trade paperback) represents the acme of its ability to miss homonyms and other plausible errors, in addition to outright typographical scrambles.

Nevertheless, this collection of novelettes by H. Beam Piper, a neglected master from the 1950s, will open your eyes to the fact that we lost somebody

particularly insightful and effective when he took his own life.

Gloomy? Feel out of place? Try the Pliocene: six million years in the past, no pollution, no taxes, equable climate. Climb into your Guderian Effect one-way time machine and bid adieu forever to Ring Around the Collar.

This is precisely what a large and varied cast of social misfits and brokenhearted lovers do in *The Many-Colored Land* (Houghton Mifflin, \$12.95), an epic by “Julian May”, who was Judy May Dikty many years ago when she lived in Chicago. It’s half of what will be a two-part panorama from the author of a famous novelette, “Dune Roller” (1951).

For your basic library: the Del Rey Books Gold Seal reprint series of trade paperbacks, at \$5.95 each. The first two titles are Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* and Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End*. Beautifully produced, with intelligence and taste, this series will embody “major works of imaginative fiction that have become modern literary classics”, to quote the cover blurb. Exactly so. Topflight prose in the best paperback packages I’ve seen in years.

Cheer up. It’s not all going to hell; nothing’s ever a 100 percent success.

2/24 May 1981

If you can’t sing good, sing loud. If you can’t write good, write long. *God Emperor of Dune* is Frank Herbert’s bloated codicil to the already overextended Dune Trilogy, whose climactic statement is that the human race will go on forever and ever, populating universe after universe, thanks to the intricate machinations of the proliferated cast of characters.

There’s reason to believe that when Herbert began all this, many years ago, his intention was simply to tell the large but still manageable tale of the planet Arrakis, its relationship to the Galactic Empire, and the charismatic Atreides family.

But now the tale is wagging the dog. There is so much genealogy and accumulated history that talking about it, not acting on it, dominates this volume. Furthermore, you can’t start here. There’s no way to understand half the references in this new book without reading the three old ones first. That’s an exercise many have found enjoyable. Others have reported it’s a little like hitting yourself repeatedly with a hammer to see if it feels good when the pain stops: they go on because it always seems that Herbert is going to tie it all together in the next chapter, or the next.

Herbert can be a very good writer. But he appears to have become

captive to his own creation, and to have proceeded not to a conclusion but to an infinite diffusion. Nevertheless, you will find this book high on the best-seller list.

Chicago's Roland Green, with his Wandor series, is also a practitioner of the popular epic form. *Wandor's Flight* (Avon, \$2.75 paperback), however, does equip the reader to understand this fourth book as readily as the previous three. Green is clearly in love with classical narrative forms, from the work of Homer on up through C.S. Forester, and there are glossaries and prologues aplenty, plus a chronology. With that under your belt, you're ready to plunge into the world of Wandor of the Duelists, his consort Gwynna, his foe Cragor, and the sweeping political contentions of Chonga, Benzos, *et al.*

Green has a gift for the creaking iron-age machinery of barbarian cultures and the smell of wet armor. If he also has a weakness for the very large cast of characters not named Sam or Joe or Alice, he at least has the forethought to provide all those charts.

Donald A. Wollheim Presents the 1981 Annual World's Best SF (DAW Books, \$2.50) hardly needs much explanation after that title. Together with old SF timer Wollheim's sometimes acerbic commentary on the present SF scene, there are 10 shorter examples here of good recent science fiction (from 1980, actually), including George R.R. Martin's "Nightflyers", Howard Waldrop's "The Ugly Chickens" – which is about the near survival of the dodo in Tennessee – and Bob Leman's "Window", which will scare you. Good stuff from a good, not great, year.

12/20 June 1981

Samuel R. Delany's *Distant Stars* (Bantam \$8.95) is a copiously illustrated two-headed book. One head is Delany's. He's an extremely bright individual who has been highly significant in this field since the late 1960s. He is a multiple award winner, and enjoys a great reputation. He has also always been a very conscious writer, producing work that proceeds simultaneously on a number of levels.

His stages are littered with burning cities, crumbled empires, and people spectacularly dead. Under all that, however, lie the tragic bases for that wholesale devastation, worked out in the most careful intertwining of hubris and nemesis. Aeschylus would recognize Delany for a shipmate.

The thing is, however, that the best way lately to approach Delany is to

be as conscious as he is of storytelling subtleties, which, when all is said and done, are purely technical. *Distant Stars* is an omnibus containing his 1966 novel. *Empire Star*, and a number of his best-known short stories over the years. The newer they are, the less punch they have, and the more they reward formal structuralist criticism. The most recent – the hitherto unpublished “Omegahelm”, and “Ruins”, a thorough rewrite of a story semiprofessionally published in 1968 – are tour-de-force demonstrations of how to build up story events on almost no central core at all.

The other head here is Byron Preiss, veteran contract packager of illustrated books, who has brought eight well-chosen artists to decorating the pages with some of the most interesting commercial artwork of the year. But the effect of the cover painting is to suggest something on the level of *Star Wars*, while the plenitude of art suggests the comic book. The total effect is to direct the reader to the events of the text, while Delany steadfastly works farther and farther below them.

Preiss, give him credit, has done better than he ever has before. But the book, its content evolved up through all the stages of Delany’s growth, tugs in too many directions ever to become unified. The harder Preiss works to do Delany justice, the more Delany slips away from him, and the more the two of them inadvertently twist the book away from the readers each attracts.

20 August 1981

In G.C. Edmondson’s *To Sail the Century Sea* (Ace, \$2.25), the crew of a Navy sailing vessel is sent back in time to sabotage the Council of Nicaea and alter the future so there’s no Russia. A paranoid security officer and Edmondson’s casual approach to plotting and dialogue make a half-botch out of this sequel to Edmondson’s very nice *The Ship that Sailed the Time Stream* of 15 years ago.

In *Heirs to the Kingdom* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$12.95), first novelist Kennedy Hudner has a drunken reporter discover that three branches of a mysterious mutant race have been infiltrating us for centuries. Caught in their incessant internecine struggles, hunted for a foul murder he didn’t commit, he then releases the mysterious substance that will turn the entire population of the Eastern Seaboard into mutants. Neither Hudner nor Holt nor Rinehart nor Winston appear to have realized this is a satire, if it’s anything.

The Elves and the Otterskin (Del Rey, \$2.50) finds reluctant human hero

Ivarr in the land of elves, dwarves, trolls and wizards, on a quest for the magic sword so he can slay the dragon who guards the treasure that will enable the five quarrelsome outlaw elves to pay the weregild that they owe for killing the king's son while he was disguised as an otter. First novelist Elizabeth Boyer has a compelling feel for the milieu of Scandinavian legend, and works out a competent skein of narrative, but alloying her promising talents is an unfortunate gift for anticlimax, and that's one struggle Ivarr loses.

Fantasy (Pinnacle/Tor, \$2.50) is a collection of short tales by Poul Anderson, who, when he isn't being SF's answer to C.S. Forester, can be one of the best fantasists extant. These, however, are the stories left out of his previous fantasy collections. Some of them are just fine, and the talent is obviously there, but the total effect is thin.

Starship and Haiku (Pocket/Timescape, \$2.50) is the first novel from Somtow Sucharitkul, who has the distinction of having been nominated for best new SF writer of the year in both 1980 and 1981. Set largely in a future Japan where the Earth's growing population has made suicide nearly a social obligation, it depicts the struggle of a few aware humans to co-operate with the whales in fleeing the planet.

A bouncy, slangy Anglophone in person, Sucharitkul is a child of diplomats and has lived all over the world, bringing an unusual breadth of perception and a unique viewpoint to his work. But he needs to polish his pacing and dialogue; otherwise, despite my reservations about noble cetaceans – I mean, why should they be that much different from us? – this isn't half bad.

Reprints worth looking into:

Kate Wilhelm's 1976 Hugo-award-winning *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (Pocket/Timescape, \$2.50) is justly famous in the SF community, and probably the best book ever written by this dependable and admirable writer. With its tale of ecological disaster, however, it now shares a number of features with books that came after it. Not Wilhelm's fault, obviously; if anything, it's to her credit.

But, oh! for one clear winner this month – one shining star, one piece of work to take enjoyment from and glory in! Even a novel about a race of humanoid robots.

5 September 1981

Pop Lit is a topic with amazing possibilities, so I would like to tell you about a place where they make it – *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

It comes out of Cornwall, Conn., where James Thurber had a weekend house. He would come up from New York City on a train that clacked and puffed along the Housatonic River Valley for 100 miles, but which no longer runs.

Ed and Audrey Ferman and their daughter, Emily, live in a house they have restored themselves. *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* is published out of an office in the attic.

F&SF, as they call it in the speculative-fiction community, has a circulation of about 65,000 copies per month, here and in some foreign countries. More than half of those are subscribers; you can get it on newsstands, but people who like it tend to sign on for the steady haul. It has been around since 1949.

Ed is the editor-publisher, Audrey is the managing editor, Emily answers the phone and does a lot of the things that keep the pages stapled together. The proofreaders are local schoolteachers. Anne Jordan, the assistant editor, tends to do most of the copy-editing at home. Isaac Asimov sends in the monthly column that forms the basis for most of his books of brief science essays, a sharp mind named Baird Searles reviews audiovisual productions, and I do the book review column.

F&SF was founded by Lawrence Spivak, the same man who invented the *Meet the Press* TV program; other magazines he published were *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and the *American Mercury*, which ties *F&SF* directly into the great journalistic tradition of H.L. Mencken, although William Bradford Huie was the *Mercury's* editor and owner by that time. *F&SF* was shaped by editors Anthony Boucher, who is still fondly remembered by mystery fans, and J. Francis "Mick" McComas, the man who named Modern Science Fiction.

Both of them are gone, now, but *F&SF* continues to be the most literate of all the SF magazines, publishing works not only by topflight writers within the magazine field but also people whose bylines would startle you: Shirley Jackson, folk singer Lee Hays, Stephen King, Stephen Becker, Truman Capote, John Ciardi, Herbert Gold, Harvey Jacobs, C.S. Lewis, Robert Lindner, Robert Nathan, Josef Nesvadba, B. Traven, John Updike and that sort of crowd.

Most years, *F&SF* wins at least one award for excellence. Many years,

it's the award for best SF magazine. When it was founded, the corporate treasurer was Joe Ferman, Ed's father.

Science fiction, people will tell you, is all ray guns and sharp merchandisers pushing dolls and tie-in paperbacks. The writers are no better than they should be, and the whole thing is some sort of grinning plastic industry.

But most of the best writers in SF are proud to appear in the magazine; quite a few of them started there. When it came along, science fiction was in the hands of people who loved it, but didn't always know all that much about prose, and hadn't had a chance to learn what might be in the world beyond the walls of engineering classrooms. I think the mix is better now.

13 November and 25 December 1983

Michaelmas and Me

I went to work for HMH Publishing Co. in June, 1963; I had my choice of becoming one of the editors on *Playboy* or of running the book-publishing division, Playboy Press, and I chose the latter.

Playboy had hired me the way it hired a lot of people in those days; it had developed a crush on me. That began at Chicon II, as far as I am aware, but may have come sooner. As of September, 1961, I'd been editor-in-chief of Regency Books, one of several arms of William Lawrence Hamling. Regency was a publisher of original paperbacks – one novel and one nonfiction title a month – and that's the kind of job you do as a pilot project, or a demonstration, or a cover for something else; it's a born money-loser, even without the help of the dreadful distributors we had. With four kids all under the age of six, I was in it for the money and the experience; a certain twisted kind of pride came later.

Hamling – the Hamling of *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, and later of *Imagination* – was a former co-worker of Hugh Hefner's and of several key *Playboy* staffers. They had all worked for a pioneering skin-mag entrepreneur, Fred von Rosen, during a part of their lives that's skipped over in their official biographies. Almost as soon as *Playboy* was off the ground, Hamling had started *Rogue* and dropped *Imagination*. Regency Books and other Hamling enterprises came later; Harlan Ellison had been the founding editor, shifting over from *Rogue*. In 1961, I took over from him, in a painful episode he tells one way and I tell another. What he got out of it was Hollywood, and what I got was Chicago; I don't see what either one of us is complaining about.

In Chicago, whose publishing world is small and incestuous, we all knew a little bit at least about each other. We tended to travel the same routes, hire the same freelancers, and bump together at parties. When A.C. Spectorisky began interviewing me for the *Playboy* job, he proved to know a great deal about me that I hadn't told anyone.

Michaelmas began at Chicon II, although I didn't know it. *Playboy* got a bunch of us together in one room – Phil Klass, Ted Sturgeon, Fred Pohl, Bob Heinlein, me, a few other people – and interviewed us for a panel discussion on the future. The way I read the situation, a magazine piece would result, but

the principal reason for the event was that Hefner and his chief associate, Sectorsky, wanted to pick our brains. Hefner wanted to know what the chances were of research medicine's coming up with something that might offer personal immortality in this generation. Sectorsky wanted to know what communications media was going to be like, since he was the man who had broken the barriers that kept *Playboy* under the counter. That had geometrically multiplied the magazine's circulation overnight, made national ad sales possible, and turned the enterprise into a goldmine. Sectorsky wanted to know where the next lode might lie. Having read it that way, I played to it. Life at Regency was not that much fun.

Out of the back of my mind came some perfectly valid prognostications on what the communications media would be like as soon as the space program had given us enough satellites and the ancillary technologies that would make electronics super-compact and operational on very small power sources. I threw in some biology I happened to have lying around, and I talked a lot, to specific points, holding the larger philosophical implications to the minimum. I'd read enough *Playboys* to know they didn't consider their audience capable of holding any thought more than six syllables long, and wanted to photograph objects, not diagram concepts. I found myself painting a rather graphic picture of the world of 1980 and beyond.

After which *Playboy* began romancing me.

If I sound cold and not the world's nicest guy, let me tell you how I actually was. I was, in no particular order and not in equal proportions, (A) in a panic, (B) in a rage, and (C) depressed. Not down in the mouth. Clinically depressed.

The panic came from having spent the better part of a decade being one of the world's best science fiction writers and having nothing to show for it but debts it would take me years to repay; from having persuaded a perfectly nice person to marry me; from having children who were above-average bright and likeable, and having nothing to give them but shut-off phones and visits from bill collectors; from having had it hammered at me from early youth that I was incompetent, thoughtless and irresponsible, and from having every evidence that this was coming true at unbelievable speed.

The rage came from having destroyed a friendship with Harlan – through what I knew was no fault of my own – for the sake of having put my head in a noose with Hamling, who quickly reasoned out that I was entirely dependent on him. Bill Hamling is an entrepreneur. Give an entrepreneur an

edge, and you're lost. Some entrepreneurs do this to you smoothly. Some do not. I was throwing up every morning before I went to work. But the rage did not come from this directly. It came from realizing that eight years of starving and scuffling in New York had turned me into something that would rather work for Bill Hamling than starve and scuffle in Chicago.

The depression, as you will have reasoned out by now, came from dining daily on one from Column A and one from Column B. I tried to freelance in my spare time; I got around that by finding ways to work sixteen hours a day, seven days a week, for Hamling. I finally decided that although *Playboy* would be the same thing on a more lavish scale, maybe I'd be buying books on budgets of more than \$1000 each. They'd also seen some of the books we – Earl Kemp, Larry Shaw, and three other very bright, high-morale people – had been managing to stutter out.

So what with one thing and the other, the Master Plan succeeded and there I was, Editorial Director of Playboy Press and unofficial advisor on science fiction and science articles for the magazine.

Sixteen hours a day, seven days a week. Most of it was motions, some of them mine, some of them Hefner's. I'd get page-proofs approved by hanging around the Mansion through Sunday afternoon movie screenings. and grabbing Hefner's elbow as he rose. We were checking silverprints on his bedroom floor, at four in the morning; then he'd go to whatever it was he did, and I'd get back on the plane to the plant in St. Louis.

He was sharp – super-sharp; the best print production executive I've ever known, by a large distance – but he was in his bathrobe and I was in shoes I hadn't taken off in 36 hours.

I'd knock off work at around 10 pm, head for the bar at the old Second City, jive with the actors, work on my developing interest in high-performance bicycles and sports cars with the up-and-coming-young-stud crowd there, go home not too sober, sleep between two and six, and bomb back down the Outer Drive in my Sunbeam Rapier again.

Sixteen months. We'd done the *Bedside Playboy*, *The Twelfth Anniversary Reader and Cartoon Album*, Lenny Bruce's *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People*, and a slew of large-format paperbacks. The plans for the trade books and the ambitious undertakings to get Ian Fleming away from New American Library and for all I know F. Scott Fitzgerald out of his grave were exactly where they had been when I arrived in the wake of a pale, shaken predecessor.

My father died. I went to the funeral, came back, thought about, the odd scraps of paper that represented all of my freelance writing for the past three years, thought about my marriage, thought about a lot of other things; I wrote a short-short around one *Playboy* illustration, wrote another longer piece around another, took my vacation pay, my severance pay, and some additional conscience money, and on January 2, 1965, bolted an IBM Model A typewriter to a stand in my basement. Next to it, on an up-ended cardboard box, I put a stack, of carbon sandwich forms. Overhead was a bare lightbulb, which allowed me to use hand-shadows to steer cockroaches around the concrete floor when I wasn't busy. And I wrote the first 57 manuscript pages of *Michaelmas*, which was as much of a surprise to me as it was to you.

All I had was a feeling that something was about to come out. I wrote the first paragraph, and then the second, the third, and onward. Characters appeared, with names and backgrounds. Events meshed together. Finally, Horse Watson crashed, Michaelmas's elevator came to a stop at the hotel lobby floor, and so did I. January 9, 1965. My thirty-fourth birthday.

And there it all was – Hefner's world of the future, but not with Hefner running it. I like the man, but not that much. And besides, Michaelmas – who is kind of like my father, in the same sense that Colonel Azarin in *Who?* is like another part of my father – is a much more desirable person to have running it. Looking around me today, I wish to hell he was.

But what I want to emphasize is that I had no idea any of this was in there. Not even when I sat down at the typewriter, after a day's messing around, to get acquainted with the new machine, and innocently thought I'd just bat something down to finish the day.

It ran and ran and ran. Not too fast, actually – 57 pages over three or four days isn't anything special by most standards. But steadily and surely. 57 pages of final draft. The eventual printed version changed Joe Champion's name from what it had been, added the love poetry, fiddled with the opening paragraphs a little, threw in a little more – a *little* more – circumstantial detail on a world with depleted fossil fuel supplies. But the rest of it was there, waiting for me to finish typing it. Even some of the material late in the manuscript – Papashvilly's long speech about who he is and where he comes from – existed in the form of torn-off sheets pinned to the wall. The scene in which he bangs his car on the trunklid did not – years later, when I was a PR man for International truck, Jan Norbye, *Popular Science*'s senior vehicle tester, did that one night, and it wasn't until approximately then that I'd ever

laid eyes on Bridgehampton or Shelter Island. But those are all grace notes. The book was there, complete, in toto – but not in full manuscript – over a few days in 1965.

(Imagine my chagrin when Heinlein used an anthropomorphized computer personality in *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*. But being pre-empted on that was no more than I deserved, considering it was my own damned fault I hadn't gotten *Michaelmas* into print for twelve years.)

It was my own damned fault *Michaelmas* didn't get into print for twelve years. I bundled it up along with a sketchy outline of the remainder and shipped it out to my agent, for her to get me a contract, and advance on. I knew – I knew – it was going to be one of the best books I ever wrote, and, furthermore, I knew it was, a book SF fans would love, because it was so full of the things that make SF fascinating. Nice circumstantial detail, fast pace, an old chestnut – the secret master – made rational at last by giving him an auxiliary data-processor that would allow him to actually keep up with events; and a rationale which was without doubt a real mind-blower. When I told it to Sidney Coleman and Carl Sagan at lunch in 1966, they giggled and snorted approvingly.

I knew what I had. Nobody else did. My agent – Philip Roth's agent, Joseph Heller's agent, Mario Puzo's agent, Nelson Algren's agent, my agent – still hadn't made it plain to me that she wasn't only undesirous of my writing SF, she was deaf and blind to it. Fred Pohl bounced it for *Galaxy* and perhaps for Ballantine as well; he wanted Plutonian fire-lizards in it. And it just lay there.

Meanwhile, I had started on another one. Same way – only, this time, 100 pages of a Doc Savage/Fu Manchu novel full of exploding wristwatches, wards full of catatonic secret agents, and a wisecracking, utterly likeable assassin.

After that, another. 40 pages. This fellow gradually comes to in the administrator's office at a VA hospital. His name is Captain Richard Lockmaster. He gradually realizes he's being discharged. It's 1965. He has hazy memories of being wounded in combat against Japs and Nazis on the Moon. The VA hustles him out the door with twenty dollars and a medical discharge. It's our 1965. He moves around Chicago, rapidly meeting a few people who seem to be more than they seem. He runs across some kind of plot to hold the world for ransom, involving a device called a radiation choke which will in due course make even a radium-dial wristwatch reach critical

mass. Every time he gets beat up, an ambulance scoops him away, the VA patches him up, and hustles him out. He goes on, still largely steered by events, almost inadvertently stopping the plot. The world is normal. Except, once in a while, when he's in a saloon and blue, he starts to feel hot wind on his face, and all the people momentarily turn out to be charred skeletons.

Don't steal it. This article is copyrighted, and I may write it yet, in which case I will write it better than you could. Well... on second thought, go ahead and steal it. I mean, there's always the one about the guy who's chief of security for a multinational corporation.... And the paraplegic whose bed is a Mach 3 fighter-bomber that he keeps in a cave under a Nevada mountain.... And... what I did was to write the beginnings of a great many books, all of them enormous fun, all of them stored up in my subconscious since 1961, any one of them intended to get me an advance check and start me on the pipeline to happiness.

I was brace and confident. I'd gotten out of the basement; rented floor space at The Totch Company, a very expensive sports car garage and restoration works run by a couple of Second City acquaintances, put in my typewriter, a phone of my own and a file cabinet. When I got tired of writing, I'd get up and help rock an engine back into an E-type. (Not easy.) The world was my oyster. Even my psychiatrist was cheerful.

And the money trickled away.

Bill Hamling was dumping *Rogue* to a gang of scavenger beetles and moving west to publish the photo-illustrated *Report of the President's Commission on Pornography*. Frank Robinson, Dave Stevens, Bruce Glassner, Dick Thompson and I got out the last respectable issue. I wrote the copy for the house ads mocking the "What Kind of Man Reads *Playboy*?" feature in our cross-town rival, and did the interview with Harvey Kurtzman, under the byline of J.P.C. James, which stands for John Paul Charles James, the middle names of the four kids who were now consuming ten-dollar bills for lunch. And then Frankie and I started our own publishing company, on Frankie's money.

Well, I still use some of the leftover envelopes. The idea was we'd sell our expertise to advertising and PR agency clients. We projected a book for United Airlines, called *Welcome Aboard*; a flossy-looking paperback, full of airborne meteorology, how a 707 works, what training a stewardess has, etc. First Class passengers would find a free copy on their seats.

That sort of thing. We were talking hard to a couple of ad agencies –

including United's – and a couple of local industries. For an outfit called Solar Systems, Inc., I designed the cover of *Theory and Practice of Silicon Photovoltaic Energy Converters*. Amazingly easy. You take a negative stat, rip it in half, paste it back together crookedly, and there's your lightning bolt.

The bank foreclosed on my house. Frankie went to work as the Playboy Advisor. I analyzed our failure. We hadn't known enough about how advertising and PR agencies work. So I got a job as a PR man. August, 1966. Pickles, Peter Pan Peanut Butter, Butterball Turkeys, macaroni, Michigan cherries, Spanish olives, the International Tuna Fish Association, Church & Dwight baking soda. I loved it. Don't think – write! Create patter for disc jockeys. Build a giant can-opener out of Foamcore, walnut Contac and two bleach bottles on a stick, shoot a picture of a lady in a short skirt attacking a circular horse-trough with the word TUNA wrapped around it. Put a twelve foot pickle on a marble base in Civic Center Plaza-call in the Picklecasso, and get out before the cops quite reach you.

But you don't care about my resume. (Dial 312/UNIFONT, communications consultants; be prepared to be turned down unless you have a very, very interesting problem and *lots* of money.) What you care about is *Michaelmas*. So did I. But meanwhile I was writing *The Iron Thorn*.

The Iron Thorn was a project Fred Pohl had offered me; an IF serial, based on a verbal outline, that had emerged from one of Fred's visits to us while I was doing *Galaxy's* book column. (We'd kept the house; bought it back from the bank on contract when I got the agency job, eventually converted it back to a mortgage.) In a master stroke of psychology, Fred bought it sight unseen, and, furthermore, began running it as soon as the first installment was written. When I got the agency job, I was in the middle of Part Two. I wrote the rest of it into a tape recorder while commuting; kept all the typist's homonyms that I liked better than my intended words.

I liked *The Iron Thorn*. I still do. It may be minor, but it's heartfelt, and it helped to heal some of the remaining scars. I don't even care if the same idiot who had called *The Death Machine* something like *Rogue Moon* now made me the author – in the U.S. only – of *The Amsirs* and *The Iron Thorn*. One of the best things about writing *Iron Thorn* was that in Part IV I got to write in some remarks of protest on the shabby quality of the illustrations in Part I.

But I didn't like the fact that Fred was making up for not taking *Michaelmas*. And I loved the agency business, because I'd lucked out on my

boss, an ex-*Chicago Daily News* rewrite man named John Bohan, who can run the world anytime Michaelmas gets tired of it, for my money. With the exception of Edna, the Mrs. Budrys, he was the first person I'd ever met who trusted me past the first week. I loved it, but I wasn't going to get any writing done. The first week on the job, the *Saturday Evening Post* published my story, "The Master of the Hounds", which eventually got an Edgar Special Award (that means second prize, folks), and that, except for the *Playboy* stories and "Be Merry", was what I was going to write, besides the last half of *Iron Thorn* and a lot of disc jockey jokes about International Pickle Week. I'd go down to my nice new cellar office, which Edna and I built after I moved back from the Totch Company, and riffle the pages. Jesus, it was a good book!

Well, I went from there to being PR director of an ad agency, and from there to the truck account of Young & Rubicam, and then one day I became operations manager of a recreational vehicle consumer magazine publishing company. The master plan was to get to know the PR men for all the light-duty vehicle manufacturers, and eventually go freelance, roaming the country in borrowed motor homes and things, meeting the now-grown kids at crossroads now and then, doing travel articles and vehicle test pieces, and getting back to SF. I had just gotten Woodall Publishing Company all set to do its own computerized typesetting when the Arabs embargoed oil, we lost a hundred ad pages in 48 hours, and, on January 9, 1974, I was set at liberty.

Two days later, Judy-Lynn del Rey called me. *Daily Variety* said that the people who owned the film rights to *Who?* had actually done something about it, and Ballantine was willing to attempt a tie-in edition if I was.

Well, I was. Certain gloomy clouds parted a bit. Rand McNally called UNIFONT and offered me a five-figure contract to deliver a 96-page bicycle repair book in offset film. There was a potential four-figure profit in that. Maybe – just maybe – I was off salary for the rest of my life. The fact that Edna had coincidentally gone back to her career as an executive secretary, two days before I was fired, also didn't hurt.

I retyped *Michaelmas*, did a new outline, and sent it back to my agent. Soon enough, Chevy Chase's father bought it. When I flew into New York for the usual high-powered editorial conference, Ned Chase shot the entire lunch talking about his kid's face on the cover of *Time*....

But we got it out anyhow. Bit by bit. Lots of helpful suggestions from junior editors who knew how to produce a surefire bestseller. Beaten down

by surly remarks about this being a science fiction novel, for science fiction readers; no mundane could possibly understand it or like it, despite the fact that it was being published *outside* the Berkley/Putnam SF program being run down the hall by Dave Hartwell – whom Chase would not permit to speak to me; we had to meet in secret. The *next* novel would be the blockbuster, oh, yes. This was *my* baby, and don't you so much as change a comma without permission.

What this turned out to mean was that it came out retailing for a dollar less than any B/P SF title in the same format, and had four crucial typos in it, in addition to getting my name wrong on the cover. It got a small advance than Hartwell would have paid, too. But I am – I really am – hard at work on the blockbuster contemporary novel. Two successive successors to Chase at Berkley have my promise I'm working on it.

F&SF serialized 45,000 words of the original 60,000 “final” draft, and I got a Nebula recommendation, which I asked to be withdrawn. I was blowing the 45,000 words up to 72,000 – not literally; I was interpolating new material, doing another draft on some of the old, putting some of the old back in intact – and I wanted the book to go for the award, not the serial. (*Rogue Moon* was put in the SFWA Hall of Fame anthology series as a novella, and I wasn't having any more of that, though I appreciated the thought no end.)

So the book came out. *Newsweek* reviewed it. *Newsweek!* *Newsweek* loved it. Others who loved it: The *Today Show*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *St. Louis Globe*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and a gang of Canadian papers. A stolen set of proofs circulated in England, rapidly. Who didn't like it? Well, besides Dan Miller of the *Chicago Daily News*, every single SF community reviewer with the exception of Charles Platt in *SFR*. The ending – the ending I thought I didn't have to spell out, point for itsy-bitsy obvious point, because any halfway knowledgeable SF fan would outrace me through the rationale as soon as I sprang the outlines of the idea – the ending killed it for the SF reviewers. Not for the mundanes; for the SF fans.

Which shows you how much I know. I cleaned the typos out of it for the Berkley paperback, which – except that it insists there's a J. in the middle of Algis Budrys's name – is the definitive edition. One of the clarified typos clarifies one small aspect of the ending, but not part that really needed clarification. I didn't mess with the ending. It is what it is; what it should be.

And I will tell you something about that. When *Rogue Moon* came out, a

lot of people said they didn't understand it, and that it was a major, inexplicable disappointment from the author of that classic, *Who?* Oddly enough, when *Michaelmas* came out, a lot of people – some of them the same people – found it an inexplicable disappointment from the author of that classic, *Rogue Moon*, which everybody these days understands, or says they do. Seventeen years had improved the hell out of the one book. I am willing to wait and see what seventeen more years do for the other.

And I thank you for your very kind attention. The name of the contemporary novel is *The Life Machine*. Any year now....

(I've just re-read this and I'm amazed at how readily I fell into the glib, media-mogul phraseology that pervades the agency business and which always makes me squirm when I find it in other mouths. What I had to say was all true, and how I felt about it is all true, but I'm dismayed to find how unkillable the spirochetes are once they have gotten a good hold.)

August 1981

George R.R. Martin, Dark Harbinger

By some subtle process, the nature of speculative fiction appears to overturn every so often. Something stirs in the misty continuum whence come storytelling modes and the talents to express them, and at first only here and there, but suddenly everywhere, the fiction of supposition has taken on a new hue. New people, with new powers to entertain and to provoke thought, dot the landscape and provide its overall coloration. Essayists and other forms of scholarly thinker, informed by this latest vista, produce the latest theories of what speculative fiction is. Those who decide that this latest is *the* SF shall, in due course, discover that there has somehow been a further change, and what was true is no longer relevant.

Look what happened early in the nineteenth century. Mary Wollstonecraft published *Frankenstein*, which was then perceived as a new sort of fantasy story. In it, it appeared that older forms of supposition, in which gods and demons had been evoked by wizards attempting to manipulate the universe, had been supplanted. In this new thing, a scientist – in fact, a reclusive, demented scientist – made a living, thinking organism, and thereby sealed his own doom and the doom of those who loved him. Science, not wizardry, had emerged as the new tool for prying at the nature of things.

From that beginning, Jules Verne produced further developments, as did H.G. Wells and even Rudyard Kipling, so that a species of literature called the “scientific romance” emerged. (And it’s relevant to recall that Verne couldn’t understand and didn’t like what Wells was doing, and Wells in response had his own reasons for disliking Vernean SF, while C.S. Lewis, Aldous Huxley and G.K. Chesterton strongly disapproved of both of them. It’s relevant because only a few years separate the emergences of Verne, Wells, and Lewis and Huxley, and yet these represent three distinct generations in the evolution of speculative fiction).

By the late 1920s, there were popular magazines devoted to what was called, in rapid succession, “scientific fiction”, “scientifiction”, and “superscience fiction”, the latter form representing a qualitative change from

the sort of SF published in Hugo Gernsback's pioneering scientification magazine, *Amazing Stories*. Superscience's *Astounding Stories*, appearing almost immediately on *Amazing's* heels, was already a redefinition. Nor did that persist for more than a few additional years before young superscience writer John W. Campbell, Jr., given *Astounding's* editorial chair, rapidly and with plans aforethought discovered and encouraged a whole new squadron of young writers who created what, by 1946, could be described as a "modern science fiction" dating from 1938 or '39.

As these various revolutions hurtled up into the future, each was already ripe for supplantation by the time it reached its peak. "Modern science fiction" had barely been detected and named in hindsight before post-modern science fiction appeared with two new magazines called *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *Galaxy* magazine at the turn of the 1950s. By 1960, England's *New Worlds* was fostering New Wave science fiction. And on, and on. There have been half a dozen science fiction generations since then, at a guess. (It becomes a little more difficult to see these steps distinctly as they come nearer present time: a good perspective in hindsight helps enormously).

Now, what is interesting about all this is that science fiction was being talked about almost exclusively from the mid-1920s to the mid-1960s at least; fantasy was getting short shrift. *Weird Tales* magazine had endured through most of this time, and some people who were nominally science fiction writers wrote stories for it on occasion. For a while, John Campbell had edited a companion to *Astounding*, called *Unknown*, and in it *Astounding's* writers evolved a kind of light fantasy that was distinctly their own, rather different from the dark, "classic" Gothic mood of *Weird Tales*. There were other magazines, occasionally, which published new fantasy fiction or something like it.

But the heart of the speculative fiction market remained in science fiction, and fantasy for a long time was regarded as a far more venerable but far less commercially viable form. It was felt that perhaps a new day of technology had permanently changed the course of literary history, and that fantasy – the fantasy of gods and demons, of wizards and incantations – was going to die out.

Even after the generations of those who had read Tolkien as children, fantasy and science fiction were naturally considered opposed forms. All that had happened was that fantasy was suddenly resurgent. Happily enough,

there was room for both forms. One could write science fiction, or one could write fantasy, or write both alternately, and there were plenty of readers. And so we entered the 1970s.

Now, in the 1980s, we find ourselves confronted with the works of writers like Stephen King and Peter Straub, who combine science fiction and fantasy elements, and stir in a little bit from another forgotten pre-World War II genre, horror fiction, and are enormously successful – which is to say that they have struck a chord in the hearts of a vast and eager audience which seems to have either been there undetected all along, or else grew into existence spontaneously some time during the preceding decade. How did this happen? And how, if George R.R. Martin is to be called a harbinger, does he relate to whatever happened? As I hope has now emerged clearly, attempting to create hard-and-fast boundaries of ratiocination around arts and artists is likely a doomed exercise. Let's go look at *Frankenstein* again.

Prior to its 1818 appearance, speculative fiction – represented almost exclusively by fantasy – had been either an allegorical or a monitory form. That is, it had been about imaginary kingdoms where social orders were different (and by implication more desirable), or it had moralized on the order of Aesop's fables or Medieval religious theater. It could have a savage cutting edge, as social satire can sometimes have, and as classical Greek tragedy certainly does. But in *Frankenstein* we see something rather new; we see the symbology of Gothic horror. The parts of *Frankenstein* that have passed into mass folklore by way of the movies are the parts about disinterring the dead, stalking at midnight, the unjust catastrophes visited on the blameless, and about meddling with forces not meant for mortal man's intercession.

That is, what the popular mind has made of the supposed science fiction in Wollstonecraft's creation is to screen out the technical rationale and preserve the irrational, fearsome elements which then reappeared in the writings of Poe and Hawthorne, M.R. James and Henry James, later in the 1800s. Those elements surface again in the writings of H.P. Lovecraft (principally for *Weird Tales* but also for *Astounding Stories*) and of Lovecraft's many youthful proteges, including Henry Kuttner – who wrote extensively for the short-lived horror magazine market – Robert Bloch, author of many Gothic and light fantasies, and also of *Psycho* – and of such other writers as the young Theodore Sturgeon and the younger Ray Bradbury.

So at the same time that all attention was nominally focused on the

science and technology elements in speculative fiction, a very strong thread continued to run back to that Gothic element in *Frankenstein*. Caught up in the technological optimism of mid-century science fiction, SF writers of that time could write fantasy only for love and on occasion ruefully agreeing that “fantasy doesn’t sell” and suspecting that it was a dead form. Fortunately, fantasy *does* sell these days, and in our hindsight their fears were groundless. All the time that Sturgeon’s, Bradbury’s and Bloch’s *Weird Tales* stories were being seen as an inconsequential aberration from their “real” careers, they actually represented rootlets subterraneously feeding on a rich tradition. All the time that Lovecraft was being described as a minor if idiosyncratically powerful figure in 20th century SF, that power was at work; the actual “idiosyncrasy” was in the mid-century point of view on Lovecraft.

That point of view, so strongly established by Gernsback (who decried any relationship between his scientifiction and “mere fantasy”), and by Campbell (who wanted none of those mystic overtones in his fantasy) and by the writers they recruited and popularized, retained its strength for a long time after its utility had waned. George R.R. Martin will tell you, for instance, that the thematic inspiration for “In the House of the Worm” comes from science-romancer H.G. Wells, sharing his *Time Machine* image of the dying, ruddy and cindered sun. Or so, at least, he told many of his fellow writers at the time that story was written, in the late 1970s. And this is true; it does share that one image. But no one who reads that story and has ever read any Lovecraft could doubt that there are many more similarities of mood and tone between Martin’s story and the pervasive view that HPL took of his menacing, death-filled universe.

It matters less whether Martin has ever been a Lovecraft fan that it does that Martin is an artist and that by the 1980s it is clear that a dark, brooding, far less rationalistic view of the universe has returned to great popularity among SF readers. It isn’t important for Martin to have studied any fantasy writer assiduously. It’s important only for him to be an unusually sensitive, unusually gifted SF writer. SF itself provides the connection to horror-fantasy, with its roots in far more than technology, its wellsprings nurturing not only the science myth in *Frankenstein* but also its freight of (perhaps quite justified) fear of mankind’s eternal frailty in the grip of forces no human being can ultimately understand or ever overcome.

Again and again, SF has produced new talents which overturn previous ideas of what the best SF is. Suddenly, with the appearance of a few very

well received stories from this hitherto unknown hand, it becomes clear that SF has disclosed a whole new series of possibilities. Or that it is time to re-explore, in a new way, what was attempted long before. Suddenly, it's as if everyone suddenly had the same new idea. Looking at the field, the latest critics describe what they see, and explain how it was inevitable, and how it is the most "correct", the most "pure" form.

But there are no pure forms, or if there are, we can never know which they are, because they don't appear in the rational, measurable parts of the world. They come from the shadowy places, and they grow in the backs of artists' minds: they shape the artist as much as the artist shapes them. The better, the more in tune with the essentials that artist is, the truer this is.

George R.R. Martin, born in 1948, published his first SF story in 1971. By the time of "A Song for Lya", which won a Hugo award for 1974, it was absolutely clear that he was a first-rate talent and it was absolutely clear that in terms of what was the best SF by 1974 standards, he was off the beaten path. This perturbed neither him nor his many enthusiastic readers. And in due course, the definition of the best SF changed to accommodate him.

Now the author of such recent fantasy novels as *Fevre Dream*, Martin has demonstrated where his talent was taking him all along. "A Song for Lya" is a science fiction story, published in *Astounding's* successor, *Analog Science Fiction*, with some pervasive overtones of *Weird Tales*-style fantasy. *Fevre Dream* is a remorselessly detailed novel of vampirism, with a few overtones of technology. In less than a decade, Martin had redefined his own idea of what an SF writer emphasizes. Or, perhaps more accurately, it had become clearer what his idea had been from the beginning.

Chronologically, Martin belongs in the generation preceding the appearance of Stephen King and Peter Straub. Actually, they are thematic contemporaries, but Martin was there first and should be recognized for his pioneering as well as his art.

By some subtle process, the nature of speculative fiction appears to overturn every so often. Something stirs in the misty continuum whence come storytelling modes and the talents to express them. At first only here and there, but suddenly everywhere, the fiction of supposition has taken on a new hue.

The book you are about to read contains ample evidence of such a transition, at the hands of the first significant such writer to appear in the SF of the 1970s and to flower in the 1980s. It's fitting that this collection should

be the first Dark Harvest book, for it represents a landmark volume in the careers of its author and its publisher alike, and most of the stories here are not only very good SF but signposts into the future.

October 1983

Pop Lit: Reviews

William Buckley: *The Story of Henri Tod*

We do best to begin – since we must begin – with one long paragraph. Contrary though such a ploy might be to newspaper practice, I have my reasons. Let us then, having prepared, set out:

Would Nikita Khrushchev really tell the joke about Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer to the assembled supreme leaders of all the Communist bloc nations? Since the joke is a pun, we must presume (a) that Tovarich Khrushchev – actually, it's Khrushchov, isn't it, although the Western press continues to get it wrong – was addressing this assembly of his comrade lackeys in English, of all things. And then one must (b) make the even more far-flung assumption that they possessed sufficient converse with that anfractuous lexicon – difficult as it traditionally has been for Eastern Europeans – to grasp what the Supreme Leader meant by “Rudolph, the Red, knows rain, dear.” And then (c), furthermore they would have needed to be sufficiently conversant with Western pop trash to puzzle out the connotations contained within the conceptual parameters of that reference – although I am told, on reasonably solid authority, that in fact the simple jingle under discussion has been translated into many languages around the world. This latter bit of news, even if true, is of course irrelevant to my principal point, which has to do either with the English language or with international communism, two instruments that can be frighteningly dangerous in the wrong hands. What I'm trying to tell you is that William F. Buckley has written another Blackford Oakes novel and it as usual represents a case of notional plethora.

The name of this one is *The Story of Henri Tod* (Doubleday, \$14.95). It's set in the days when Walter Ulbricht was trying to get Khrushchev to let him build the Berlin Wall and nobody knew which way Jack Kennedy would jump. Blackford Oakes, deadly Brahmin, represents the CIA's interests in the matter.

By the nature of things, Buckley's hero, like his ilk, can't do anything to change the events that have marked some of American foreign policy's most memorable hours and yet display a hypnotic attraction for this sort of

novelist. It turns out in the end he can't even do anything for Henri Tod. So Buckley's stuck for a strong story; instinctively, then, he goes for effect not to events but to sheer words and exotic settings.

The flavor of the words you have now had a fair sampling of. The best of the settings is Hitler's private railroad car, left shunted onto an East Berlin siding and employed as a trysting place by Ulbricht's rather simple-minded nephew and his equally fresh-faced mistress. Others are Ulbricht's private office, various locations in the Kremlin and the Kennedy compound, the White House, aboard Air Force One, and a mirror into which JFK fusses with his tie while engaging in one of the tough-tactician, naive-strategist interior monologues with which Buckley successfully dresses up the essential shortcoming of this book.

What might that be? That is that this is not an "insider" book at all. Those offices and interiors have never felt the touch of Buckley's foot nor the stroke of his sapient eye.

Mistake me not... if we're going to be led around the interior of someone's psyche in the pretense we're getting a world tour, there are far more sparsely furnished interiors than this one. But it is surprising about the Oakes novels, how bare their stages are and how buckram their actors, when their author strives with such finesse to make us discern how fustian his warehouse.

8 April 1984

Ken Follett: *Lie down with Lions*

It's exciting, it's by somebody who knows how to write good prose when it seems advisable, and it will tell you something about Afghanistan – not too much, not too little; a nice, palatable, measured dose.

It's also a vexatious piece of work. Maybe pernicious.

We're talking about *Lie down with Lions*, by Ken Follett (Morrow, \$18.95). Follett hit big with *Eye of the Needle* and has not looked back since. He has in fact improved technically. Unlike *Eye*, *Lie down with Lions* has a plot whose workings don't fully require divine intervention; a little coincidence here and there suffices.

The plot revolves around Jane, an idealistic young Englishwoman. In Paris, where she has lots of friends who form protest groups and work for a good world, she falls madly in love and takes up with Ellis, a Vietnam vet she

does not know is a CIA agent. Ellis uses her contacts in order to uncover clandestine activities.

When Jane learns this from Jean-Pierre, a handsome young French doctor, she orders Ellis out of her life. After a crash course in nursing, she marries Jean-Pierre and they take off to Afghanistan, where he will spend two years ministering to the anti-Communist guerrillas in the hills. By now, she's pregnant by Jean-Pierre, and in due course gives birth to the sweetest little baby girl you'd ever wish for.

But Jean-Pierre is a rotten apple. Fortunately, Ellis turns up at Jane's remote village on a mission to supply the rebels with American arms. Substantiating his cover as a demolitions expert, Ellis blows up a bridge. Jane and Ellis then have a sex scene that would have gotten Follett and his publisher arrested just a few years ago, but in this case simply makes Jane feel all snuggly. Incidentally, Ellis has been able to explain that he was not acting as a fascist thought-policeman; he was a counterterrorist, and the only people he busted were true criminals or KGB agents.

After some guerrilla-war hugger-mugger (I'm trying to avoid giving away all of the scenario), Jane and Ellis and Chantal take off to safety over the three-mile-high mountains in the freeze and ice. They are harried by Jean-Pierre and other baddies, plus Chantal, whose purpose is to make Jane feel sexy while breast-feeding her and to be a burden on her mother. Things get very harrowing indeed before the happy ending. This arrives even though Jane keeps Ellis hopping to conform to her standards of what's moral and proper, postcoital afterglows notwithstanding.

Despite the spy-novel window-dressing of the Afghan war, stern tribal mountaineers and secret agency, this is a book clearly constructed on the premise that it's the women who buy the best sellers. Fair enough. What disturbs me is Follett's picture of those women.

The text begins with a brief section written in exemplary prose, deftly introducing Ellis and his situation in Paris, done in what I take to be Follett's natural style as a former newsman. At least, you say to yourself, someone who says anything only once, says it directly, and makes sure it's relevant. As soon as Jane becomes the viewpoint character, however, we slip into a tone of address that's not many levels above "Run, Spot, run!", and persistently muddleheaded.

We can, for instance, have a clinically detailed, literally masturbatory mountain tryst, but Jane doesn't have a belly – time after time, in a book with

a spartan, nitty-gritty milieu populated by elemental people and elemental events, Jane has a “tummy”. I say some persuasive advisor told Follett to study women’s popular reading, and what he first came to must have been a 1950 *Ladies’ Home Journal*. The second thing, of course, was a rackful of Harlequin romances.

Jane is the kind of woman Matt Helm would kick over the nearest precipice, and no wonder. Ellis is carrying a secret treaty between the United States and the Afghan rebels, and she knows it, but she deliberately lets them be captured rather than put up an effective resistance. That is, they have done all this trekking up hill and down dale, baby and all, for absolutely nothing, plus the love of her life will now be tortured by the KGB, put on a show trial before the whole world, and tossed into Siberia for a thousand years.

Why didn’t Jane pull the trigger on the advancing Soviet troops? “Because they have mothers.” Shortly thereafter, she pistols a guy at extreme close range because he “betrayed her”. What Jane is is a self-righteous little bitch with the IQ of a barnyard fowl. Nevertheless, there’s no question that Follett offers her to his readership as an epitome of modern, enlightened womanhood.

There are the usual signs of hasty work and sloppy editing. We did not need the second, let alone the third and fourth repetitions of what a *pattu* is (it’s a blanket). The Kalashnikov assault rifle is not a “machine gun”. And the problem with water at high altitudes isn’t that you can’t get it to boil. The higher you get, the more readily it boils, at uselessly low temperatures.

So the impressive bibliography Follett supplies at the end of the book is apparently as near to Afghanistan as he has ever come; further, the book is probably cobbled together from many whole or partial rewrites done too swiftly, and certainly reflects committee thinking on what’s hot and what’s not. It’s a product, and I’m not sure it’s not a contemptuous product, shrewd but not wise, signed by someone whose innate talent is becoming irrelevant to what he does for a living.

2 February 1986

Marek Halter: *The Scroll of Abraham*

Marek Halter’s novel *The Scroll of Abraham* (Henry Holt, \$19.95), is also a document – a text none of whose individual pieces are fully enlightening in themselves, but whose sum in this case is cumulatively majestic. Sentence for

sentence, this large compilation of sentences doesn't impress at once. It's a 710-page translation from French, in which this book became a European best-seller, but the essentially pedestrian quality of the prose is obviously deliberate on the author's part. Gradually, it comes clear that this is one of his strengths, confidently employed.

Paragraph for paragraph, too, there's not much flash or colorful construction in this account of one Jewish family, over centuries of generations and their wanderings. Halter's quasi-documentary work is the journal of Abraham, a scribe of Jerusalem, and his multitudinous descendants. His account follows them from the day of the destruction of the Temple of Solomon to the death of Halter's grandfather, Abraham, in the Warsaw Uprising of World War II.

Halter interfolds the threads of his tale in a calm, discursive manner. No matter how shocking the event being described, he is not a shouting, gesturing melodramatist – he is an honest weaver.

The scroll of Halter's title was begun by the scribe, to record his name and the names of his wife and children; to mark their existence, to contain a line or two of significance in their lives, and then to be passed on to the next generation. And in an unbroken though not always easy succession, it is handed down. It isn't a journal; it doesn't flesh out what's meant by entries such as: "... who in Troyes, in Champagne, knew Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac and Mordecai the madman." The fleshing out is what Halter has done, like a particularly insightful annotator.

No other approach, one comes to realize, would have done as well. Any attempt to be Cecil B. De Mille about the long, difficult history of the Jews over nearly 2,000 years would have become as full of bombast as your average best-selling writer could have made it. Blood has been spilled, tears have been shed; if from every Jew only one drop and one tear, still the world ought to have drowned.

The cumulative effect of this sum has clearly worked on Halter's sensibilities to produce this harrowingly quiet, sometimes quirkily fond, now-and-then rollicking depiction. We see an essentially ordinary but industrious, sufficiently intelligent and sufficiently lawful, not to say occasionally stiff-necked, lineage making its way down 19 centuries... with howling death always astir near the pavilions of that life to which Jews drink in joy and steadfast appreciation.

Here is, first, an understandable depiction of what formed the kinds of

Jew that gentiles of the western world are most likely to encounter. The acculturations laid over the Jews of Spain and central and eastern Europe are seen here in their inception, in their first full flower, and then in their further evolutions and their meldings into one another. As in time-lapse cinematography, we see an unfolding of varied hues and functional shapes suited to particular environments, ever changing, yet always itself.

It's been common to say the Jews are rootless. Halter shows instead how they are rooted wherever they are. He does it with love and respect, and he does it without fear or favor – there are times when he plainly has them say harsh things about Christians and Christianity that more diplomatic authors might have glossed over.

But the ultimate thing to be learned from this honest work of literature is that we are not as divided as all that, gentile and Jew. When they came to America, they came from the same places, “they” and “we”, whichever persuasion those pronouns might represent. Our histories are, in many respects, one history. One is struck, in Halter's book, by repeated instances in which common participation in an event, on the long scale of unfolding time, is more significant than who did what to whom in response to transient humors.

In the course of this book, empires rise and empires erode. Human life is what endures... and the concept of law, respect, and love. “They” are “we”, and I have never seen a finer argument for that precept than the one Halter has created here.

There are days when it's gratifying to be in this line of work.

20 April 1986

John D. MacDonald: *Barrier Island*

The procedural novel of American business chicanery is peculiarly John D. MacDonald's. He has no equal at it. And that's not just because too few people care to support a decent-sized school of imitators. It's much more because to read MacDonald in this mode is to realize that just about the last word has been said and there's not enough room to shoehorn in any other two cents' worth.

Barrier Island (Knopf, \$16.95) is not as massively crowded with characters as MacDonald's earlier *Condominium* or as sharply delineated as his *A Key to the Suite*. The latter ought to be required reading-aloud at Junior

Chamber of Commerce luncheons and taught as part of the curriculum at Harvard Business School. It would save many a smart, optimistic and proudly ruthless young person from needless heartbreak in the weed-out 40s. It is also a genuine piece of American literature, of which *Barrier Island* is a paler shadow.

But if you want to know how land deals are manipulated on the Gulf Coast (and by extension anywhere that private gain is possible by converting taxpayer dollars and raping the ecology), here are the homey details.

It's particularly his ability to catch that inflection of the entrepreneur's voice, the speech patterns of the small-city multimillionaire power brokers, and to accurately limn the mercenary loyalties of their various sorts of henchmen, that makes MacDonald peerless in this metier.

As we were saying, not enough people care. Or perhaps it would be a better promotional strategy for MacDonald to write in some arm-waving, muckraking manner. As it is, he merely writes without pity, creating truly damning indictments – and searching examinations of the moral dilemmas facing the individual who, against all good sense and sincere advice, wants to play it straight.

The particular persons MacDonald evokes in this Dostoevskian tale are land developer Tucker Loomis, simply a little amoral in pursuit of his ambitions; Bern Gibbs, who has forgivable weaknesses when it comes to easy money, and Wade Rowley, Gibbs's partner in an up-and-coming real estate agency.

Is Rowley in fact a little stuffy and stubborn about Gibbs's dealings with Loomis? Is it stupid of him to wonder why their agency is suddenly the recipient of Loomis's business, when another agency across town had been handling it all? And when, in truth, the Rowley/Gibbs agency doesn't seem to be really doing very much to earn it – just processing some harmless pieces of buy-option paper? Is Rowley risking the bread on the table of his long-faithful wife and their teenage son? More important, is he risking that moment we all dream and speak softly of in our 40s, the moment when we may finally have levered the rock of our careers up to the crest of the hill?

Well, what Dostoevsky – or the John D. MacDonald of *Key to the Suite* – would have done with this would have been to show us exactly how Tucker Loomis is in fact profoundly evil, how hard-won Rowley's virtue would have to be before he could be permitted to keep it, and how intricate but inevitable Gibbs's doom would be.

What we get, instead, are equivalents: the ending of Loomis's career, the mutation of Rowley's, the peculiar and far too coincidental terminal events in Gibbs's career, not merely in real estate but also in human society. Mind you, this is still a good read, and certainly a book that will repay your interest if you read it as a piece of forensics into what has gone wrong with the bright theories of laissez-faire capitalism.

But it is not energized by either some fundamental inventiveness or by an extended and mesmerizing delineation of its scenario. By definition, it must be a book MacDonald wanted to write, because everybody else would much rather read the next Travis McGee or, perhaps even more so, a new free-standing tough crime book. If he wanted to write it, it's interesting that he put strikingly little enthusiasm into it.

Ingenuity, experience, craftsmanship, intelligence – all of those are here. But this is a book written almost as if it were a piece of land out somewhere well beyond the present edge of urban life, with some curbs and gutters in, a few stakes and strings marking the homesites, and out front a big painting of what it's going to look like once the bricks and mortar are applied. It's almost like that.

25 May 1986

Louis L'Amour: *Last of the Breed*

Louis L'Amour, I think, enjoys being full of surprises. I met him, briefly, at the American Booksellers' Association annual convention in New Orleans last month, and he had this funny little grin. At the convention, he was doing something against regulations – autographing in his publisher's sales booth. Nobody seemed to care; they just lined up with their copies of the new book, *Last of the Breed* (Bantam hardcover, \$17.95).

These were, of course, mostly booksellers, not the usual book-buying public. But they knew who the big source was. They came to him, murmuring polite greetings they'd been rehearsing for the past half hour, and he responded to each as if he'd never heard that particular opening before.

It hardly matters what he writes. But even for the author of such departures as *The Walking Drum*, L'Amour's suddenly coming out with a story of Cold War dash and adventure has to be considered unusual in a fellow known as the world's leading author of Westerns. Didn't seem to be bothering him.

There are echoes of Hondo and Jubal Sackett here, to be sure. The hero of *Last of the Breed* is Joseph Makatozi, part Sioux, part Cheyenne, and, in L'Amour's description of him, under a veneer of civilization he is an unreconstructed savage. As quoted in the book, the four virtues of the Sioux warrior are bravery, fortitude, generosity and wisdom, and these are the ideals that drive him.

When we first meet him, however, he is Maj. Joe Mack, USAF, a superb airman and test pilot who has been captured by the Soviets as part of a deliberate program to kidnap key Western personnel, hold them in a hidden interrogation camp in Siberia, pump them dry, and then kill them. Makatozi knows how the new U.S. fighter plane works; Colonel Arkady Zamatev means to get it out of him. When Makatozi suddenly breaks free and "escapes" – without supplies or warm clothing into the limitless Asiatic wastes at the Arctic Circle – Zamatev almost negligently sends out Alekhin, a relentless native Yakut hunter, to retrieve the American savage.

As you might imagine, this fails. We follow Makatozi step-by-step, surviving in the bleak grayness and the marshy forests; we watch him kill, eat and skin animals, eventually including a bear; making fire by means not explained until Page 290; making a bow and arrows out of a tree limb and sticks – which is not a method that usually produces much of a weapon, by the way; becoming, step by step, more of a skin-clad savage, more fined-down to being a survival machine, more, by implication, noble.

This book can't miss. It tells us exactly what we want to hear, it holds up to us, once again, the image of the man of undeviating action and worthy purpose, and we hardly notice that Makatozi's survival depends on (a) very shortly finding a cache of food and a knife and (b) having a large supply of useful actors who appear, whenever required, from behind a tree or shack in this wilderness. They help Makatozi out of whatever's troubling him at the moment, then go off again on their various errands.

Makatozi's Siberia, like the real one, has plenty of people in it. But the impression L'Amour initially gives – that this will be a story of One Man Alone Against All Odds – is never abandoned. People keep helping him – hardly anyone in this part of the Soviet Union seems to display any loyalty to the Soviet system – and things work for him that shouldn't, like an inherently unbalanced bow, and arrows with varying density. But everyone in the story keeps saying that it's One Man Alone, etc., and we keep on believing it.

We believe, too, in the unlikely combination of background events that

produced an unreconstructed savage, full of primitive survival skills, from someone born in about 1950, and yet gave him time to also be an officer and gentleman, and a superb aviator rated to fly anything with wings or rotors, including Soviet helicopters, on sight. And, like the fact that L'Amour only gets around to describing one vital survival technique on Page 280 – and then only sketchily – we believe that Makatozi was not only deliberately downed in the Bering Sea with no U.S. agency the wiser, but that he was recovered efficiently and swiftly transported to the secret camp, even though L'Amour shows us not one incident in that unlikely chain of events.

What the hell, he never shows us the payoff confrontation between Makatozi and Alekhin, either, even though the book has been building up to it all along. In other words he doesn't really tell us a story – he tells us, convincingly, that he has told us a story.

None of that will bother us: it didn't bother me even though I was noticing these technicalities with one part of my mind and making notes. The part of my mind that reads Louis L'Amour for pleasure was thoroughly hooked, and that's what matters... that's the source of the entertainment, the dollars for Bantam and L'Amour, and the quirky little upturn at the corners of his mouth.

I do want to register with you the fact that the “Lithuanians” he introduces into this story have names like Stephan, even though there is no ph in the Lithuanian language – it would be Steponas, like my No. 2 son. According to L'Amour, Lithuania was absorbed by the Soviet Union after World War II instead of in 1940; “Lithuanian” children in the U.S. speak Russian while at play, not Lithuanian, and these children have been given Russian first names – as, apparently, Yakut children have, too. Also, they come, he says, from a largely Protestant nation, which will be a shock to the Pope, who thought he had that flank well covered.

In other words, L'Amour's research on Lithuania is so wildly inaccurate that I think someone sold him a bill of goods, though at the ABA he assured me, with his little smile, that it was impeccable.

Even that didn't bother me; it's irrelevant to the main storyline. I believe him about the West, I believe him about Hondo, and Jubal, and I can even believe him about Joe Makatozi. Because, most of all, I believe him about Louis L'Amour, one imperturbable man against all odds.

Algis Budrys is a son of the late Col. Jonas Budrys, who entered the Free Lithuanian diplomatic corps after long military service in Asiatic

Russia.

29 June 1986

Richard Condon: *Prizzi's Family*

Richard Condon is a snob and we love him for it. I think the reason may be that we think he's kidding the snobs on our behalf, and is himself a good, honest fellow of our own sort. Well, maybe.

Condon's work almost always presents a similarly slithery aspect. *The Manchurian Candidate*, which flung him to prominence on the pop lit scene, is still his best book because under the cultural flash and the S&M filigree he also told us who to laugh at and who to cry for. Over the intervening years, Condon has produced a lot of breathtakingly nervy stuff, most of which could be filed under "Fatal Styles of the Rich and Famous". Personally, while I was sometimes awed by the goings-on, I found I did not give a damn who got hurt. Worse, I felt that Condon had a not particularly genial contempt for all his characters, even the ones he was nominally rooting for.

Charley Partanna is a little different. In *Prizzi's Honor*, and now in the new *Prizzi's Family* (Putnam's, \$17.95), Charley the Mafia hit man is very much like what we're supposed to take him for – a quirky, warm, wise but unsophisticated person, with his little human vices constantly getting him in hot water. While he gazes up at the stars and wonders at the intricate scheme of things, he now and then whacks out people (he calls it "zotzing") and occasionally even brings their thumbs home to the Don. But it's his love life that's a mess.

Well, maybe all of that works.

You will recall, from *Prizzi's Honor*, book or film, that Charley had been involved in a contretemps with Maerose Prizzi, Don Corrado's willful, ambitious and sexually compelling granddaughter. This new book is not a sequel but, as you have doubtless heard, a "prequel" – a story set in that earlier time when Charley thought he was going to marry a showgirl named Mardell La Tour but Maerose had other ideas.

Specifically, Maerose sees a union with Charley as her ticket toward becoming the first female Don in history. To achieve marriage to him, she mounts a campaign of truly Sicilian singlemindedness and intensity, which ought to have swept a Mardell La Tour aside in seven seconds of the first round.

But this Mardell is actually Grace Willand Crowell, finishing-school and Yale Drama School graduate, who is conducting her La Tour affair with a killer hoodlum as an intellectual exercise. She is invincible because under the weeping and distressed Mardell is the blithely uncaring Grace, who wants to marry some society somebody named Freddie. (Freddie, I think, is part of a conscious inversion of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*.)

And meanwhile, of course, there's the business of zotzing Vito Daspisa, Charley's boyhood friend, who has fecklessly killed a couple of cops and is trying to sing his way out of the bind. Then, as a consequence, there's the involvement of George F. Mallon, psalm-spouting candidate for Mayor of New York, the consequent need to frame George F. Mallon Jr. for some truly revolting felonies, and eventually the pressing need to whack Vito's brother, Willie, and his lover, Joey Labriola, etc. All of that is very atmospheric, but technically it could be lifted right out of the plot and anything else – or nothing – substituted.

It's maybe all funny stuff, and it's certainly a piece of reading that moves right along. But basically it's a construction, designed to follow up on the smash success of *Prizzi's Honor*, filling out some allusions left unfleshed in the earlier book.

In the earlier book, Charley was successful as a character. He had novelty, he was not quite what you'd expect, and thus he had charm. If you were Grace Crowell, or wanted to be a Grace Crowell, or wanted to get a Grace Crowell after her affair with a Charley Partanna, he engaged you. But I think the reason Condon had to go into the past is that Charley was all used up for him at the end of the first book.

It's not that there isn't any more to Charley Partanna; it's that Condon can't find it. And even his main storyline, about the love triangle, collapses under stress. Two books now, and I don't believe the Maerose we're supposed to see is the Maerose who would have thrown it all away so readily.

But like sad Vito Daspisa, who lives only long enough to die, and that poor culatino, Joey Labriola, whose only purpose is to teach us a new word, the sapient, puissant Maerose turns out to be there just so Condon can temporarily complicate Charley's life. And what does he think of Charley? Is Charley somebody his own author regards with affection or respect?

Well, maybe. But maybe not.

14 September 1986

Walter J. Boyne and Steven L. Thompson: *The Wild Blue*
Pat Conroy: *The Prince of Tides*

Here are two books about as different from each other as popular books can be: *The Wild Blue*, by Walter J. Boyne and Steven L. Thompson (Crown, \$19.95) and *The Prince of Tides*, by Pat Conroy (Houghton Mifflin, \$19.95). The first is an Air Force novel by two highly experienced commercial wordsmiths. The other is a Modern South regional story, set in a Carolina sea-island shrimping town. It's by the man who wrote *The Lords of Discipline*, *The Great Santini* and *The Water is Wide*, from which the film *Conrack* was made. Conroy is not a commercial wordsmith, despite his membership in the screen writer's union.

At first inspection *The Prince of Tides* looks like a seriously literary if self-consciously Southern piece of work. It is in some ways a combination of *The Great Santini* and *Conrack*. Its hero... no, its protagonist... is a high school English teacher and football coach, Tom Wingo, son of shrimp-netter Henry Wingo, a blustering, ready-fisted Army Air Corps veteran. There are, however, a parody's worth of additional features. Even omitting some, they make a tangled summary:

Tom's mother, Lila, is a seductive schizoid belle with grotesque executive abilities. At one point late in Tom's eventful youth, she, Tom, and his twin sister, are raped in their home by three escaped convicts. They then kill the cons in a gory slaughter abetted by the family's Bengal tiger. Lila eradicates all traces and conceals the event from the world. Henry comes home for supper and never notices that an overstuffed chair has vanished forever and his tiger is bleeding to death. Later Lila divorces Henry; in despair, he goes to prison for dope-smuggling. Lila then marries the local land-baron, and profits from the federal takeover of the town, razed for a plutonium-processing complex.

Tom dotes on teaching, but has had "a nervous breakdown" and is unemployable. His sister, Savannah, is now a genius poet in New York. There she has developed the habit of attempting suicide. Tom's older brother, Luke, unable to protect his siblings and mother from Henry's habit of beating them, at first just wants to be a shrimper and say "ain't". He is in the end fatally articulate all of a sudden, passionate and committed, and unable to survive.

All this emerges from Tom's inconclusive episode with the lovely, repressed Susan Lowenstein, Savannah's psychiatrist, whose lover he briefly becomes. She's married to a famous violinist, and Tom coaches her whining son in football and manhood while railing to Susan about his awful childhood and his present lassitude. But suddenly, for no visible reason, Tom reconciles with his mother, his stepfather, his father, and even his wife, Sallie, an M.D. who had openly taken up with a heart specialist, leaving Lila to see to the welfare of their little daughters. He somehow gets a new teaching job, and Savannah seems much better.

From the content of the fervent if inconclusive declarations that often burst from his characters without warning, it seems Conroy does not intend satire. Certainly his publisher is packaging him as a serious novelist. He has attractive intentions and respectable talent, but someone has told him that writing is elegant words, picturesque characters and memorable scenes. This insufficient truth does him in.

"My wound is geography," Tom Wingo begins this first-person account. "It is also my anchorage, my port of call. I grew up slowly beside the tides and marshes of Colleton; my arms were tawny and strong from working long days on the shrimp boat in the blazing South Carolina heat." Lovely... a confident step onto the stage, and a hush of anticipation falls over the house. It's only on second thought that you wonder how an anchorage can also be just a pause in transit.

Tom Wingo's wound may be geography; Pat Conroy's is language. Again and again, he trips over his silver tongue: "A bulldozer was parked beneath a street light, articulating the fate of Colleton in its hunched, stubby silence. It seemed part insect, part Samurai, and it had the dirt of my town bleeding along its gums. As my mother and I walked in silence, I could feel the soft linens of my family unraveling in my hands."

Elsewhere Conroy skimps his attention. On one page, we have "Savannah had nightmares about Nazis breaking down the door for years." Style is a gun you should always treat as if it were loaded.

I never did deduce what this book's string of scenes is supposed to sum up to. If the point is that Tom surrenders to his melancholy and is (almost) happy for it, the book boils down to something that many a Southern and Northern novelist has told us as numbly.

If it is, instead, that in the crucial confrontation with his mother in Savannah's apartment he has finally penetrated the hitherto impervious Lila,

and is a somewhat better man for it, then, again, nowhere on that page has Conroy written anything to explain how this miracle happened or how it might ever happen to us. Obviously, something finally moved within these hitherto garrulously static characters, but Conroy does not depict it. He simply writes on from there as if he had made his point.

You are not going to have any such problem with Boyne and Thompson. *The Wild Blue* is a sprawling cast-of-characters story that details every dramatic event in Air Force history from just after World War II to 1978 – and, in an epilogue, beyond that.

Shrewdly, it starts with a teasing prologue; we aren't told which of the three women at the Arlington National Cemetery funeral in 1978 is the grieving widow. And it then goes on to drag you right in, turning page after page, through wars and garrisons, through perilous exploits in storms and gunfire, wives, mistresses, politicians and all. There are the raw cadets from East St. Louis, one Irish Catholic and one black, there's the snobbish younger son of the retired general... oh, it will make one hell of a movie, F-104s, B-47s and -52s and thundering jets and all, and bedroom scenes.

During all that time, it's clearly building to a point. We always know exactly who's on stage in any given episode, where, when, and, most important, why, and we always know as we flip to the next section that we'll see them again a little farther up their careers... probably.

Neither Boyne nor Thompson would please Conroy's literature profs. Their prose is purely utilitarian, designed to stay out of the way of the journalistic pictures forming in the reader's mind. If Conroy is a sort of gravy-biscuit Van Gogh, this is a pair of reliable press-photographers.

Which book will you like? Within its compass *The Wild Blue* is the more roundly accomplished. But ultimately it depends on whether you think a book should be written for you or for the author.

19 October 1986

James Clavell: *Whirlwind*

If you glance at the best-seller lists, you will find James Clavell's *Whirlwind* (Morrow, \$22.95) right up there. And deservedly so. I think that of all the practitioners working in the mass market these days, Clavell gives readers the most. They respond accordingly.

The same thing used to be true of, say, Samuel Shellabarger, author of

Captain From Castile and other smash titles re-marketed as paperbacks and films, book club staples, Reader's Digest-type excerpts, etc. Surely, you would never have thought that by 1986, if someone said "Samuel Shellabarger", no one would say "Who?" And what about Thomas B. Costain, author of *The Silver Chalice* and many other bankables?

It's strange. We're talking about novels set in a time and place away from the contemporary. Presumably, they shouldn't become dated, and ought to be able to find a new audience in each oncoming generation. But they disappear without a trace when done for the audience that produces popular acclaim. *War and Peace* plays in a different league.

Captain From Castile, with Tyrone Power, still turns up now and then, on the smaller and more desperate TV stations. So does *The Silver Chalice*, Paul Newman's first starring vehicle. But that is death, nevertheless, and I suspect it tells us that our grandchildren will know a world essentially without *Shogun* and *Noble House*, *Tai-Pan* or *King Rat*. Or *Whirlwind*. Now – what is it about *Whirlwind* that makes it mortal?

Hard to tell at first. On inspection, this is another in the developing series of interconnected Clavell novels – "The fifth novel in the Asian Saga", says the blurb. *Whirlwind* is set in 1979, and takes place not in Asia so much as in Asia Minor – in Iran at the time of the Khomeini revolution.

Clavell's creative technique, according to a quote from Morrow's PR people, is to feel his way through a story, working without a conscious plan and doing a number of drafts until the thing takes its own shape. *Whirlwind*, I think even more than his other books, hops and skips around, shifting scenes and sets of characters every few pages, as if Clavell could only go so long with any particular subplot.

Actually, this might as well have been a closely calculated strategy; the result is immensely successful. What *Whirlwind* portrays, better than any other account has, is the incredible diversity of cross-purposes and motivations that led to Iran's collapse into chaos. And the clear fact established by Clavell's fiction is that if millions of Iranians wanted the shah out and the ayatollah in, they had millions of separate and often antithetical reasons for it.

This is what we expect of the good historical novelist: a sense that as we are being given an accurate picture of a dramatic time and place. Then, of course, we appreciate the tie-ins to *Noble House*, *King Rat*, etc., as a British helicopter company, secretly owned by the Noble House, struggles to survive

in the midst of all this upheaval, and its director attempts to survive and perhaps even advance within the house.

How is this different from *War and Peace*? Aside from the fact that Clavell is still alive and few “classic” authors are, he is also a bit less gifted than Tolstoy in delineating character economically. In fact, he generally takes just a shade too long in describing everything. But these are seemingly minor matters, as is his insistence on calling a helicopter an “airplane”, and his extended praise of “Forster’s” Lager beer. Clavell is himself a helicopter pilot, after all, and maybe there is another Australian beer besides Foster’s. I’m sure there must be.

I enjoyed this book – couldn’t put it down. I felt, as noted above, that somebody had finally given me a grasp of what Iran is like, and I even managed to care about the destinies of a few of the hundreds of characters. Everything in it will be a (reasonably) valid observation 30 or 90 years from now, and it won’t matter that occasionally Clavell’s prose falters: “...when Erikki reached back to touch her, the Soviet motioned him to stop with the gun.” We know what Clavell meant to say... what the hell. If all accounts are to be believed, Clavell works very hard, and qualified as a novelist by spending years in a World War II POW camp administered by the Japanese. That is paying your dues as a researcher into the Asian mind.

Yet why am I certain the water will close over Clavell’s work as surely as it has over the leading popular novelist in every preceding generation? Literature professors will tell you mass writing is intrinsically transient, but that’s not true; what is true is that literature professors make their livings by watching what vanishes and what doesn’t. If it doesn’t, it’s Tolstoy, and if it does, it was mere mass-market writing, somehow utterly different from that of Balzac, Dickens, the Dumases, or even Norman Mailer or Ernest Hemingway when they sold serial rights to *Life*.

Might be true. But have you read any Dickens lately? *War and Peace*? Are they really any better on those counts?

I don’t think so. I think they were essentially Samuel Shellabarger and Thomas B. Costain – certainly Dickens was – but they got a better foothold and won acceptance as “classics” before the first flush of popularity had died, and so have made it into school curricula, where only students have to test them by actually reading them.

Things popular move at a different pace now; even a Clavell has 20 or 30 Ken Folletts and Robert Ludlums, and their publishers’ marketing

departments, ready to wash him off the list, themselves to cling there only so long as the next tide. There isn't time for popularity to harden into place.

Sorry about that, James Clavell. Should have been trapped in an earlier war.

14 December 1986

James Carroll: *Madonna Red*
John le Carré: *Call for the Dead*
John le Carré: *A Murder of Quality*
Martin Cruz Smith: *Nightwing*

Hill and Co. has had a good idea. For \$9.95 each, it's bringing out new hardcover editions of early books by James Carroll, John le Carré and Martin Cruz Smith. The theory is that if you liked their more recent novels, you might be interested in Carroll's *Madonna Red*, le Carré's *Call for the Dead* and *A Murder of Quality*, or Cruz Smith's *Nightwing*. And you certainly should – they are what we call “good reads” and are considerably more literate than the average best-seller. Which is to say you can actually follow the story line without having to choke down all sorts of absurdity.

As a bonus, you get le Carré before he bloated and Cruz Smith talking about an exotic culture he knows intimately instead of from the library. You get better than what has now become of these people, good as they still are.

Genre fiction is that stuff in which there are definite heroes and villains. It's not like life; it's fiction in which likeable qualities and intense risk-taking guarantee success over those who want to take away what is rightfully yours.

It used to be that genre fiction frequently provided clean, direct prose, in the interests of economically conveying a logical story. And it used to be that genre fiction was markedly intelligent. Setting a story in some exotic locale, or in some milieu like the (supposed) world of foreign intrigue, was deemed to require a certain sophistication in its author.

Masters of mid-century genre fiction – writers such as Eric Ambler, Graham Greene, C. S. Forester, Nevil Shute, James M. Cain and Dashiell Hammett – clearly were as bright and as engaged with the world as Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, or Steinbeck. In fact, what they wrote was frequently very much like what the more literary writers wrote, until you got to the endings.

By and large, things have slipped badly. Nobody writes as clean a line as Hemingway or Hammett, and nobody dares test the sophistication of the best-seller audience very much. Writers such as Ken Follett and Robert Ludlum, who could not walk Eric Ambler's dog on a sunny day, have found a massive public that seems to consume bad grammar, absurd scenarios and travel-brochure "local color" with a vast, uncaring appetite.

I don't know which came first – the prosperity of the Irving Wallaces or the Wallace-shaped niche created in the market by decreasing standards of general education – but the success of the inept and oblivious has been driving out elegance and penetration. Look at what's been happening to le Carré ever since big bucks began to depend on his product; it is clear that much shrewd advice and perhaps pressure has been lavished on him.

But there was a time when le Carré was just an ambitious, smart, well-equipped craftsman who knew no better way to break into the market than to do a job to high standards. Thus *Call for the Dead* (1961) and *A Murder of Quality* (1962), two excellent George Smiley novels that preceded le Carré's public success with *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, which is almost but not quite as good.

It might be fair to say that while the money started low and has built up steeply, the sheer craftsmanship and intensity of entertainment value started high and has, over 25 years, worn down bit by bit, steadily. Maybe that just measures the distance between the heyday of the old English genre masters and the rise of Leon Uris and Jack Higgins.

James Carroll is that now rather familiar figure, the fiction-smith who is or was a priest. *Madonna Red*, his first novel, is a murder mystery from 1957, and between mayhems grapples with the confrontation between the old Roman church and people like the attractive nun who lies, cheats and conspires to be ordained. It's first-novelish in its pacing, overextended narrative, and cliché characterizations.

But then, genre fiction has never had characters; it has personified forces sticking bayonets into appropriately costumed dummies, and the thing that often keeps you from realizing this is the author's individual skill. Carroll does OK in this maiden effort, just OK. But then, being in with the young and vigorous le Carré is not a comfortable match for most contenders.

Martin Cruz Smith – whose murder mysteries about a Gypsy antiques dealer are dandy little confections – is of course known now for *Gorky Park*, his tour de force mystery about grisly murders in Moscow's *Gorky Park*. But

he began with an even nastier tale – an outright horror-fiction drama called *Nightwing*, which is about internecine Navajo/Hopi politics going on as usual while a chittering swarm of vampire bats skins people alive and spreads bubonic plague through northern Arizona.

I describe it that way because I remember when it first came out, in 1977, and was sold as a pure throat-slasher among a welter of similar books that were cooking up the start of the horror boom. I got a review copy and never even read it, so stereotyped did its original publisher make it seem. My mistake.

The bat stuff is excellent, the slashings are satisfactorily gory (particularly since the vampire bat salivates a substance that prevents blood from clotting in a wound), the bat-cave incursion scenes are marvels of claustrophobic horripilation and the characters aren't bad.

What they are mostly, however, are Navajo slick-talkers and the good, down-to-earth Hopis who are compelled to live cheek-by-jowl in reservation territory with these not-real people they call "head-pounders". Some of them take it as a matter of course that old Abner is still functional despite his bites and his burial.

Smith, who is half Pueblo, got all the craftsmanly parts right, presumably because he really wanted a career as a popular writer. But while he was at it, he also showed a very nice streak of regional novelism. If he'd been from someplace in the Spanish Moss belt, they'd have held literary teas for him.

Good stuff. Worth your while, even the Carroll. They won't make you an improved person but will certainly repay your time and attention. It does feel good to see some work that had hope and drive and optimism, and thought "bottom line" just meant a nicely rounded phrase in the last sentence.

Go look.

29 March 1987

James Park Sloan: *The Last Cold-War Cowboy*

The ins and outs of real clandestine warfare have a bizarre, mesmerizing charm for fiction readers attracted to Byzantine ratiocination as a spectator sport. But those appear to be a dwindling number, whereas publishing is increasingly in the hands of bean-counters.

This shortcoming has been met by Robert Ludlum, Ken Follett and Jack

Higgins, to name three, who hawk infantile fantasies and make fortunes at it. But what's a writer to do if it would make you gag to look down at your manuscript and see you had perpetrated something like that on your education and your mind?

Literate voices speak to you – Eric Ambler and Graham Greene building on John Buchan, the young John le Carré building on them in turn, and on to Len Deighton, who clearly once knew how it ought to be done as distinguished from what's bankable. These voices are old, perhaps outmoded. Greene called his later spy novels "entertainments", I think perhaps because he felt on the verge of doing burlesque. Ambler was in some ways Dashiell Hammett to Greene's Raymond Chandler, too set in his ways to get bent from his adult shape.

In the contemporary spy novel, actual literacy in the service of the tale is now just about as dead as verisimilitude. What we mostly have along that line are mannered rewrites of old Greene paragraphs by castrati and epicenes showing off how toney they can get.

That does not leave many hands at the torch; if Bill Granger ever gets a high-paying steady job, it may be all over.

But obstinate Chicago also brings us James Park Sloan, whose new *The Last Cold-War Cowboy* (Morrow, \$14.95) has found another viable tack. His plot is as solid as that of a Granger or a Greene, his Indonesia is as real as when Ambler was using it, and his depiction of spy-types and spy jargon – his spookisimilitude – is utterly convincing.

I like his cops, too, and he has found a new agency – the Treasury's Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Bureau – to attribute the best of them to. (There's a fellow named Pafko; Sloan is a Cub fan.) But where Granger writes the traditional good stick of prose in an anecdotal style, Sloan goes for jive.

He does it extremely well, as it must be done if done. His viewpoint character and narrator, Keith McCallum, a professor and specialist in Far Eastern studies, looks like a dry stick from outside. But he's a child of the '60s inside, and he couldn't possibly tell you his story without being so cool he skitters like an ice cube on a griddle.

On the one hand, he flourishes inside jargon about stocks and bonds, international oil-dealing, and realpolitik as played in the world Allen Dulles made. On the other, he reflects a not especially resentful awareness that being a good guy and productive citizen, as defined by the world's spokespersons,

inevitably means you'll be played for a sucker by what runs the world.

The result of this is that McCallum underplays every crucial moment, even the ones where he's being beaten and interrogated by the KGB, and the entire account spends proportionately more words on moving him from scene to scene than it does on what happens when he gets there. Something shattering always does; the effect is that you're being lulled along, and suddenly you're on a plane for somewhere else with the sound of a firecracker still ringing in your ears.

Yet although he has half-blundered onto a major dirty secret that's getting a lot of people killed, including some dear friends and mentors, McCallum both accepts the cold-war world and keeps testing to see if maybe it isn't really there. He tries to improve the future of the son of his broken marriage, he tries to believe the Texas magnate isn't lying more than one expects, he gropes for some way the Indonesian strongman could possibly be on the up-and-up. McCallum, like this novel, is both with it and outside it. The last cold-war cowboy of the title is another character who never really appears on stage; McCallum is what the cold war has made of the last decent hero.

Interesting. I wonder if this mix will work. McCallum's a character I could stand to see sequelized, and when was the last time that reaction came along?

24 May 1987

Tom Clancy: *Patriot Games*

I love this genre. At this writing (July 22) we are right on the official publication date of a mass-marketed hardcover book, and the situation is typical. The stores have been selling copies for some time, the advance publicity has long since been built and made itself felt, and the book is already being discount-retailed even as it climbs up the best-seller charts. Nothing about this strikes anyone in the industry as strange anymore; it's become an institutionalized practice.

In the case of some books, we can even see them being "remaindered" – publisherese for "dumped" – on publication day. That happens a lot to "category" books from some publishers who have long since geared their sales forces to develop routes of tame stores. Those will order, say, three copies each of that month's murder and SF, two bodice-rippers and a

western, just on the salesman's assurance that the product is substantially the same as last month's.

Add to that steady pulsation the total of the assured library orders, print as few more than that as possible, and you have your mingy predictable profit on the trade edition that justifies the reprints and spin-offs. Naturally, you don't cut into that by paying warehousing or bookkeeping overhead on excess copies, and, besides, there'll be another spurt just like it next month. Thus, hardback remaindering as a tactic of the sales strategy.

Now, that extreme of books-as-modules merchandising isn't quite happening yet to the Robert Ludlum/Ken Follett type of book, but these things are category fiction, too, and on their own scale they spin out their own dances to the same tune.

Take Tom Clancy's latest, *Patriot Games* (Putnam's, \$19.95). It's a "main selection" of the Literary Guild, the Doubleday Book Club and the Military Book Club. These are all, if I am not mistaken, actually one thing – a source of cheaply manufactured copies sold at prices so low that the only reason Putnam's and Clancy's business management go along with it at all is to build the book's and Clancy's reputation.

The *Reader's Digest* condensed version may or may not be more of the same. The sale of first publication rights to *Penthouse* magazine doubtless did bring in some real cash, which Putnam's and Clancy split 50-50, I would guess. But, again, if it weren't that they had to keep Clancy's market value established at some high level, I think both parties to the 50-50 would have given the serial rights away to any major slick medium that offered to package and push its version in advance of the trade edition.

It's hype, all of it. It's intended to create an atmosphere in which the trade edition, which does make money, though mostly for the bookstores, climbs up the charts and you have to have a copy. If enough of you have to have a copy, then there are the foreign editions and the movie rights, which mean there's significant additional money to be dropped into the 50-50 hopper, and there's the mass-market paperback, which is where Putnam's and Clancy actually make the money, particularly Putnam's. That's been an uneasy alliance for some time. Why else do bookstores stock jigsaw puzzles and ceramic animals?

But where in all this is young Tom Clancy, gradually coming to an awareness of craft and creativity, and putting it on the line day after day to produce the manuscript that turned out to be *The Hunt For Red October* and

the sudden vindication of all the days he fenced with bill collectors?

Where in all this are the founders of G.P. Putnam's Sons, a century and more ago, telling Dad to stuff the offer of good jobs in the nepotism factory, and stepping out on their own hook? And where, come to that, are you, with your hope that for your \$19.95 you will get back something to read, as distinguished from to have, or to participate in the type of? Just a little something, for God's sake, to start the pictures in your head?

Well, now, there you're in luck. Clancy is about as good as one can get at this. If he didn't have to stop his plot-run in every chapter to sketch in the glamor... excuse me, glamour... and scenic details, and deliver some paragraphs of disquisition on The Irish Question, he'd be damned good at writing a story. As it is, he's about as good as one can get at writing one of these slide-illustrated action lectures, and for once, it even has the sense that the author intended it to be deeper than a glorified brochure.

Jack Ryan, *Red October's* reluctant hero, returns here, with his sexy, commanding wife and ceramic-animal daughter, to get shot and agonized while also dining with Elizabeth II (no, not the boat) and being made a Peer of the Realm. Toward the beginning of this skein, he saves the child of the Prince of Wales from kidnapping, and toward the end he pulls some irons out of the fire at Camp David, which is more than real life offers.

But you can tell that, underneath, Clancy is engaged with certain questions that are important to him, and has some clearcut opinions of his own, perhaps not sufficiently vapid to fully satisfy the *Reader's Digest*. Oh, good enough to get by for now, but perhaps in the long run this unfortunate outcropping of an actual individual behind the byline will wear out Clancy's hypeability.

Better get him while he's hot.

2 August 1987

Edward Rutherfurd: *Sarum*

Sarum, by Edward Rutherfurd (Crown, \$19.95) is subtitled "The Novel of England", and that's what it is, in several senses of the term. (a) It's the novel everyone in England, apparently, had to read when it first came out over there; (b) England itself is the hero, and (c) it's the novel everyone over here is going to be talking about as the best single indicator of what one might expect to find going on in the typical English person's mind, were there such

a thing as a typical English person.

It's a very good read. "Rutherford" – the byline is a pseudonym – is literate, well-read, and a natural storyteller. He's also, if the introductory material is to be believed, a tireless and skilled researcher. And he's intelligent. What emerges from these qualities, after years of dedicated labor on his part, is a massive tome of nearly 900 pages, which moves a lot more readily than so much weight would lead you to expect.

This is due in part to some judicious thinking about how long to stay with any one episode, in part to what's in each of these mini-dramas, and in part to Rutherford's skill in populating them with fascinating people. I haven't read so satisfactory a "saga" in years... in fact, perhaps not ever before.

It's set on Salisbury Plain, which, as every schoolchild knows, is where Stonehenge is. One of the reasons Stonehenge is there is because Salisbury Plain is so topographically attractive that people have been living there continuously, and building things, since about 7500 B.C., which means it's fast approaching 10,000 years of habitation. And we have relics covering every bit of that span, more or less (though Rutherford invents the first one, shifting it from its actual venue into the hands of Hwll, the first nomadic hunter to come down from the tundra and settle his family on the high hills overlooking the plain). Rutherford gives Hwll the impulse to stonecarve a fertility symbol which, in the real world, was found in a European cave. But that's fair enough, and over the centuries that follow Hwll's colder, darker time, the relic reappears again and again, in charmingly selected places.

With a locale of such scope, Rutherford faced a – you should excuse the pun – monumental task. Nearly a hundred centuries of human aspiration, striving and accomplishment had to be described. He did it by "following" the Wilson, Mason, Godfrey, Shockley, Porter and Forest families down from their remote emergence from Hwll, from his difficult neighbor, Tep, from Krona the Warrior who brought his people in over the Channel in hide boats, from Nooma who appears in the time of the Henge, and from Aelfwald, in the time of King Alfred.

Intertwining, and occasionally branching out, and in one case wedding with a line descended from the same source as itself, the tale of these lineages, always centered on the Plain, comes down to 1985, with Prince Charles landing in a helicopter to help launch an appeal to restore a crumbling architectural monument.

The sight of that would have given old Hwll a nasty turn, we think, and as we think it, we realize that Rutherford has done his job well; he has brought so many people before us, and each is distinct in our mind, yet each a part of a lineage that is itself a distinct and living thing.

To further facilitate this, Rutherford has invented the village of Avonsford, in which a majority of the incidents here occur. If he hadn't done that, he points out not in so many words, he would have had scores of characters dashing hither and yon over the landscape in order to have things happen to them. But he asserts that all of these things are exactly like things that did happen as the present England formed itself up from diverse native races and immigrants both warlike and peaceful, and began to accumulate that sense of ancientness which Rutherford recreates from the bottom up, so to speak.

In his quest for authenticity, Rutherford conscientiously draws back from over-inventing. If you want to know how Stonehenge was built, exactly, or why the blue stones were once partly in place and then were moved out and replaced, you won't see it here because Rutherford knows that no one knows. As for the engineering, he contents himself with a passing reference to its having been done by vast teams of men. So where drama might demand picturesque narratives of stones being dragged hundreds of miles and tipped into place with huge ramps, a web of ropes and, possibly, immense levers, Rutherford cannot in all good conscience supply them. (His teams of men, though, ring true; the breeding and handling of draft animals was not invented there by the time the earliest stones went up.)

The longest part of the book, though, deals with comparatively recent times and events. The characters wear sewn cloth and live in houses much like ours, have politics we can recognize, and worship God while dealing with Mammon. It's just that, from an American eye, they do all this on such a great base of the past; a past which is one of the things we lost with the American Revolution. The heritage came over the sea; the cathedral did not, and we do not every day walk paths that may very well have been trod by Hwll before us.

That makes a difference. We don't miss it because we're not reminded, as a rule. And we wouldn't know what to do with it if we got it overnight, either. But in this case a writer not only brings it, he shows us how it works.

The strength and appeal of the saga novel, of course, is that it gives us an illusion that even if things look chaotic and unfair in our one lifetime, and

a lot of what happens seems purposeless, it all works out into a comprehensible shape over the generations. Usually, that's done just barely well enough to stand up to light scrutiny. What Rutherford has done here is much different from that, if only in its quality. This one lives and breathes, and until you stop to think that there will be life after Prince Charles, it gives you not only history but comfort.

6 September 1987

John Jakes: *Heaven and Hell*

John Jakes has devoted his life to thinking of stories the public will buy and finding ways to write them so that the public will want more from his byline. He does not go around conducting himself in such a manner that the public can see how each word is woven out of the fabric of his life. One way of looking at this is that he does not sell John Jakes; he sells what John Jakes does.

The John Jakeses of this world neither breakfast at Tiffany's nor lay waste to the countryside in motorcycle jackets. They are never on talk shows for their wit; they appear only when there is a product to plug. They may have wit or other evidence of a complex and engaging personality, but the host doesn't attempt to discover that.

All that's asked of the John Jakeses in that respect is that they be able to respond to a few simple questions without tipping their chairs over backwards. Johnny Carson never says to his producer: "Hey, let's get John Jakes on and let him talk about whatever he wants to!"

So the author of *The Kent Family Chronicles* and the *North and South Trilogy* is both wildly successful and totally unknown. John Jakes, the person, sits behind a keyboard in a featureless room somewhere; the John Jakes byline is on every bookrack in America.

His latest, *Heaven and Hell*, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$19.95), concludes the trilogy, and it delivers. The intertwined lives of the Main and Hazard families and their various friends and foes are conducted through about 690 pages to a relatively peaceful conclusion. On the way, there is plenty of pillage, rape, murder, massacre, petty and grand scheming, and an unfolding diorama of the vicious politics that formed the history of the post-Civil War period.

What emerges is in some senses a tribute to the persistence of noble

human values in the face of human weakness, and the lesson that only the mostly virtuous can benefit from the trials that life imposes. The progress of Charles Main and George Hazard could be called a simplistic homily. But the sheer weight of detail makes more of it than that. Jakes conscientiously provides a series of settings in which you can see the furnishings in each mansion, hotel room and teepee, every feature of the landscape on the prairie and in the tumultuous cities standing raw and new, yet already begrimed.

He shows you George Armstrong Custer, Andrew Johnson, Buffalo Bill Cody and a vast array of other historical figures whose contending ambitions control the events that happen to the Mains and Hazards. But he also shows you what people wore, what they read, and what they drank and ate. As the years and hundreds of events roll on, and the Mains and Hazards make what they can out of what is imposed on them, what you get is the feeling that this is life.

That's art. Now Jakes is never going to be confused with Tolstoy, because there are things in his style and characterizations that are not deft. The same is true of Tolstoy, but that's not taken into account. When Tolstoy does the equivalent of dancing in wooden shoes, it's art because Tolstoy is an artist. When Jakes does it, it's because this popular contemporary American commercial author is just a guy grinding it out.

The people who decide these things are not the same kind as the people who live behind the keyboard in the featureless room.

The John Jakeses of this world do the best they can with what got them off the farm or out of the genteel neighborhood in the first place – a talent for words and a willingness to work as hard as a field hand. In his particular case, what we are looking at is a man who spent decades doing equally good work – and sometimes some literarily “ambitious” work – under all sorts of names not his own, for every market that would help him pay his bills. He is like a thousand other writers your college teachers never try to teach you to be.

For a few out of the thousand, lightning strikes. One day, as it happened for Edgar Rice Burroughs finally discovering Tarzan, or Erle Stanley Garner at last getting the idea for Perry Mason, all those years of having to hold day jobs met with just the right circumstance, and John Jakes became an overnight success.

He looks out at you in a superb photo portrait on the back of *Heaven and Hell*. He is up against a wall. he wears a Hilton Head sweater, but he doesn't look like a resident; he looks like the clubhouse pro, veteran of many a sand

trap on the tour, a guy who checks in alone at the motel well after midnight.

It's too late for him to have no road map in his face. He looks straight into you. His eyes reflect a certain sad awareness, and his mouth is twisted into a slight grin you can also see on old police reporters. His arms are folded across his chest. "I've been a long way," the portrait says. "And what about it?"

18 October 1987

Bill Granger: *The Infant of Prague*

Bill Granger's latest November Man novel – *The Infant of Prague* (Warner, \$16.95) – is the best in this increasingly distinguished series about work-weary agent Devereux of R Section. With it, Granger has now clearly established himself as the most consistently rewarding contemporary writer of the foreign-intrigue story.

The other kind of spy novel is a bunch of Robert Ludlum/Ken Follett soap-opera clichés superimposed on travel brochure copy to make it a little different from the same clichés superimposed on some other glamor background. It cares nothing for the actual human condition. It's full of additives, substitutes, extenders and emulsifiers; its sources are murky, it won't refresh life and may cumulatively poison it.

The genuine novel of foreign intrigue does the thing popular literature does best; it pares reality down to its essentials. Its characters and their travails may be "unrealistically" un-complex, but, because of that, when accurately deployed they touch plainly on what really dwells within us. Done by a Bill Granger, their effect gets in under the nice social cushions that usually prevent us from groaning aloud or laughing hysterically in the presence of people whose opinions control our lives.

For practical purposes, this entire school of writing began two generations ago with John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, which Alfred Hitchcock then heavily rewrote into the script of the movie of the same name. But Hitchcock kept the thing that made it work, and which then sustained a flourishing body of work in prose and film. He kept the decent central character who persistently tries to make things better in the face of shadowy powers with hidden agendas and enormous secret resources.

The most prominent intrigue-novel writer in the next generation was Graham Greene, who wrote the classic *Stamboul Train* (also published here

as *Orient Express*) and leaped into prominence.

This “overnight” success was preceded by earlier novels whose action was clogged by long philosophical disquisitions on good and evil. Greene, a profoundly religious man, was trying to find some way to attract public attention to the premise that guilt, sin, struggles of conscience, and the machinations of persons who have embraced evil, are not abstract things set aside for sermons and the pages of holy books; these things act every day in the lives of every one of us.

For these purposes, it doesn’t matter whether this proposition is actually true; what matters is that underneath it all, most of us strongly suspect that it might be. Greene finally found the handle on that with *This Gun For Hire*. (The Alan Ladd movie is exciting; the Greene novel is a gut-twisting Greek tragedy in miniature.)

Writers who care to bring their skills to this mode, and are willing to take the risks of failing to maintain an effective balance between text and sub-text, have the foreign-intrigue setting to help them with its speeding cars, fog-wet cobblestone streets, and the rattle of Uzis in the night. This kind of writing will not work if it can’t get your adrenalin pumping.

You can – and should – just pick up a book like *The Infant of Prague* and read it for the events. You’re not supposed to have to sit there pondering; you’re supposed to be living this thing, which is why it’s much harder to do right than it is to froth out a Jack Higgins confection. Both the front and the back of your mind have to be engaged, because the back of your mind will be realizing that Cold Wars may come and the KGB and CIA may go, but there will always, always, be things moving around out there in the dark that could rip the roof off you at any moment.

And in the back of all our minds is the hope that there is some way to behave, some system for keeping straight with yourself, that will let us survive, and will equip us to go on surviving, through the times when the sky comes pouring down on our heads. A book that tries to do what *The Infant of Prague* succeeds in doing has to offer some answer to all that.

With all that in mind, it doesn’t matter whether, in *The Infant of Prague*, the holy statue at St. Margaret of Scotland in Chicago begins to weep real tears. It doesn’t matter that the TV reporter needs to save her job; it matters that she herself can’t dismiss what it is she saw.

And it matters that this convincingly arouses some of the world’s most powerful clandestine antagonists when the confused Czech teenage filmstar,

on her carefully iron-curtained goodwill tour of the U.S., is seized by the conviction that the statue weeps particularly for her.

Granger, who knows his backgrounds, weaves all this into a tightly circumstantial package that includes convincing glimpses into corporate pragmatism that blur all distinctions between the private and governmental sectors. Those lead to several very non-abstract mutilations and gory killings, some of them ludicrously in error, just like life. Every one of these journalistically convincing events has an effective thematic purpose. Devereux, more and more a man without illusions, once again suffers grievously, but persists, for the sake of doing the right thing.

You don't have to remain aware of any of the above heavy thinking; the book bangs right along, and it's a fun read. I just tried to explain where the fun comes from.

22 November 1987

Len Deighton: *Winter*

In the wordsmith trade, there is a thing called "Maid-and-Butler Dialogue", and it goes like this:

As the curtain rises on the opulent parlor, we see the downstairs maid dusting the chandeliers while the butler polishes the port decanter. "Ah, Matilda," says the butler, "today is the day the Master finally gets out of prison, having served the unjust sentence for defalcation which was imposed upon him due to the machinations of his uncle, the ruthless international financier."

"Indeed, Ruggles, that's true," agrees the maid, "and I wonder what the Mistress and Derek the chauffeur will do now."

Or you could do wife-to-husband at the lying-in hospital:

"I want to call him Paul... Do you hate the name Paul?"

"No, it's a fine name... "

"...Two sons named Peter and Paul...."

"Have you been saving up this idea ever since our son Peter Harald was born, more than three years ago?"

The latter example appears on Page 32 of Len Deighton's new novel, *Winter* (Knopf, \$19.95). By then there is already very little doubt as to the nature of Deighton's work in this book.

It's a "panoramic" novel about a family through the years between 1900

in Vienna and the immediate aftermath of World War II in Germany. The gimmick is that the mother is American and the father is German, the two brothers are split up, and one winds up on the Nazi side and the other goes through the war for the Allies.

This requires Deighton to introduce a host of locales and a cast with hundreds of speaking parts. Because this is not a four-volume series, many a character then has to get through ordering tea or being measured for a new wardrobe while working in casual references to the Kaiser, horseless carriages and the folly of investing in flying machines, Adolf Hitler, and the problems associated with getting doctors to endorse the proposed new euthanasia program.

These are busy people on a crowded schedule. The way to show this to the reader, Deighton has decided, is to have everybody tell everybody else what they already know. The other thing is to rush them place to place so they can be at all the events we vaguely remember from school histories and TV documentaries.

There isn't time or space for any pretense that these are real people speaking normally or living rationally conducted lives. They are Disneyland androids who jerk into a semblance of life long enough to twitch their mouths while a recording of Winston Churchill, or whoever, appears to issue from them.

This is, in short, a book that won't work unless it's telling us stuff we already know. That's its only possible appeal; "Oh, yes!" we are supposed to exclaim, "The new hunting lodge is right across the valley from Berchtesgaden and, just think, in another 35 years, or 70 pages, whichever comes first, Hitler will be moving into the neighborhood with that tarty Eva Braun creature!"

When Len Deighton first hove up on the horizon, he was the author of some of the freshest, most intriguing cloak-and-dagger novels of our time. They were artificial as all get out – never in this world has there been an agent like Harry Palmer, or an antagonist quite as elaborately paranoid as the operator of the Billion Dollar Brain – but they were grittily real in the realest sense; they were about people who were committed to what they were doing, at whatever cost.

Since then, Deighton has tried his hand at a bewildering number of styles, and only a few have worked except at the bank. *SS-GB* was considered innovative, but only by people who never realized any number of science

fiction writers, some of them quite a bit better at it than Deighton, had already written essentially the same story.

Berlin Game, *Mexico Set* and *London Match*, a recent trilogistic attempt to get back toward what Harry had been, proved a dismal let-down with a cop-out ending. *Goodbye, Mickey Mouse*, which immediately preceded them, read like what would happen if you were a best-selling author, had already published a good book called *Bomber*, and commissioned some aspiring Harlequin Romances writer to script an imitation you could sign your marketable name to.

But *Winter* tops that vapid standard for stuffed books about stuffed dummies:

“Pauli huddled on his side... constricted in the way that so often comes with the final moments of such deaths. Peter, immediately behind him, was spread-eagled, face down. To General Glenn Rensselaer it seemed as if Peter’s arm was reaching out towards his younger brother’s shoulder.”

There. I’ve given away the last paragraph. Actually, I plan on giving away the entire book.

20 December 1987

Robin Cook: *Mortal Fear* **William Diehl: *Thai Horse***

What we have here are two examples of the thriller mixture: Robin Cook’s *Mortal Fear* (Putnam, \$17.95), a medical-horror novel, and William Diehl’s *Thai Horse* (Villard, \$18.95), about noisy higger-mugger in the exotic Far East.

If you are the natural customer for these books, nothing more need be said. Both bylines are reliable purveyors, with Diehl having authored cop novel *Sharkey’s Machine* and several other staples, and Cook having done *Coma* and other imitations of Michael Crichton. Both would make popular run-and-shoot movies, using a great deal of the footage from almost any other film of that sort. And if you are the natural customer for these books, I can assure you they will deliver whatever it is that attracts you to them, because it’s all in there, somewhere, several times.

If you are not the natural customer for these books, I hardly know what to tell you that would persuade you to read them. Both bristle with jargon and

cliché, the one biochemical and the other geopolitical. Both have exotic locales – morgues, laboratories, Washington, D.C., restaurants; Hong Kong, Bangkok, Georgia – and fast action.

People’s hearts explode either from disease or from heavy-caliber hits, other people seem to be desperately concerned by all this and are propelled into catastrophic action by these events, and they make love a lot, or are crammed into juxtapositions that induce them to think about it a lot. And none of it seems to be actually happening in real places, or to people who deserve to be cared about. But that, of course, is the attraction.

The idea is not to write a book; it is to write something like a book report. Long and prose-filled as some of these productions are, and *Thai Horse* in particular has a lot of words in it, no real reader can take them as things in themselves. These people can’t be believed in, the dialogue they utter has never been heard by the human ear except at the movies, and if this be Bangkok, why, it is just like Passaic, N.J., with the street signs changed.

The terms from the travel brochure and the medical dictionary occur as surely as items on a laundry list, but what you have to do is read William Diehl’s mind, for instance, and say to yourself: “Now, if I match this piece of understanding of what the real thing would look and smell like if I went there. If I observe what this cliché character is doing, and make the assumption that not even Robin Cook believes this is a real person, what would be happening to my emotions if I were standing in that person’s place?”

But if you do that, you are not so much reading as studying; you are actually employing your analytical faculties. You’re not supposed to do that with this form of literature; you are practicing a perversion.

Another way to deal with this stuff is to giggle at it. One of the central characters in the Diehl novel, for instance, was nicknamed Polo at the United States Naval Academy. Why? Because he had a photographic memory, and “Polo” is short for “Poloroid”. (The advance copy of the book is additionally replete with “fusilage” for “fuselage”, that old favorite “gutteral” for “guttural”, and “repel” for “rappel”, as in “He repelled down the face of the building.”)

Another hero’s nickname is “Gli occhi di sassi”, or “Stone Eyes”, which is OK until Diehl tells you with a straight face that it was bestowed on the Shadow Brigade assassin by Chinese bandits. (It’s Italian.)

But no matter what kind of dressing you use, these are Styrofoam salads.

They have no nourishment of their own in them. And that is their attraction. You can buy one of these things, consume it, and it will not arouse your digestive apparatus; you can have had lunch and not gain an ounce. You can claim to have read a book. You can even talk to your friends about it, assuming your friends have the power of speech. You can go to Bangkok and never go, which is a blessing, considering the fact that in the real Bangkok there are seven million people who do not give a damn about you and are apt to show it if you arrive.

It's reading books like these that has convinced me the purpose of the medical novel or the gunfire novel is to prevent its readers from thinking about death in any real way, that the purpose of the exotic locale is to forestall fears of nonexistence, and that if this numbing process is eventually successful, then the master purpose will have been realized; its readers won't have to think about that thing which leads to death; that is, existence.

No wonder Stephen King has been so popular; his stories are usually set in the very same room with their readers, and deliberately devote much of their action to matters full of small, mundane details. It's not relevant to King's many millions of readers that his talent and insight could actually support a large audience of people who read for pleasure; what brings in the big numbers is the ability to numb the Styrofoam readership out of its fear of Passaic.

31 January 1988

Tom McNab: *The Fast Men*
Robert Daley: *Man With a Gun*

Here are two novels that offer glimpses of exotic times and places; both are pretty good – good enough. Tom McNab's *The Fast Men* (Simon & Schuster, \$17.95) is about the now forgotten but then raffish and tumultuously popular 19th century sport of professional foot-racing. Robert Daley's *Man With a Gun* (Simon & Schuster, \$18.95), is about politics at the police commissioner level, particularly as related to New York City but obviously with broader applications.

The two books are very close to each other in size and in their level of literacy (the palm goes to McNab by a nose). I don't know what prompted S&S to price the Daley a dollar higher, unless it's that they think people are

more eager to read about fight than they are flight.

McNab is English and possibly got interested in his topic from that end of things, because foot-racing on the blood-sport level began in the British Isles. But many of his settings are in the American West – roughly at the time of the Custer massacre – where the citizenry of dusty frontier towns could be taken to the cleaners for astonishing sums of side-bet money, provided the scam were meticulously prepared.

The nonpareil of preparation is McNab's central character, Moriarty the actor, ostensibly only the head of a troupe of itinerant actors dispensing palatable snatches of the classics along with knockabout melodrama. But two members of the troupe are "fast men" with few peers, and Moriarty himself has an impressive record on the cinders as well as the boards.

Turning up separately in isolated communities, and "competing" against each other in events drummed up by Moriarty, Billy Joe Speed and Buck Miller eventually attain world-class form. This does not prevent Moriarty from turning matters to account nevertheless, though it does eventually get him into a spot where he himself has to get back on the track despite the probability of a fatal heart attack.

This is almost a successfully poignant novel. Its problem is that McNab (a consultant to the makers of the movie *Chariots of Fire*) has exhaustively re-researched the West, American and British folkways of the time, and the world of the theater, and it shows a bit too much. His control of the plot wavers here and there, so what might have been gripping drama is just interesting. On the other hand, many will find the research to be the book's major strength.

Man With a Gun has a similar problem. Daley actually was a deputy police commissioner in New York City in the 1970s, and before that was a newspaper foreign correspondent. So his background closely resembles that of his hero, Phil Keefe. But Keefe never really comes alive.

Of problems he has a lot, and those are gritty and real. Trying to do a good job for the reform commissioner who has brought him in to the department as an experiment, Keefe soon makes all the novice mistakes possible when naively attempting to exercise authority within an entrenched bureaucratic structure.

What seems like a small thing at first – he stumbles over a major auto-theft ring and tries not only to arrest everyone but also make the raid a media event – turns into a nightmare that eventually finds him on trial for murder

and the top command of the police department in a shambles. In addition, his live-in girlfriend suddenly gets a job in Hollywood, so that she's not there when he needs her most; not that she was ever thrilled about his new interest.

Various division heads in the department populate Daley's cast, as do the commissioner and the mayor, and Sgt. Rainey – Keefe's secretary, a wise, aging cop who is also well known in the department as a drunk and who aspires to become an actor. There is Sharon, a sexy iron maiden of an assistant district attorney, and a very nice if clichéd walk-on part for a black Southern cleaning woman. But not even Rainey ultimately makes a lot of sense as someone for the reader to get involved with, and Keefe and Sharon verge on the hopeless.

None of these people really act out of logical consequences of logical motives. They just exchange dialogue and do things, but nothing Daley shows us about them accounts for their motives or their sometimes bewildering changes of course. Keefe's problems can be dramatic only if we like Keefe, and this is hard to do; he's rather wimpy and remarkably obtuse about Balkanized political structures for someone who filed from Europe for the *New York Times*.

This shortcoming isn't flagrant; Daley is far from the worst of the journalists who have tried their hand at fiction. Though he only comes waist-high to some of his peers in that respect, those are high waists, and conversely he's nowhere near as bad as some others have been. And courtroom drama always creates a certain intensity. But, once again, the major strength of this novel is in its nonfiction. And, once again, that ought to please a lot of readers. Even this one, to some extent.

What it comes down to is the worst kind of favorable review-line: You probably won't be sorry you read these books.

28 February 1988

Steve Pieczenik: *Blood Heat*

There must be a particular frame of mind in which many "pop" books are read, and the thing that worries me about it is that it's schizoid.

Take *Blood Heat*, by Steve Pieczenik (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$17.95). This is a "thriller" on the Tom Clancy model. *Blood Heat*, which climaxes in 1989, is essentially a contemporary novel, full of circumstantial detail and insider terminology, designed to convince you that under the

surface Bad Things Go On All the Time. The force that propels those things is greed for money and power.

This greed appears to be rampant and reckless. Competent people of promise and intelligence instantly seize the first opportunity to aggrandize themselves by doing something not only illegal or immoral but nasty. In this example, it begins with rescuing sadistic prison-camp commanders and expropriating germ-warfare secrets. Then surreptitious corruption and ruthless chicanery increase over the years. Round about Page 125, typically, things have reached the point where large numbers of ordinary citizens are helpless to prevent being exploited, sickened and killed in order to support the financial and sensual profits the protagonists have no time to savor.

Germ warfare being what it is, there are plenty of international political implications, and soon all sorts of fingers are quivering toward that Big Button. We are ultimately saved from universal pustules and plutonium only by the unlikely happenstance of some hard-working, conscientious guy – who, regarded objectively, is living a life of perpetual self-sacrifice with a fanatical diligence for our own good. Everybody in this kind of fictional structure is nuts and dangerous, and is out there lurking under bushes this minute.

Piecznik, like most of these authors, is not familiar with grammar or the sound of actual people speaking. But this is an advantage, because it validates his credentials as someone who is not a mere writer; he is, if the jacket copy is to be believed, “recognized worldwide for his work in psychiatry, international crisis management, and hostage negotiations”. That is to say, this book is presented as being “real”. And people buy it – I would guess by mail, considering what waits just outside the front door.

Now, Robert Littell, author of *The Revolutionist* (Bantam, \$18.95), used to be a European bureau chief for *Newsweek*. I suppose Bantam’s blurb-writers don’t quite understand what they imply when they dub Littell literally “a master of espionage”, but perhaps they do. At the very least, the reading public is going to expect someone with those credentials to be some species of insider on Cold War realities.

This particular set of realities pertains to be about the funding days and subsequent progress of the Bolshevik Revolution, and how Stalin the thug perverted the bright dreams of perfect clockwork the wimpy Trotsky and the syphilitic Lenin were already corrupting even as the Marxist ideal was flowering in the hearts of decent, ordinary people who had had a bellyful of

plutocratic exploitation. It's a book of the breathless sort, crowding unlikely combinations of historically familiar names into the same cafe every night, somewhat reminiscent of Irving what's-his-name's technique in his "novel" on French Impressionist painters.

"More than a novel of history... an imaginatively plotted work of suspense that transports the reader into the soul of Russia," says Bantam, prevaricating energetically. Apart from truth, "suspense" is killed by including wise and fictional conversations in 1917 that predict 1934 developments with total precision. Littell's characters constantly tell each other how smart and noble they are; this disguises their basic imbecility, but there is no meat in their brains and only fudge in their hearts.

Littell's prose is a cut above Pieczenik's. He textures it with more words in better arrangements, as one might expect, validating his job resume. But nothing comes alive; everything is just meticulously described and lies there.

Considered as a barely handy catalog of some decades of Soviet history, *The Revolutionist* is probably the best recent source for that dose. And it has a polymorphous-perverse Russian princess in it, which is always an asset to an afternoon's literary diversion. But what's going to sell this book is its spurious promise of contact with the "real" world, where a handful of insiders arrogate power to themselves and can be frustrated only by the intervention of another kind of megalomaniac.

And we buy it; oh, boy! do we buy it. The only remaining question is: do we buy it because we think somewhere in there is some clue how we might escape from this real trap? Or do we buy it because we like to tickle ourselves, feeling confident there actually is no trap?

In that latter way of looking at things, the more "real" these confections can be made to seem, the more they declare they aren't real. In which case, why are we paying to have this done for us with increasing frequency?

Algis Budrys is the author of Michaelmas, a futuristic novel in which a conscientious journalist secretly runs the world for the benefit of humanity with the aid of a computer program that keeps track of everybody.

24 April 1988

Alan Brien: *Lenin*
Anthony Grey: *Peking*

I hold in my hands two books. (Actually, it's a bit of a struggle to heft either one of them.) They are *Lenin*, by Alan Brien (Morrow, \$20.95) and *Peking*, by Anthony Grey (Little, Brown, \$19.95). Both are historical novels, the one being a biographical docudrama and the other using the Red Chinese revolution as a backdrop. I suppose glasnost can be credited with the recent emergence of a renewed fascination with the roots and branches of Soviet Socialism... or, putting it another way, pere stroiks again.

It was Sir Walter Scott, I believe, who became a knight of the realm for inventing the historical novel with *Ivanhoe*. Later it was Thomas B. Costain and Samuel Shellabarger who made it flourish, though we must not forget the contributions of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* and Kathleen Winsor's *Forever Amber*.

But the last two books actually point up the difficulty with this genre; maybe now and then Scarlett O'Hara does seem to be a person of her time, but Winsor's tarty heroine, against her Restoration background and in her London bedchambers, rarely appears to be different from any bimbo working her way up the social ladder in any day and age.

Shellabarger and Costain had it easier. Scott had the best handle on it; medieval people lived in such remote times and talked so strangely that they automatically gained authenticity. "By the Rood, Damoselle, I'll stretch thee on my trestle yet aday" is a line that assures you the guy is not wearing Jockey-brand shorts under his doublet. More or less similarly, when the Captain from Castile declares "May all the Saints witness my fidelity!" there is not much chance he sells insurance when not acting in amateur productions. (But I have to admit I keep seeing Tyrone Power in the part.)

When, in *Lenin*, Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov writes in his diary about trying to make Marx's theories fit the hundred contending peoples of a ruined empire, it is a little harder to let go of one's skepticism. This history is too close; this harassed, brilliant, dogged but somehow little man does little to explain the heroic profiles on the banners at May Day, or the impulse to enshrine his body for eternal viewing in a tomb with hundreds of visitors daily.

Even though Brien makes him write according to the best Western idea of what translated Russian reads like, and gives him gestures and expressions straight out of Tolstoy... it's not the same as when *Ivanhoe* rescues Rebecca from the Templar. harangue then departs a changed person to do things in a different way, there's a tendency to ask "Would I fall for that line?" The

answer inevitably would be “No, I’d want a second opinion. I mean, how do I know this nutty-looking guy is a real doctor for my troubles?”

So the secondary characters in historical novels set in recent times never act convincingly – even when they act as the historical record shows most of them did.

This lack of credibility is built right in, in other words, and though Brien does a yeoman job... you want to learn the facts on Lenin, read this book; it wouldn’t hurt you... it fails to raise Vladimir Ilich from the tomb.

Similarly, the viewpoint character in *Peking* is motivated to go to China as a missionary after attending one lecture on China as a young boy. Oh, really? One lecture, which doesn’t move his parents or any of the other participating role models very much? Here we go, you say accurately, here’s a straw man who, with his progeny and collateral acquaintances is going to spend the next 670 pages stepping from one panel to the next in a cyclorama of exotic events. I can’t wait for the scene where he pulls a thorn from the young Mao’s paw.

And you would be right... and, again, if you want the facts on Chinese domestic politics at mid-century, here’s a perfectly viable alternative to looking them up in the World Book. But you would be right in thinking that Jakob Kellner and his ilk cannot be taken as real people, even for fictional purposes.

Which is a shame, because the historical record shows that people do drop everything, now and then; discard every element of their past lives, overcome all practicalities, march off over the horizon, and have adventures that change the world. It’s just that this is believable only in real life.

Apparently, going into detail that approximates 700 pages is the author’s attempt to convince by sheer weight of evidence. This is probably a technical error. It may be meaningful to contemplate that *Forever Amber* is longer than *Gone with the Wind*, which is more convincing, but is in turn longer than *Captain from Castile*, which is longer than *Ivanhoe*, I believe.

Less is more. Distance lends enchantment. Absence makes the heart grow fonder. Moss hinders the roll of the stone.

3 July 1988

Gerald Seymour: *An Eye for an Eye*
Tom Clancy: *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*

Lawrence Sanders: *Timothy's Game*

Good news: you will not go far wrong with *An Eye for an Eye*, by Gerald Seymour (Morrow, \$18.95), *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, by Tom Clancy (Putnam's, \$19.95), or *Timothy's Game*, by Lawrence Sanders (Putnam's, \$18.95). If you are into thrillers, this rather attractive trio will make your late-summer hammock quiver perceptibly.

They are good but not equally good. *An Eye for an Eye* is a shade too melodramatic in handling the story of the innocent bystander snatched up in the coils of international hugger-mugger, who finds himself sneaking into the Bekaa Valley to hit the Palestinian terrorist in his most secret lair.

I doubt that a few weeks' preparation and a few privations would enable the hero, young Holt, to place a bullet accurately at a thousand yards' distance. Especially since it's the first rifle shot of his life. But Seymour tones up this incredible (though attractive) old scenario with plenty of insider window-dressing about the Arab-Israeli conflict and its international permutations.

And so even the least of these three novels keeps you moving right along and delivers a satisfactory sense of familiarity with realpolitik or at least a wearable knock-off of it.

As for *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, Tom Clancy, of course, convinces you he lives in the Kremlin. In fact, his Russians and his KGB are more convincing than his CIA and his Americans, particularly Jack Ryan. For my money, Clancy's series hero just barely scrapes by as a character to hang your hat on; like Upton Sinclair's interminable Lanny Budd, he's just a gofer with a high-toned vocabulary.

Nevertheless, *Cardinal* is as good as *The Hunt for Red October*. Maybe that's because its real hero is the battle-scarred, desolately lonely, movingly characterized old Soviet colonel of tank troops, holder of the equivalent of three American Medals of Honor for extreme service to his country in World War II. He is now a senior weapons advisor to the top levels of the Kremlin and for 30 years has been the CIA's best agent in the USSR.

Clancy isn't sufficiently concerned with elegance of prose communication to be a Graham Greene. But there are many times in this book when it verges on being a genuine novel. And not in any way that impairs its pacing, its attractive details of spycraft, and the death-dances of its central characters as their various ambitions collide. This book convinces us

that it knows how glasnost is actually working out, and the exact operational complexities involved therein. So what we have here is that rare thing, important entertainment.

For elegance of prose, Lawrence Sanders is so thoroughly established as being good at it that he doesn't always have to bother. However, in *Timothy's Game* he casually makes the present-tense narrative actually capable of conveying the past-perfect when the story requires it. They are not going to etch that on his tombstone, of course, but next time I raise a glass, I'll give it an extra little bounce for Sanders.

Getting back to what's important, the Timothy here is Timothy Cone, previously the hero of *The Timothy Files*. This is a marvelously attractive kind of character – the scruffy, not to say aggressively antisocial investigator, smelly, burping, and anathema to the Best People, whose inner rectitude is so unshakable that he rights wrongs simply because they are wrong. All the while, he steals table scraps to feed his cat and beds his boss with poetic viciousness.

This of course upsets his boss's boss, who owns the financial investigations agency where Timothy constantly goes beyond the bounds of the actual case assigned to him and very rarely shows up in his Wall Street offices except on payday, but we all knew that without being told. This kind of story is in its character and in its line of patter, which in this case concerns the world of greenmail, arbitrage, conglomerate mergers, and, as it happens, the occasional gangland hit.

What we have in the present book are three totally unconnected novellas, of which the first introduces Sally Steiner, a terrific character who's trying to hang on to her dead father's garbage-hauling business while figuring a way to make a fortune on the street. This is followed by two other tales involving greed, adultery, jealousy and mobster violence in the board room. One is set in the round-eyed world and the other in the milieu of Chinese canned-food manufacture.

All three are full of street smarts and Street smarts, and Timothy's fascinating character traits. They are a tad frothy, and I have the feeling Sanders regards them as a lark. His track record up until Timothy was of a fervent earnestness and an unsmiling, slightly sweaty obsession with sin. But maybe the Timothy stories are as much fun to write as they are to read, so here's looking forward to next summer.

31 July 1988

Peter Forbath: *The Last Hero* **A.A. Attanasio: *Wyvern***

What we have here is not what we were supposed to have here: a pair of historical novels. Peter Forbath's *The Last Hero* (Simon & Schuster, \$22.95) shares its title with several other works of fiction, including an early Leslie Charteris piece about Simon Templar, *The Saint*. And there are clear-cut evocations of the British mania for paladins whose iron will drives them to superhuman feats on behalf of Right and Truth. As the Forbath is, however, a "docudrama", what emerges more than anything else is a picture of an episode in the British Empire more tragic than comic. And Forbath being the sort of writer he is, it's the docu rather than the drama that does all the work.

His hero is Henry M. Stanley, at the height of accomplishment as the Victorian explorer of Africa. By the time we see him, Stanley has not only found Livingstone, but also has traced the sources of the Nile, mapped the Congo, re-ensconced himself in the England he originally fled under another name and with a bastard heritage, and is ready to go on a lucrative lecture tour of the United States.

To him comes A.J. Mounteney Jephson on a mission from a consortium of would-be land pirates. The dervishes have risen in Africa, slaughtered garrison after British garrison, and killed "Chinese" Gordon, fabled figurehead of empire. In fact, all of Africa has now been presumed to be lost, with the British Army defeated in battle after battle, famous generals dead or in disgrace, and Prime Minister Gladstone's government fallen because of it. But – hark! – suddenly, after long silence, a message has gotten out. Emin Pasha is holding on for Victoria in Equatoria.

The British public is galvanized. Rescue Emin Pasha! is the popular outcry. But the new prime minister won't do it. He envisions yet another defeat and consequent personal catastrophe for him. Still and all, if he doesn't do it, his government may collapse for that. What to do? What to do?

And though nobody ever heard of this loyal Emin Pasha before, into this juncture steps Sir William Mackinnon, steamship company owner. He and his friends will finance a private rescue expedition, to be led by Bula Matari, "Breaker of Rocks". All they want in return is a royal grant of permission to form a British East Africa Company and exploit to their hearts' content. And so this is done, and Stanley, otherwise Bula Matari, is found by Mackinnon's messenger at a dinner party with whores in a fancy New York restaurant.

This Henry M. Stanley bears little resemblance to Spencer Tracy in the old movie. Stanley is a powerfully purposeful thug, totally egocentric, and in the end, after incredible privation, he bullies the remnants of his sanguinary expedition across Africa and through to the Pasha.

The Pasha turns out to be Eduard Schnitzer, a myopic and sickly Silesian Jew who converted to Islam many years before and has no wish whatever to be brought back to Europe as Stanley's trophy. So Stanley kidnaps him and pulls him clear across Africa to Mozambique. There the Pasha succeeds in jumping out a second-story window and fracturing his skull, so Stanley has to go back to England without him. Stanley, however, garners all the available plaudits, including a peerage, a seat in Parliament and a socially ultra-desirable marriage, and lives happily ever after.

Jephson turns from being an idle sprig of the ruling classes into a man of character and purpose, but instantly reverts to his wastrel mode as soon as the green and pleasant land of England is safely underfoot again.

Half-blind and half deaf, the Pasha makes his way back to Equatoria, there to be beheaded by the dervishes just as Gordon was, and the moral of this story is that history and statesmanship as normally presented are a cruel sham.

True, I tend to think. Forbath is adding a somewhat lesser brick to the edifice of books implying amazement that the British Empire ever existed, and that heroes generally are best viewed at a genteel distance. The best parts of this novel are the factually journalistic prologue and epilogue which, between them, essentially tell the whole story. The long fictionalized middle is rampant with tin dialogue and wooden postures, and you're carried along only by the sense that somewhere in this medicine there's enough actual data so that you'll be better for having taken it.

A.A. Attanasio, author of *Wyvern* (Ticknor & Fields, \$19.95), has been an impressive speculative-fiction writer. And although this book is presented as a straight historical adventure about piracy and commerce in the East Indies, its viewpoint character is a 17th century tribal sorcerer in Borneo. He eventually turns into a pirate, and then into a leading figure in commerce, but his mystical view of the universe stays with him.

It's reinforced, in fact, by the strikingly similar world-views of Trevor Pym, educated at Oxford, quondam member of Drake's expedition around the world, now the most feared and bloodthirsty pirate in Indonesian waters. Pym, by way of science – or “natural philosophy”, as it was called – has

come to realize that horrible death, torture and rapine are what the universe is all about, and that to confer it on the world is to progress toward the ultimate Rightness of Things.

Amidst the headhunter massacres and the crash of naval cannon, the clink of rapiers in duels to the death, and the occasional dalliance in the bedchamber, Attanasio makes this orientation hypnotically fascinating. But what this means is that this is not so much a historical novel as a work of horror-fiction. In this case, it's a hot read, and you will probably like it, but what you are getting is a work of philosophy that sometimes explores well into the dark heart of fantasy... as its squeamish publishers vigorously pretend not to know.

9 October 1988

Franklin Allen Leib: *Fire Arrow*
M.E. Morris: *The Icemen*
Stephen Coonts: *Final Flight*
Harold Coyle: *Sword Point*

The PR people for Presidio Press (“Publishers of Team Yankee”) seem to have coined the definitive genre label – “military techno-thriller” – for the sort of thing Tom Clancy started. There definitely has gotten to be a distinct genre, and they have convincingly named it.

This reassuring news comes to you in conjunction with this columnist's reading of *Fire Arrow*, by Franklin Allen Leib (Presidio, \$18.95); *The Icemen*, by M.E. Morris (Presidio, \$17.95); *Final Flight*, by Stephen Coonts (Doubleday, \$18.95); and *Sword Point*, by Harold Coyle, author of Team Yankee. That last is \$18.95 from Simon and Schuster, which means Presidio probably let the option clause get away from it.

Actually, none of these books is much like what Clancy does, although it's to his *The Hunt for Red October* that all these works owe their heavy promotional investment and the book-club interest in them. Genres evolve rapidly, especially when they're young. As fresh talents leap aboard, there's a certain jostling created by the particular strengths and weaknesses of the newcomers.

And the result is that Coyle, for instance, weighs in with what amounts to a simple game-scenario for a limited Russo-American land war in the

Arabian Peninsula. There is none of Clancy's concentration on the motivations of his characters, and little subtlety of interplay as these motivations clash; there's just list after list of military equipment, glossary after glossary of military jargon, and a specious claim that this story has people in it somewhere. It has names and stick-figures; what this aspect of Coyle's work reminds me of is 1939 U.S. Army maneuvers with broomsticks labeled "rifle". But now's your chance to find out whether what you really like in stories of this kind is their emphasis on the war-game aspect.

Leib's *Fire Arrow* confines itself to a fictional projection from the real terrorist TWA hijacking in which U.S. Navy diver Robert Dean Stethem was killed. In *Fire Arrow*, it's an entire planeload of U.S. military personnel that gets taken by a militant Moslem group, and the problem gradually broadens to include U.S. and Soviet efforts to deal with the situation militarily and diplomatically.

Presidio is marketing the trappings, its press release promising: "...intricate descriptions of complicated maneuvers... codes, signals, communal jargon and even battle songs... a celebration and illumination of that inner world dedicated to defending the nation." So we know where they think the chips should be placed on the marketing-roulette table.

They're the experts and they may be right – but they're doing Leib some injustice, since there are people living and breathing in his narrative, which for me makes it much easier to care what the jargon depicts as happening to them.

By and large, what each of these three publishers is selling is not literacy – which is fortunate in the case of Coyle, who knows a LZ from a DMZ but has real trouble with subject and predicate. What they're selling is blatant expertise, and for this purpose M. E. Morris, a retired naval aviator specializing in Antarctic missions, hits big with *The Icemen*. Better than Coyle but worse than Leib in keeping subject and object from switching places in a sentence, Morris somehow makes you stay with the premise that the Third Reich might still be a viable menace based south of Argentina. This assertion is dragged in by the scruff of the neck, but meanwhile you learn a lot of circumstantial stuff about what it's like to operate military technology in the polar climate.

From a long-term marketing view, the counterproductive feature of these evolutions of the Clancy school is that they're narrower than the original. They speak only to those already converted, whereas the original

reaches out toward anyone who consumes fictions offering immediate relevance and might become a new outright fan. From the point of view of communications arts, I have to wonder when some of these publishers are going to realize some of these writers need help in not fogging their message. Grammar, too, is a technology, and exists for a purpose.

For all readers who care for the genre in any way, *Final Flight* comes highly recommended here. Coonts is an expert prose technician, a subtle characterizer, apparently an excellent researcher, and a big-league plotsmith. The premise is that Moammar Gadhafi (under another name) raids a U.S. aircraft carrier in order to obtain nuclear warheads and drop one on Tel Aviv. Once again, we get the U.S., the Soviet Union and Mossad involved in preventing the villain from pulling it off; but this time, you believe it.

You believe it because you actually get shadings of motivation and orientation in all the principal characters. For once, the bad guys are not just naively drawn straw men; they're genuinely dangerous because they're genuinely understandable. Of all the benefits Coonts confers on his readers, that's to my mind the most important service. It's not a game out there, folks; it does not come as a box of toys labeled "War", and once you take them out, you cannot put them back whenever you choose.

30 October 1988

Craig Thomas: *Wildcat*

It's really no wonder the intelligence services of this world continually are stumbling. The people running them are punch-drunk with fatigue and desperation.

There you are, head of a department or division after years of long service, and every time you'd normally get a day at the beach, somebody's out to capture Nepal or steal an intercontinental missile. Worse, everyone you're involved with is either an idiot or out to steal your job; actually, they're idiots to want your job. And the fate of the world, as the book-jacket copywriters say, hangs in the balance.

Well, anyway...

Craig Thomas has evolved considerably as a writer since *Firefox* – which, as you may recall, eventually gave Clint Eastwood the opportunity to infiltrate the USSR and steal its most advanced fighter plane. *Wildcat* (Putnam's, \$19.95) has to do with an attempted Soviet/ East German takeover

of an entire nation in the Himalayas apparently just because it's there.

Thomas dedicates his book in all sincerity to Ray Bradbury, but he clearly meant John le Carré. His spies in *Wildcat* are tired, and old, bedeviled by ambitious but incompetent subordinates, embittered, beset by personal problems, unable to deal with the present except in terms of old feuds with each other. This gives a certain "novelistic" depth to the work, and Thomas has gotten to be not half bad at creating it. If you like le Carré, you will probably be pleased and impressed. If, however, you are getting sick and tired of spies who are sick and tired, you will have problems with it.

The local color on Nepal is convincing enough, although Katmandu seems not that much different from any other teeming, smelly place out there in the plot-riddled East. The climactic scenes are satisfactorily explosive – although I never did get quite clear on what caused the first planeload of Soviet commandos to crash. But it becomes noticeable that the combined staffs of East German and Soviet intelligence are not competent to forestall a boy lieutenant and a superannuated old man in their thrashings-about along the storyline.

Hardly knowing what they're doing or how the pieces fit together, those two heroes time after time escape capture and certain death, without the slightest help from British or U.S. agencies, which regard them both as dolts. And when you look at it, their skein of successful escapades is possible only because the bad guys can't tie knots, can't lock doors, can't shoot straight, and don't think to put perimeter guards around the vital bridgehead.

There is less to *Wildcat* than there at first seems to be. It's just as contrived and incredible as *Firefox*, but it sounds more real because it more closely resembles reality... which we're not supposed to remember is a reality created by novelists.

There are franker approaches. With us also on this occasion is *Firebird*, by James Carroll (Dutton, \$18.95). Carroll is the author of *Madonna Red*, among other books we have viewed with suspicion here. He is capable of delivering this sentence: "The man was a master of reassurance, and even now in underscoring the risks involved in the operation, and even in acknowledging the limit to how far he could confide personally, Minot had simultaneously conveyed the depth of his own feeling for Malone." This is not a writer who is going to confuse you with mock-credibility.

In *Firebird*, the Federal Bureau of Investigation discovers in 1949 that someone has been leaking atomic secrets to the Russians. A naive young FBI

agent is brought in to Washington from Kansas City because he, and he alone, can penetrate the Soviet embassy and obtain the secret records with which the FBI can find the source of the leak.

What the young man also finds is that J. Edgar Hoover's FBI is enough to make anyone sick and tired, and vulnerable to the charms of Soviet women, and bedeviled and frustrated and treated as a dolt and....

And then there's Stephen Hunter's *The Day Before Midnight* (Bantam, \$18.95), in which only this particular welder can cut through the security barriers that stand between the mysterious, ruthless miscreants and the theft of the missile, but he's a patriotic American so they threaten his cute kids and this is the only way to deal with the problem.

Early on, there's a domestic scene in which the tyke little daughters get into bed with Mrs. Welder, who notices of one of them that "her little nose was full".

Now that I review the bidding, I think I marginally prefer mock le Carré, which is mock Somerset Maugham, to the kind of writing in *Firebird* or in this example (given that the plot logic of all three examples is on a par).

Her "little" nose?

This is a child, imprimis, and of course her nose is sized accordingly. The only reason to remark on the structure of her nose would be if there were something extraordinary about it, as for instance "Her nose was of antique walrus-tusk ivory, a family heirloom that uncannily fitted darling little Midget as if expressly made for her instead of her remote great-great Aunt Sabbatha, who frequently disappeared with all hands while attempting to round Cape Horn but was always forgiven by her stalwart husband, Captain Jack."

If there is no such particular occasion related to the nose in question, then the need to stick a superfluous modifier in front of it is just as nonexistent as the need to mention what it was full of.

29 January 1989

John Katzenbach: *Day of Reckoning*
Peter Maas: *Father and Son*

The world today is full of unreasonable situations fraught with peril; official agencies are powerless to help, through stupidity, corruption, or outright

antagonism toward the individual, and the ultimate recourse is to take up arms in one's own cause. Deep breath. Got all that? The remedy against a life of endemic catastrophe is to deal death. Only at deserving targets, of course.

People buy this. Or so it's hoped by the publishers of John Katzenbach's *Day of Reckoning* (Putnam's, \$19.95) and *Father and Son* by Peter Maas (Simon & Schuster, \$17.95).

Katzenbach has a fresh idea: what happens when the domestic political terrorists of the 1960s finally get out of the slam and come after lapsed comrades who finked on them? The Maas has to do with Irish-American support of the IRA and the stew that can stir up. Its best feature is Maas's literary talent, which makes something almost believable and certainly page-turning out of a theme you'd think had been dulled to decrepitude.

Both of them are written by accomplished professional journalists of nasty crime. Although both have done well-received novels since, Katzenbach broke in with *First Born*, and Maas is best known as the author of *Serpico* and *The Valachi Papers*. So their work conveys a certain gritty realism of detail, for instance on how a revolutionary brigade wakes up in the morning, or how kneecapping works. One cannot help thinking that these fictions in some way observe how life really is, and from there it's an easy step to looking at their plot-resolutions as expert recommendations.

And they may be... perhaps that's become one of the things readers are looking for in this kind of fiction. That may be a measure of how desperate we're becoming, but that doesn't necessarily invalidate the worth of the recommendation. Maybe we are due to live through a generation or more in which it's taken as a matter of course that any man's gun-hand may be against us – and ours ready against him. Nor, by “man”, do we mean only persons of the male sex, or only persons full-grown.

Day of Reckoning makes this clear. The “villain” is Tanya, leading theoretician and driving force of the Phoenix Brigade, captured after a bloody botch of a 1968 bank holdup. Tanya blames Brigade member Duncan Richards, who was not fool enough to drive the getaway car into the crossfire, and got away clean.

Richards is now a totally respectable exurban banker with teenage twin daughters and an autistic son, and a real-estate agent wife who shares his guilty secret, since she was driving the other car that horrible day they have pretty much forgotten. Well, Tanya now finds them, and it turns out she's still interested in robbing banks, and is willing to terrorize the Richards

family in ways that can only be described as hand-wringingly effective.

You might guess, as you work through the scenes of kidnapping and physical and psychological abnegation, that eventually the harassed exurban couple will get around to drilling their cupcake offspring in how to use a rifle with intent to kill in the defense of decency. They cannot, after all, go to the cops or the FBI.

In *Father and Son*, going to the FBI is a mistake based on not realizing that quite a few of its members have nothing against the Irish Republican Army; that some of them, in fact, will steal government explosives so they can be shipped overseas for the good of the Cause. In fact, high-level government functionaries will fatally set up an only slightly misguided American citizen as a fall guy to cover the identity of the Irish citizen who really informed about the arms shipment. This gets his father's dander up, and it is not good to brown off a former intelligence operative. In fact – but, then, this is fiction, isn't it?

In many ways, Maas advocates the Irish position vs. the British in the rebellion, which, as he points out, is in its ninth century of continuous struggle. Since he does it with craft and artistry, rather than expository declamation, that elevates his book above the level of mindless-thriller fiction. But while that has its advantages, and offers some genuine rewards to the reader, it also imposes the burden of novelistically depicting how the Irish-American grandfather's blindly sentimental view of the Auld Sod could so deeply effect the child while skipping over his totally amalgamated-American father, who works for a large advertising agency.

Oh, you can see how it would work; it often does work that way in immigrant families. But Maas doesn't much try to tackle it. This lack flaws the credibility of the process whereby young romanticized Jamie can be so readily accepted by the pragmatic genuine Irishmen who normally have a poorly concealed contempt for his kind... but now I've drifted into talking about this book in terms of things it is not intended to be.

What it is, like Katzenbach's novel, is a romanticized tale operating under the color of realism. Well, basically that's OK, too, because that's what this genre has always had to offer. One of the finest pieces like it is Geoffrey Household's *Rogue Male*, and that chef d'oeuvre is now 50 years old – and still highly recommended here, one might add. But we are not now talking crime-and-suspense readers, who have always been a little strange, all of us. We are talking Pop Lit – the general best-seller list – and if everybody out

there among the malls is beginning to resonate to this chord, I am moving back into town with the pros and away from these increasingly twitchy amateurs.

26 March 1989

Mark Berent*: *Rolling Thunder* Bryce Courtenay: *The Power of One*

Many of us have a soft spot for aviation war books, and this department is no exception. And it finds *Rolling Thunder* (Putnam's, \$19.95) by Mark Berent*, a pilot in the Vietnam War, a reasonably well written, passably plotted, rather adventurous novel involving airplanes a good deal.

* This author's name was wrongly given here as Dale Brown and corrected at the end of the 16 July 1989 column below. [Ed.]

Read as entertainment, it will do a good job of filling a weekend, but not a great one. Its author has things to learn about tying up loose ends and finding meaningful scenes in which to show the reader why this colorful character or another was introduced in the first place.

And he also ought to bring himself to understand that soap-opera subplots are not the only way to describe interactions between the sexes. But all in all, he's done an acceptable job; James Jones's *From Here to Eternity* is technically a rather similar book, and it's done OK.

Like Jones's novel, *Rolling Thunder* is about something the author feels deeply, and that goes deeper than whatever its characters are actually doing. On that level, it contains some apparently hard-won comment on the bureaucratic procedures and slapdash policies that made a farce of our conduct of the war. And I believe him.

So, if you care about all that – and you should, because apparently we and the Russians are prone to repeat these mistakes, and that could eventually do physical damage to the world's summer cottages – *Rolling Thunder* is an excellent book.

Why? Because despite a library full of nonfiction books such as *The Best and the Brightest*, it takes a novel to make Vietnam real to most of us. If you want an entertaining, sometimes moving, often fascinating picture of how come all those crazy things happened over there, distorted the lives of so many capable, caring individuals, and hurt us so badly as a nation, this is the

best piece of actuality I've seen on that topic.

There's a definite prejudice in this department against books sold as having high philosophical and moral merit. The key word in the marketing copy is "inspirational", and we've got one of those as well: *The Power of One*, by Bryce Courtenay, (Random House, \$18.95).

If somebody has something valuable to say along those lines – valuable as distinguished from plausible – they've been saying it to their friends for some time, and they've been repeating it to their friends, and a spreading wave of beneficial behavior ought to have overtaken us all before the processes of manufacture and distribution could have brought forth the commercial product.

I just put my wetted finger in the air and felt no such breeze blowing. In my hard-won vocabulary, "inspirational" is almost invariably a synonym for familiarly high-toned malarkey in a new package designed according to the well-known rules: fellow looking exhilarated on a mountaintop – the implication being that he climbed all the way instead of being set there by an itinerant fowl – with the green and luxuriant valley spreading below him. The intoxication could be altitude sickness. You seen one *Sorrows of Werther*, you seen 'em all.

The Power of One is just as awkwardly constructed. But it isn't about anything we don't already know. Set in South Africa, it seems to be about something – apartheid, intercultural relations, the inhumanity of man toward man, and all that stuff we have all been convinced is important. And it has its hero, starting as a bullied little boy, working his way up through heartache and persecution to triumph. Any editor will tell you that's always surefire.

But this is a tsk-tsk book. Courtenay introduces bullying, and you go tsk-tsk, because bullying is part of the common human experience and you recognize it immediately as being a lamentable thing. He introduces racial prejudice and you go tsk-tsk. He talks about apartheid as a viciously institutionalized form of prejudice, and you, having read the papers, go tsk-tsk. Et cetera.

You maybe don't notice that the blacks with whom the hero works so democratically are depicted as losing all heart and leaving their project as soon as their "white leader" is lost. As for the hero, well, he starts out being urinated on by a bully and his henchmen, and his triumph as a grown man is to take that same bully, beat the bejesus out of him until he's bloody, his nose crushed, and slice up his swastika tattoo and rub filth in it so it'll infect, scar

over, and obliterate the hated symbol.

I wonder if you can see the inspirational triumph of rationality in this, and if you are looking forward to the next Courtenay work.

4 June 1989

Martin Cruz Smith: *Polar Star*

Arkady Renko, who became one of category fiction's most engaging characters when he first appeared in Martin Cruz Smith's *Gorky Park*, is back – in *Polar Star* (Random House, \$19.95). This new novel is that very rare thing, a piece of literature that walks like a page-turner.

Its events are about murder aboard a Soviet fish-factory vessel cruising Arctic waters; a slimy, smelly, frigid sweatshop indifferently running crudely gathered raw products down high-speed processing lines and hoping that about 30 percent of what it eventually packages and freezes will be edible. (The production quota is set on quantity, not quality.)

One day, one of the trawlers in the *Polar Star*'s satellite fleet brings the body of one of the workers up in its net, and though everyone would like to hope her death was an accident, it's clearly best this matter be looked into speedily.

For one thing, Zina Patiashvili was, in the old-fashioned phrase, no better than she should be; something just about everyone in the crew knows but has never wanted to say. For another thing, the pattern of Zina's sexual exploits might lead a suspicious mind to suspect she had an agenda... perhaps merely criminal, which would not be much of a novelty among the crew, but perhaps political.

So, in going through his crew files, the captain recalls he noted the presence of a trained investigator formerly on post in Moscow, totally disgraced and politically unreliable, a veteran of a Siberian correctional facility.

These ships have to get their crews from somewhere and so processing-line worker Arkady Renko, under the nagging presence of the ship's political officer and assorted other bureaucratic impediments and threats, temporarily resumes being a cop. The problem persists, that no one can stand to have him around.

He does crack the case. One would expect that. Meanwhile, though, he is the focus of a major portrait of the parts of Soviet life that glasnost and

perestroika will hardly trickle down to at all.

Martin Cruz Smith, author of a rare kind of book, is a rare kind of author; the kind who can breathe life into a milieu found in a library. (His earlier best-seller, *Gorky Park*, was set in a living, gritty Moscow based on guidebooks and reference tomes.)

For *Polar Star* he actually visited a Soviet fishing vessel, but not for any great length of time, and the circumstances soon turned awkward. The thing is, what really holds you in this book is the idea that you're almost actually experiencing what it's like to live over there. It's done so well that the book is indubitably a novel, and a damned good one, but what we are in contact with is not the Soviet milieu but Smith's imagination.

Now, possibly on some cosmic scale of merit, there is some drawback to that. On the other hand, do we get better books from people who have "been there"?

Deponent sayeth not. Not based on ex-cop Bob Leuci's *Captain Butterfly* (NAL, \$17.95) a turgid summertime confection about a female New York City police captain fighting internal corruption.

Featuring a wish-fulfillment plot whose happy ending depends entirely on the villains being pushovers and key characters changing their motivations at the author's need, to say nothing of events taking useful turns apparently only because the gods so will it, the department depicted here is about as real as the setting in a Harlequin romance, while the book as a whole reads like something Harlequin would have turned down without regret.

Then there's *Day of the Cheetah* (Donald I. Fine, \$19.95), an aviation-spy thriller by ex-pilot Dale Brown. In it, the Soviet Union has gotten so good at infiltrating the West that it can send in an agent to take over the identity of a young American with prospects good enough so that the identity might predictably rise into high and sensitive places, such as a super-secret air base where the U.S. is developing a "thought-controlled" super-fighter.

Only one man, a "right stuff" pilot with an inferior airline, can possibly bring down the nefarious, half-mad... and I can't stand any more of that. What did it is the part where the cannon jams because the Russian has to lose, for there are only three more pages in the book.

For every Joseph Wambaugh there are scores of Bob Leucis, and for every Ernest K. Gann there is a squadron of Browns. (And for every Martin Cruz Smith, the picture gets even grimmer.)

OOPS: In my June 4 column, I unaccountably and inadvertently credited to

Mark Brown *Rolling Thunder* (Putnam's), a novel by ex-pilot Mark Berent, and I apologize profusely to you, to Brown, to Berent, and to their respective publishers.

* In the newspaper archive the wrongly given name is Dale Brown rather than Mark Brown. It has been corrected to Mark Berent in the 4 June 1989 column above. [Ed.]

16 July 1989

Ken Follett: *The Pillars of the Earth*

Among us literary insiders, you hear, if you listen, that mass-market author So-and-so or Thus-and-such has some really great books in him, and will get around to them just as soon as he can afford to.

Well, the race is not always to the swift, and so, once in a while, one of these so-and-so's actually shakes off the feedbag and runs for the roses, if not the laureate. This does not always bode well; much of the time, it turns out that Thus-and-such had been doing what he or she was naturally gaited for, and higher aspirations have resulted only in barked shins, and a lot of losing tickets thrown away by disgruntled bettors.

Then there's the artistic effect of having a fair number of literary practitioners, serving and encouraging the allegiance of their fans, who in effect hold those readers in contempt. One tends to feel there's something immoral about that. And something not too healthy about a writer being able to work under that mindset.

Which may have absolutely nothing to do with Ken Follett, who for years has been astonishing me not only with his ability to ignore actual history as well as actual grammar and characterization, but also with his sales figures. What Ken Follett has done now is write the book he says he's been wanting to write all along, and it's as if all those other pieces were done by another hand entirely.

His *The Pillars of the Earth* (Morrow, \$22.45) is as fine a panoramic historical novel as I've read in years. It's more than that; it gets far enough into the stubborn, aspiring, creative heart of its central character to be a memorable portrait of the thing that compels some individuals to turn their backs on the safe and customary and reach up toward what we call glory.

Follett's book is set in the great period of English cathedral-building, an exercise which, in the Middle Ages, was not only churchly but viciously

political. What Tom the mason does not understand is that in aspiring to work stones into spires, he is aspiring to become involved in the convoluted intrigues and deadly contentions that culminate, finally, in the murder of Archbishop Thomas à Becket, and then in the political convulsion that made him Saint Thomas and a cult legend almost overnight, much disturbing both royalty and clergy.

To Tom, the outlaw girl he finds in the forest, with her strange red-haired son, is only an outlaw girl, and a comfort. He knows nothing of the public curse she had pronounced on the powers that decreed her man's hanging. And only gradually does he come to realize that this, too, was a profoundly political act, and an enduring one.

He just wants to work his trade... and almost helplessly but pridefully follow the enigmatic muse of building in stone; to create enduringly for a God whose endurance is infinite. Of course when you deal, as the Middle Ages did, with a God who rules mankind from a very near distance, you deal with the kind of man who ventures to bribe and bargain with God. The Middle Ages were full of those, and they tended to sponsor cathedrals, plus the occasional felony.

What Follett's book does is involve the reader step by step in the same way that Tom becomes involved. The cast of characters grows huge, and the workings out of their individual contentions become a vast, intricate structure. But it never loses definition, and the journey through it is an exploration, not a wandering through a labyrinth.

I rather think you're going to be fascinated, excited, and pleurably conscious of the fact that you're inside a masterly construct built by someone who can be trusted.

Follett's technical achievement is nothing less than wonderful. Some of that is because it's so unlikely in the light of his prior track record. But a great deal of the impressive quality in these pages comes only from what's been put on the page. This strutwork and underpinning is really neither here nor there for the reader who has paid \$22.45 – and will probably pay something like \$8 for the eventual paperback – and expects that the author has done whatever it takes to give the reader satisfaction. But if you've done a little bit of this brick-and-mortar stuff with words yourself, then what's striking from that point of view is Follett's series of risky technical choices which in fact were not risky at all because they were exactly the right ones to make.

The one I most admire is the narrative mood. For a novel about what medieval man will do for and against God, the exact correct choice turns out to be the approach one would use in writing an excellent “heroic fantasy” novel. There’s a gritty, unflinching realism of detail on the dirt, the smells, and the feel and look of the food, clothing and shelter. And the characters really believe that they are continually under omniscient observation.

They’re on stage, in other words, and they speak and move in an awareness that every action has potentially dramatic consequences, and not just in the short term. They believe in omens and blessings and curses as operational factors in their lives, and they believe they’ll be held to account for the conduct of those lives in the long run.

Follett quickly conveys a sense of this, so that when the outlaw girl utters her curse, early in the book, the crowd at the hanging of the peculiar red-haired man, AND the reader as well, stirs with the awareness that awesome powers have just been invoked, and will now, perhaps slowly, but inevitably, work themselves out in the lives of all concerned.

So Follett’s book has almost immediately acquired both majesty and power, and I can pretty safely promise you that it will, indeed, hold you, fascinate you, and surround you.

20 August 1989

**Bill Granger: *The Man Who Heard Too Much*
Paul Pickering: *The Blue Gate of Babylon***

Well, sir! Bill Granger is back (with the 10th November Man novel), and I for one am right glad of it. With *The Man Who Heard Too Much* (Warner, \$18.95), Granger is better than ever.

Henry McGee is back, too. To say nothing of a brand-new female character who may or may not have a real name, and if so we may or may not have been told it, but who goes by the name of The Rat when we first see her. Rita Macklin has a small – a very small – part; what may be more to the point, she has been replaced in Devereaux’s affections – no, that’s too glib; she has been replaced in Devereaux’s bed, however. The replacement is Rena Taurus, a black-haired Lithuanian expatriate. Also prominent are Michael Hampton and Cardinal Ludovico of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

The title, of course, is a takeoff on Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. But it's accurate enough – the whole thing starts running when Michael Hampton accidentally gets handed the wrong cassette and can't resist playing it.

Ostensibly Hampton is just a freelance journalist, and he only has two or three clients – Colonel Qaddafi, King Hussein of Jordan, and the Society for the Propagation of the Faith – which makes it perfectly logical that he would be interested in a conference in Malmö on the rights of the American and Soviet navies in the Baltic Sea. I would believe it, too. The amazing thing is that I did, for quite some time, until Granger is ready to have me not believe it, and not believe that it was an accident that he got the cassette, and on and on, until I hardly knew what to believe.

Of course, Henry McGee's escape from 50 years' imprisonment in the U.S. is a factor, as is the role of Rena Taurus, who when we first see her is just a (admittedly a knockout of a) bimbo who happens to be sleeping with Michael, but refuses to go away... in fact, her role takes on a whole new aspect after we realize she is key to the whole affair.

To say nothing of The Rat, who appears about a third of the way through the book and literally pulls Michael to safety (?) for the time being. And of course there's the enigmatic Cardinal Ludovico.

Let me put it this way, and let me put it plain: Bill Granger, a Chicagoan, is the very best writer doing this kind of thing today. And he is getting better.

Paul Pickering is no slouch, either. In *The Blue Gate of Babylon* (Random House, \$17.95) he takes a far different attitude from Granger – a rather bizarre one – and makes it work.

Toby Jubb just wants to go on studying the classics. Unfortunately, he finds himself the keeper of a whorehouse in the divided Berlin of 1960. And in the end, he finds himself the keeper of a rather sordid secret of some kind in a sort of whorehouse in 1989, but exactly what has transpired in the 29 intervening years is somewhat blanked out by the fact that Toby Jubb is mad as a hatter.

Surely the mad Sir Anthony Selwyn Parr has something to do with it, but unfortunately he cannot speak. And the mad Cindy has something to do with it, but she has never, even for a moment, been sane. And although Magda might explain it, the problem is that she has been a consummate liar from the word Go. Probably the most reliable witness is Toby Jubb's mother,

but she has been dead for some time by the time this novel opens, so it's hard to get her to comment on any event after 1960.

Well, Sigi, surely... well, no.

In fact, not to put too fine a point on it, this is the damndest crew who have capered their way through a spy novel in some time.

The dead whores have a little to do with it. But, to tell you the truth, I'm still not sure who killed them. And there is the nub of the little warning I have to give you – either because Pickering lost control of his book, a little, or because I blinked – there are passages that seem a bit too opaque.

Nevertheless, this book at the very least is a gem of the second water.

This is the third Paul Pickering novel but the first to appear in this country. It is by a “established and admired” former British journalist, says Random House, which doesn't tell me anything, and the autobiographical note sounds suspiciously sparse, almost as if Paul Pickering didn't exist – as Paul Pickering, that is.

26 November 1989

Len Deighton: *Spy Line*

Every once in a while, you come across a bad book by a good writer. One such is Len Deighton's *Spy Line* (\$18.95). Not that Deighton hasn't laid an egg before. But by and large he's a good writer, and certainly the Harry Palmer stories and *SS-GB* were first-rate. But it's been a long time since the Harry Palmer stories and it's been a while since *SS-GB*.

Spy Line is the middle book in the “Hook, Line and Sinker” trilogy about Bernd and his wife, Fiona. Perhaps that's the trouble. (Not that it's about Bernd and his wife, Fiona – that it's the middle book in a trilogy.) But out of the welter of corpses and the enigmatic Gloria, who seems to exist only for the purpose of looking after Bernd and Fiona's children, I can't make head or tail of this one, and it's not my fault.

The furniture is in place. The safe house, the settings in Berlin, London and Washington, and the penultimate scene on the Autobahn, when Fiona gets to cross back into our hands after years of (pretending?) to be a KGB agent. There's faithful Bernd, waiting for her, and getting in a few shots of his own in a confused setting that includes the sudden and violent end of Tessa, who happens to be remarkably close, physically, to her sister, Fiona.

Which would be all right, except it's the merest chance that Tessa

happens to be along at that moment, for all that the German dentist has been working for some time on artificial teeth that would make Tessa's burnt and battered corpse look like Fiona's.

The thing is, the whole scene is dependent on Tessa being at a certain spot at a certain time, Fiona's coming out at a certain time, and the ambush being laid at a particular spot on the Autobahn. To accomplish this, Tessa has to be moved from London to West Berlin, and from West Berlin has to be just sufficiently high on cocaine to want to go on a tour of East Germany.

Suppose Tessa – who knows nothing about this; she thought she was just being unfaithful again to her husband back in London, which strikes me as weak – suppose Tessa had not been high enough? Or too high – suppose she had been a sodden lump, which would have gotten her to the right place at the right time, all right, but would have aroused poor old Bernd's suspicions too soon? Nah – I don't buy it, at all. And poor old Teacher – what about his involvement in that?

So as the book closes, we see Fiona and Bernd in California, in a maximum-security installation disguised as a very nice villa, and worried about the children, with whom they've had no contact since before Bernd went on his little adventure on the Autobahn.

As a matter of fact, the children – wherever they are, and in the care of Gloria (remember her?) or perhaps not – don't even know their mother is (not?) a KGB agent. They're rather behind the times.

And the infuriating thing about this is that word for word, scene for scene, this is as good as Deighton has ever been. But it doesn't hang together by one iota. Every time you become convinced that now, at last, Deighton is going to settle down and tell a coherent story, he throws another curve. And it's not that he's doing it deliberately; he just plain doesn't hold the book together.

Characters – and this story is full of characters, though some of them don't last very long – come and go, the scene shifts from Berlin to London to Vienna to Washington and back again with bewildering rapidity, considering that Bernd is in all these places, but, as a matter of fact, the actual action takes up the Autobahn scene and little else that I can see. This book is mercilessly padded.

Now, there's a partial explanation for this – the trilogistic nature of this book. It's conceivable, I suppose, that Deighton actually turned in the entire script at once; that the decision to break it into three books rather than one fat

volume is the publisher's and that some very strange editorial choices followed. In other words, that it's not entirely Deighton's fault.

But let's pretend that this is so, for a moment. Hard things could be said to Knopf for asking \$18.95 for a book that can't even pretend to be complete in itself. But the padding remains, as does the ludicrous scene on the Autobahn. The only way that is going to come straight is to learn, in Book Three, that it didn't happen that way. But if it didn't, then Tessa is still alive – in fact, Tessa is still in London... and, somehow, I don't think so.

I am far more worried about that than I am concerned about actual events in East Germany and the opening of the Berlin Wall, which have led some critics to conclude that events have made obsolete the kind of spy story Deighton writes. In the first place, it is not known whether these changes are a permanent or temporary phenomenon. In the second and more important place, the shortcomings of this book go a lot deeper than that, and far outweigh any mere incidental truth.

24 December 1989

Arthur Hailey: *The Evening News*

Well, the question is simple enough: do I like Arthur Hailey's new novel, *The Evening News* (Doubleday, \$21.95)? I like it.

It's a simple story: Colombian terrorists take hostage the family of a famous network TV anchorman. The anchorman and his most prominent rival set about finding the hostages. Meanwhile, the parent network of the news organization gets sold to a cost-cutter. And that's all.

That's all? This novel spans 560-plus pages, and that's all? Yep. And, oddly enough, it's enough. While undoubtedly it would be possible to cut this novel in length in some respects, it does not read as if it were inordinately padded. The filler is there, right enough, but to my mind it moves along briskly, and is interesting, and does bear on the main events in the story.

For instance, while there is ostensibly nothing connected to the main thread about the burning Airbus trying to make it back to Dallas before it crashes, introducing this thread enables Hailey to also introduce all of the main characters in the news organization, and to show them at work on a fast-breaking story. It makes a bang-up start for the book.

Furthermore, the story as it develops does so at a measured pace, which is not to say the same thing as slow, and there is always plenty in the reader's

mind to keep him busy, while at the same time none of the material seems extraneous.

What I am saying is that Arthur Hailey, at 70 years of age, has it together to an extent that a much younger man might envy. Bravo, Mr. Hailey!

More to the point: while many a writer has come and gone, Arthur Hailey seems to deliver regularly, at about the same level of quality, ever since the days of *Runway Zero-Eight* and *The Final Diagnosis*, which I can assure you is a long time ago. *Airport* and *Hotel* are better known, of course, but in a way that's an artifact; those two books are from the period after blockbuster novels took on a life of their own. The earlier pair are from before, when a novelist really had to deliver the goods and even so took his chances with the market, in a way that is no longer necessary. Of course, *Hotel* and *Airport* had a lot to do with making the transformation possible.

Let me explain that. Once – not too long ago, actually – it was necessary to write a book well, and have it be about an interesting topic. And, even so, the numbers were much smaller. Oh, they were big; but they were below some sort of magic number, which hardly anybody even knew existed, at which point the PR takes over and people buy books with only a marginal expectation of reading them.

Arthur Hailey did well in that forgotten market. He didn't write superbly – he still doesn't write superbly – but he wrote well. And he picked interesting topics. He did well financially, although at that point he was not rich.

Nowadays, it's different. The would-be author of a best seller has to pick an interesting topic, and that's essentially it. He or she can write very badly, indeed, and an amazing number of them do. (But, statistically, more of them should be female; apparently, maleness is part of the desirable image.) Because the numbers are so big, the PR is what makes it.

Believe me – I realize this may not be credible to you, because by definition you actually read – a vast percentage of trade editions sold, even at \$21.95, are not sold to be read. They are sold to sit on coffee tables until next month's best sellers are out. A vast number of "readers", with an indubitable copy of the book sitting right there in plain sight, actually get their inexact idea of what a book's about from the *Reader's Digest* condensation, or a similar source... or else don't bother at all.

An appreciable number of books – at \$21.95 – hit the recycling bin

without anyone's actually having opened them. (It's the reprint market that determines more exactly whether a book's actually any good, although it gets tricky, too. But that's another story.)

And Arthur Hailey goes right on doing well in that market. And he's quite rich. And he's full of years. And – this is the important point, really – he's still got it. He doesn't have to have it – it's irrelevant – but he still writes a good book in addition to one about an interesting topic, which isn't usual for a guy who started out in the Royal Air Force in World War II, and I say again, bravo, Arthur Hailey, and may you live a long time yet.

P.S. No, he is not the Alex Haley of *Roots*.

29 April 1990

Elmore Leonard: *Get Shorty*

A thing I don't think enough people have noticed about Elmore Leonard is that he is a very uneven writer, and in many genres. Perhaps they just don't talk about this aspect of him. He has been a Hollywood screenwriter of all sorts of things, mainly westerns, and the seller of properties to the movies, mainly crime dramas, but that does not begin to describe all of him. And often enough he only does a creditable job. Sometimes less than that. But, ah, when he's fully on...!

Readers seem willing to ignore his unevenness, plowing through an obviously less than satisfactory book or two in the sure and certain hope that next time out he will produce another *Stick*. I am one of those readers – in a world in which Robert Ludlum, say, gets very short shrift from me, I will put up with a lot from Elmore Leonard.

Get Shorty (Delacorte, \$18.95), Leonard's newest novel, is like that. It begins with a loan shark, Chili, in Miami, and it goes on with him and loan-sharking long enough so that you assume this is what the book is going to be about. Even when Chili goes to Las Vegas because (a) Bones, a genuine mobster, is seriously thinking of ways to get rid of him, and (b) because Chili is on the track of a supposedly deceased shark-loan client who appears, instead, to have ripped off an insurance company and is re-investing the proceeds at the tables, the book still appears to be proceeding in a straight line. But it is not so.

One-fourth of the way along, the book begins to kink. Chili runs across a film producer, having been drawn to Hollywood by the movement of his

quarry, and from that moment on the book concerns itself largely with being a satire on Hollywood. A sometimes gut-busting satire, mind you, even when it veers back into the world of organized crime (instead of the chaotic crime that is, essentially, the film industry). It veers back only long enough to get rid of Bones (I can't understand why Bones didn't kill Chili on say, Page 10, and certainly by page 150), in a very funny but not totally convincing manner.

What I am saying is that this is two books, and the odds are that Leonard started to write one and then followed a white rabbit down a hole. On the other hand, it's not bad – it's just not the very top of Leonard's form.

It abounds in funny characters who at the same time are genuinely characters, including a very tough one named Catlett. But Catlett, tough as he is, has an associate named Ronnie whom Leonard simply moves out of the picture when he realizes this particular character isn't going anywhere. He has another one, named the Bear, who is, as one might expect, rather large and menacing. But who, as far as I can tell, never wins a single fistfight with Chili and generally acts to facilitate matters for Chili – if the Bear hadn't switched sides, for not very convincing reasons, Chili would have had a much harder time of it.

What I am saying is that Leonard sold Delacorte a first draft. All the pieces are there, but some of them are too long, some of them are too short, and none of them are quite properly arranged. Anyone as competent as Leonard knows that. The question is, why did he do it?

Well, there are lots of possible reasons, of which the one I like best is that Leonard figured no one would notice, or if someone (for instance, someone in the Delacorte editorial department) noticed, they would not be the ones who are parties to the contract between Leonard and Delacorte (the contract-signing department). Furthermore, once the contract had been signed and executed, whoever at Delacorte might have noticed this about the book was told (by the contract signing department) that he or she should bloody well mind their own business, it being assumed, somehow, that an editor's business is unrelated to editing.

This does go on, all the time, in publishing, particularly where big-name authors are concerned. It is as if the business side (which rules the roost) were afraid of offending Mr. or Ms. Big Name by suggesting that they pass the manuscript through the typewriter one more time. And the fact of the matter is, why should Mr. or Ms. Big Name do so?

Of course, there are good reasons, but none of them operate in the short run. Eventually, for instance, the public could get tired of waiting for Leonard to get back to the top of his form. But perhaps the boss of Delacorte isn't interested in anything but immediate profits; and besides, when Leonard goes away, as he ultimately must unless he's immortal, there'll be another one along. Probably more than one.

So who wastes the editor's time? If he wants to practice his craft, let him deal with authors who are less well known, and still selling only on their intrinsic merit.

29 July 1990

Len Deighton: *Spy Sinker*

Len Deighton has done it again. We speak of *Spy Sinker* (HarperCollins, \$19.95), which is a definite sequel to the *Spy Line* of about six months ago, and is in fact not only part of the earlier *Spy Hook* but is connected to *Winter* and the earlier trio, *Berlin Game*, *Mexico Set*, and *London Match*.

So just exactly what is it that Len Deighton has done?

Good question. Easy parts of the answer first:

He has written a good, tense yarn, albeit with some strange discontinuities from time to time, which actually has no ending.

He has picked up the story of Fiona Samson, again; her husband, Bernard Samson; Tante Lisl; the man in the gorilla suit....

Yes. The man in the gorilla suit. What I am telling you is that this book repeats scenes from *Spy Line* (and for all I know, *Spy Hook*, but I am not going to read that book to find out), and, in a dazzling bit of play, actually ends a few scenes before its predecessor.

Dazzling, that is, if you are a reader of British mysteries, in which, from time to time, an author will go over the same ground book after book, telling it each time from a different viewpoint, revealing a little bit new, or at least different, and thereby engaging in an intellectual game some readers find fascinating. Deighton has translated this (minor) tradition to the spy novel. Does it work? No.

Deighton, for all his charms, has for the last 15 years or so been trotting in place, at best. Some books since the long-ago days of Harry Palmer – when Deighton was at his best – have been downright awful, though those have tended to be outside the spy canon. (I am thinking in particular of

Goodbye, Mickey Mouse, an air war novel so bad I was ready to wonder if Deighton hadn't signed his name to somebody else's manuscript.)

He wouldn't have been the first to do that. He would have been the first to do that after writing one of the finest air war novels ever – *Bomber*. Then *SS-GB* wasn't bad, although it wasn't as good to those of us who had read plenty of Hitler Victorious Over England books before. (Doesn't count; that is, we understand that in some circles, still, a novel which is by a science fiction writer just doesn't exist, as distinguished from the very often weaker piece, carefully not called science fiction, by a writer dropping in from outside. We understand that, and someday we are going to get you for it.)

What I am saying, in part, is that Deighton is uneven; shockingly uneven, to the point of abandoning the airs and graces of pure language in his worst books. But, worse, lately he has kept the airs and graces, which will fool an amazing number of people some of the time, and beat the same dead horse on the same spot on its hide.

I never read *London Match*, having noticed, as I rounded to turn in *Mexico Set*, that very little was happening. I did read *Winter* – for my money, because I was paid to review it, and even so it struck me as being particularly sappy. I didn't read *Spy Hook*, as I've already noted, and this may be why I didn't quite grasp the fact that all of these books are connected, so to speak. I'm not at all sure I should apologize; it's the author's job to make one care enough to remember these things from one book to the next, and if I didn't catch, or remember, the fact that some of the same character names crop up in *Berlin Game* and *Mexico Set* as crop up in *Winter* and the later books, I don't think it's my fault.

What I am really saying is twofold. One, this is at bottom a tedious series, far too sprawling, particularly in light of the fact that Deighton is not able to sustain anything like the same level of wordsmithing from book to book. *Winter* is appalling.

Two, of the series, if read by itself, only except for the lack of an ending, *Spy Sinker* is probably the best. It has a lot going for it, including Deighton at the top of his form as far as words go. The ideas are a little shaky at times, and the ending doesn't exist, but perhaps we are asking too much. On the other hand, considering that he's not tackling them for the first time, perhaps we are not.

9 September 1990

Jack Higgins: *The Eagle Has Flown*

The big news is *The Eagle Has Flown*, by Jack Higgins (Simon & Schuster, \$21.95). But first we have to get through *The Eagle Has Landed*, same author, same publisher, same price. But, we are told, for the first time we have the complete text of the book, which is some 10 percent longer than it was when first published in 1975.

Now this is something a lot of successful authors have taken to doing – Stephen King and Robert A. Heinlein, for example. I will withhold comment on them; in Higgins's case, however, I would like to point out that *The Eagle Has Landed* concerned itself with a small band of Nazi paratroops who landed in England during World War II in order to kidnap Winston Churchill. You either like that as an idea for a thriller or you don't; 10-percent additions to the text are not likely to make a significant difference.

As it happens, I read the book in 1975. I was led to the thought that Higgins was the best of the second-raters; I didn't buy his premise then, and I don't buy it now, but that aside, he wrote a good stick of copy and I did not regret the price of the paperback reprint. On the other hand, I did not read any more Higgins until the present occasion.

Which brings us to *The Eagle Has Flown*. (I presume that 15 years from now we will not learn 10 percent of this book has been cut.) And this time three men intervene to save Hitler's life at the last moment, even though they all wish him heartily dead. They are Liam Devlin of the Irish Republican Army; Asa Vaughan, West Point graduate now flying for the Luftwaffe after a stint in the Finnish Air Force, and Col. Kurt Steiner, late of the German paratroops, who is not dead after all, events of *Landed* notwithstanding.

Himmler is not identified as the mastermind behind the plot to knock off the Fuehrer, anti-Nazi Gen. Walter Schellenberg gets away with his plot, and, really, one is left again with the feeling that Jack Higgins is the best of the second-raters. I can't buy this premise, either, but other than that, it's an OK book.

I should probably enlarge on that.

About 20 years ago, it stopped being necessary for a writer of this type of book to pay much attention to historical verisimilitude. I believe the first of these was Ken Follett's *The Eye of the Needle*, in which German agents performed deeds in England which were not even remotely possible, forcing British citizens to perform deeds even more incredible in order to thwart them

at the last possible minute. Other than that, the book was all right, in the sense that it was written in English and moved right along.

It was not written in the best English – that remained for Graham Greene and Eric Ambler, who could show gentlemen of the Follett stripe, and the Higgins stripe, a thing or two with one hand tied behind their backs, while telling a coherent story. And Geoffrey Household, and Nevil Shute, and... but I am about to burst into tears. The only point I am really trying to make is that Higgins, for only one of many, simply does not come up to the standard of the previous generation; hardly anyone does.

But, that said, Higgins is the best of these second-raters putting one word after the other in workmanlike fashion and frequently having these words describe scenes and characters you will like a good deal. He even has one or two individual tricks, such as finding new ways to put people who were raised in America or Britain into Nazi uniforms.

Come to think of it, that's not a truly winning trick. It fosters the legend that there were lots of people in the Nazi armed forces who hated Hitler. I can't buy that, either. There were a fair number of Nazi generals and lower ranks who, as the war went from bad to worse, decided that Hitler was a liability. But that is a different kettle of fish. I know it's not fashionable to say this right now.

On the other hand, mine was one of the windows the Nazis broke with brick halves that had swastikas chalked on them, and that was in 1936, which was the time Dad decided we would relocate. I'm glad he did. Anyway, perhaps I have an ax to grind, and you should not pay it any mind. On the other hand....

10 March 1991

David Ignatius: *Siro*

Can you dare not like a spy novel by the foreign editor of the *Washington Post*? Don't be ridiculous. *Siro*, by David Ignatius (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$19.95) is a lovely book. That it is not quite as good a book as it would have been a few years ago is almost beside the point.

And we might as well clear that up right away. The only thing wrong with this book is that, in the end, it turns out that all the people at the CIA are untrustworthy, with the possible exception of one character. A few years ago, as I was saying, this would have been new. But now it is not. It has been done

too often in recent times. (The heart cries out for a novel in which the CIA is believably virtuous, but that is beyond hope.) And the result, in this case, is that what was shaping up to be a very, very good book is only a little less than that.

This book comes on the heels of Ignatius's first novel, *Agents of Innocence*, which I have not read, but which was a best seller. Certainly the front pages of *Siro* are crowded with encomia for *Agents of Innocence*, including one by William Colby, former director of the CIA. So we are led to believe that *Siro*, too, is an extraordinary book. And in many ways it is.

First of all, it is set largely in Turkey, and concerns itself with an attempt to make the Russians believe the United States is actively funding revolution in Turkestan (not the same thing as Turkey) and elsewhere. It has been a long time since Graham Greene (who died last week) and Eric Ambler were playing in the same waters, and much has changed; it is refreshing and educational to watch a good writer – and Ignatius is a good writer – go over much that is new, and do it so well. It makes, too, a pleasant change from Washington-London-Paris-Moscow as the focal points of a novel. They are here, of course, but they all take a back seat to Istanbul, and I really like that.

Then, Edward Stone, the elderly spymaster, is a good character, and so is Alan Taylor, his younger foil. True, Stone and Taylor make a better team at the beginning and middle of the book than they do at the end; but most of that is intentional, I think, and most of the intention is sound.

The most interesting principal character, however, is Anna Barnese, a young CIA recruit. And here we see something not often attempted: a novel with a female hero, written by a man. This is Anna's book: Anna is the smartest and most courageous person in it, and, in the end, with the exception of Margaret, the CIA character, who perhaps is the necessary tie to an older generation – Anna alone still retains her integrity.

Now, this is interesting. The American crime writer John Godey tried the same thing several times. Unfortunately, the only book Godey ever wrote that was successful was *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*, which did not have a female hero. The other Godeys were all earlier novels, brought back into brief paperback prominence by the success of the one later book, and all they succeeded in doing was demonstrating – perhaps falsely – that Godey did not get it right until *The Taking*. But the mind runs back, and now I wonder if the earlier Godeys were that bad, or whether the world was just not ready for female heroes – as distinguished from heroines. Because it certainly

is ready now; *Siro* is going to do very well.

And deservedly so. The ending is acceptable, and the rest of the book is almost all first-rate; certainly there has not been as good an espionage writer qua writer – with the exception of Bill Granger – in God knows how long. Would you care to mention Graham Greene? I think you could, without much of a stretch at all. If there is a palpable difference between Ignatius and early Greene as far as plot-turns are concerned – which is a different matter than sheer writing – the difference in fact is in Ignatius's favor; early Greene is almost unreadable, a fact which most of the world either never knew or has chosen to forget.

I think Ignatius's literary talent, more than any other, is the main strength of this book. I think what we have here, still not utterly sure of himself, but close, is a considerable figure, the author of books to come that may very well prove to be genuine events.

7 April 1991

James Carroll: *Memorial Bridge*

James Carroll was previously the author of, among other novels, *Madonna Red*, and I was pretty dubious about that 1976 book. I am also pretty dubious about *Memorial Bridge* (Houghton Mifflin, \$22.95) because although a lot of water has passed under Carroll since *Madonna Red*, he doesn't seem to have learned a thing.

This is a novel set in Chicago, more or less, from a period just before World War II to just before Richard Nixon's election, although it takes time out for Sean Dillon, the hero, to stop being an FBI agent and spend time as an Air Force general, mostly in Washington, D.C.

Sean Dillon, in the beginning, is a young man working in the Chicago stockyards as a steamfitter's helper by day and attending Loyola University law school at night. On the day when he is to take his final exam, the blood backs up all over the stockyards; it bubbles up from under the floor, relentlessly, rises to cover the shoes of the nauseated workmen, and does not stop. Sean, already scrubbed and ready to climb into his law school clothes, is summoned to solve the problem. Which he does. In a horrifying scene, he lifts a lid on the particular sewer that is blocked, ducks under the surface of the blood, and extracts the body of a man who has not just been murdered but flogged before he was murdered.

Now this is good stuff. What is not so good is that through a series of nothing less than simple coincidences, plus a lot of offstage action we never see, Sean winds up in the FBI, where, among other things, he falsely convicts the man who had the murder done. The conviction is all right with me; Sean may have used illegally obtained evidence, but there is no question the guy was guilty of that and a hell of a lot more. I am a little bit troubled by how easily he fell, once Sean started him going; I think it would actually have been harder to bring that off in reality.

But let that go. What troubles me more is that Sean is said to be a crackerjack FBI agent, but we never once see that. Eventually, toward the end of the book, we get a brief scene at FBI headquarters, but during all the time that Sean is said to be the youngest FBI agent to ever do this, and the youngest FBI agent to ever do that, etc., we never see one single instance of this, except the one in which he is not a very good FBI agent.

What's stranger is that Sean turns to Cass – his eventual wife – and asks her to go to Washington with him, and she does without hesitation – and we never see the wedding. In fact, Sean and Cass are living together for quite some time before Carroll casually refers to Cass as Sean's wife.

What I'm really saying is that Carroll is careless with details. (For another sort of instance, he refers to the "twintailed B-29, workhorse of the war", by which I can only presume he means the B-24, workhorse of one theater of the war. Perhaps more important, he refers to "Colonel MacCormack", which must send Chicagoans scurrying to their almanacs to verify that Carroll, not they, has the spelling of McCormick wrong.)

And so it goes. Sean is made a brigadier general in the fledgling U.S. Air Force after the war and given a very important mission. He actually screws it up except for one instance in which, helped by the lockpicks he has saved from his FBI career, he uncovers in the middle of the night a Navy plot to discredit an Air Force general who actually deserves it, but never mind. The Navy deserves it, too.

Sean gets off one hell of a line at the conclusion of the congressional hearing which marks this episode, but it doesn't come to anything. In fact, Sean screws up most things, but somehow the people who would notice this are absent. Unfortunately, it is clear from the context that Carroll does not notice it either.

Next thing we know, it's years later, Sean has risen by quite a bit, Cass and he no longer sleep with each other for reasons which are not one bit clear

to me, he goes to Vietnam and verifies that the body counts are inflated but he can't get anyone to listen, meanwhile his son, Richard, who when last seen was going with a Brazilian nurse, is a draft dodger instead, and I am convinced, by now, that Carroll does not realize a writer's job is to write good sentences if possible, write effective scenes if at all possible, but, above all, to have them mean something. And I will be damned if this book means anything.

Which is a shame, because in many ways it's a good book. Its main problem is that the parts that connect all the parts together are lying on the cutting room floor, if they were ever written at all.

12 May 1991

Bill Granger: *Drover*

Bill Granger's back, and with a new lead character – in fact, a quite markedly different way of telling a story from his famed November Man series. The new book is called *Drover* (Morrow, \$20), and, in addition to its apparent marking of the end of \$19.95 books, it launches Jimmy Drover on his way into the world of gambling and, naturally, crime.

Granger, a Chicagoan, is a very good writer, and the November Man cloak-and-dagger series is probably the best of all such creations. (A new one, *The Last Good German*, is coming from Warner Books in November.) Jimmy Drover is not a bad companion to the November Man series even if he has to do with gambling rather than espionage. I will be very interested to see the next book in the series, because this one does not even end, quite, like a series novel. But I know Granger will find a way.

Jimmy is a former sportswriter who got canned by his paper when an ambitious D.A. tried to include Jimmy in a gang of crooked gamblers. The charge didn't stick, but the paper canned him anyway. Since then, Jimmy has worked for Fox Vernon off and on. Fox has a sports line in Las Vegas.

Much of the time, though, Jimmy spends on the pier at Santa Cruz, Calif., where he hangs out in Black Kelly's saloon and eats Firehouse pot roast, meat loaf, or what have you. Black Kelly is a good cook, among other things, and he is Jimmy's best pal.

A woman whom Jimmy loves hopelessly, but who married a compulsive gambler, comes back into his life when her husband commits suicide. Not only was he deeply in hock to a sleazeball professional poker player named

Slim Dingo, she actually spent a weekend sleeping with Dingo to keep her husband's accounts close to balanced. Unfortunately, because Dingo really liked that weekend, he promptly got her husband to get in over his head again. All this she tells Jimmy, but she can't imagine what he could do about it.

This leads by apparent coincidence to Tony Rolls, a Chicago gambler, who recruits Jimmy to solve the problem of some Chicago commodities brokers who are running a pool of football futures; oh, and Dingo plays poker at Tony Rolls's house every so often, and Jimmy....

Well, Jimmy does Dingo pretty good, and digs around about the football futures pool, and a great deal additional happens as the book rolls along. I won't tell you about it; I want you to buy the book and read it. A lot of twist and double-twist goes on with the plot, and very little is as it seems on the surface. Hang on tight, and you'll be OK.

The story in fact runs from Santa Cruz to Vegas to Chicago to the football commissioner's office in New York. It also dips down to New Orleans. The cast of characters includes all sorts of types, and is large. In other words, Jimmy's activities take in a good deal of compass, and his interactions with people are many. This leaves a lot of plot threads to be resolved at the very end. To Granger's credit, they do resolve; this is a harder trick than it seems.

In fact, Granger does a number of things which seem like nothing at all to do, but which in fact most writers cannot seem to get right. Granger makes every word count, which is one reason why his novels are (a) slimmer than average and (b) better than average. I don't imagine he actually goes through a manuscript and takes out the superfluous wordage; you could do it that way, but you wouldn't be the fine, instinctive writer Granger is. Of course, "instinctive" is misleading, too; it took a lot of years, and working on several newspapers, before Bill Granger learned to transform the raw talent into the polished thing it is today.

The Chicago school of fiction writing is in hard times. It doesn't have the drive and the eccentric wobble it used to have. Institutionalization has set in, as it tends to do, and with a few exceptions, you couldn't tell a Chicago writer from his or her cousin in New York or Los Angeles.

In fact, most writers of prose gravitate out of Chicago and into New York at an early age, and most writers who yearn to do screenplays of course wind up in Beverly Hills if they're successful and in Hollywood if they're

not. What stays behind is few, far between – and better-than-average gifted, I think.

2 June 1991

Bill Granger: *The Last Good German*

Bill Granger's *The Last Good German* (Warner, \$18.95) is, as usual, a winner.

It's rather complicated, too, but that is the strength of this particular November Man novel; the tangled threads of deception and counter-deception which I, for one, was not able to place in a coherent pattern before Granger, in his own good time, showed me how they ran.

There are a lot of them. The tale begins years ago, when Ruth Sauer, then a child of 18, sets up master spy Devereux, for the sake of her brother, Stasi terrorist Kurt Heinemann, but at the behest of Pendleton of R Section. R Section is of course Devereux's employer, but Pendleton, as head of the Paris desk, turns out to be playing a game of his own. And in the course of this deadly game, Devereux kills two Mossad agents before being nearly fatally shot by Heinemann.

Years pass. Hanley is out as head of R Section; Pendleton is in. Kurt Heinemann is not in Moscow with the rest of the bewildered Stasi agents, homeless now; he is in the States, along with Ruth, and still playing games. Specifically, he is sent by Pendleton to join Consortium, a CIA contract corporation, and eventually to get his hands on an encryption machine – the mother of all encryption machines – just developed by a Japanese corporation. Devereux, blackmailed into it by Pendleton, is sent to Mickey Conners, a West Side New York Irishman who has a thousand connections and might buy the machine for R Section.

If you have been paying attention, this is already lofting gently off the ground. But it is as nothing to further developments, which include Mr. Denisov – you will remember him from at least one previous November Man novel – and several very angry, very effective Japanese gangsters.

I am, of course, not going to tell you how it works out, except to assure you that it does.

There are several curious things about the way this book is being marketed, by the way. They will not show to the general public. One is the fact that the synopsis helpfully printed at the front of the book is not just

wrong, it's very wrong. The other is that the note the publicity department puts into the bound galleys we reviewers get apologizes for the "production delays" that caused the galleys to be late. But they're not in fact conspicuously late.

In other words, I think the publicity department at Warner was coping with some sort of Class A emergency we know nothing about, and it has been dealt with, and the waters have closed almost seamlessly over whatever hole it was. Personally, I think the book went through some sort of rewrite late in the cycle; possibly because world politics changed so dramatically in a very short time that probably scores of books were affected. I hope that all of them were as amenable to last-minute fixes as this one was; if you just read it, in the printed version, you will never guess at any of the above.

You will not remember, probably, but Granger was the radio/TV columnist for the *Sun-Times* a dozen years ago, and nobody suspected there was anything special in his future. Now look: he is the author of 12 November Man books, three non-fiction books, and seven novels in other categories, the front of this book says, but in fact it's more. And all of them are very, very good.

The November Man, is I think, Granger's best creation: mordant and burned out so long ago that it is no longer a factor. He clings to just one thing; Rita Macklin, the red-headed journalist who, this time, takes a very strong part in the story. And even with Rita, there are things he does not dare to share. He is very alone, and very tired, and one begins to see, at last, why he is called the November Man. December is coming.

But not just yet. Please.

8 December 1991

Lawrence Sanders: *McNally's Secret*
Robin Cook: *Blindsight*

McNally's Secret, by Lawrence Sanders (Putnam's, \$21.95), as you would expect if you know Sanders, is mannered. Sanders writes very cleverly, and rather well, too. This one is a comedy, so what we have here is a comedy of manners, clever and rather well-written. That it is about a quarter of an inch deep is not a particular handicap.

It's the story of Archy McNally, son of a Palm Beach lawyer, who

conducts discreet inquiries for a living, and Lady Cynthia Horowitz's missing inverted Jenny. (As you undoubtedly knew, these are airmail stamps with the Curtiss Jenny mail plane, circa 1920, inverted by a mistake in the printing process. A set of four recently was auctioned at Christie's for a million dollars.)

McNally is really a straight-up-and-down guy, except for a certain creative streak in expense accounting, but he likes to play the lightweight. This lets him get off a series of rather good one-liners as he beats about the Palm Beaches in search of the stamps.

Lady Cynthia is in her 70s and ugly, but she happens to be possessed of a body that apparently has never heard of time; even at her advanced age, it is quite something to see... which a number of people do.

Jennifer Towley is Archy's current mistress. But she, unfortunately, has an ex-husband who is now out of prison. Consuela Garcia is Archy's ex-mistress. But she, unfortunately, has a new attachment now.

Then there is Bodin – the absolutely brainless but hunky Horowitz chauffeur – and his well-endowed girlfriend, Sylvia. And then there is... but you get the idea. There are lots of people in this book, and not a one of them is as straight as Archy; not even Sgt. Rogoff of the police. So Archy gets to flit from flower to flower of this exotic conservatory, kicking up one-liners, until, ultimately, he gets to solve the inverted Jenny case, and a couple of others, too.

This is, as I said before, a comedy. And it is written cleverly... and well, in a sense.

If, in the end, you find you don't give a damn who stole the stamps, well, I don't suppose you were really intended to. You were just intended to enjoy Lawrence Sanders in his puckish mood. Sanders has the well-established habit of letting his endings go flat, because plot is the thing he is least interested in. In the end, he delivers a barrage of one-liners, which is what he is interested in. And very good one-liners they are, too. Some day, just for the exercise, he should try writing a book.

Now, *Blindsight*, by Robin Cook (Putnam's, \$21.95), is a far worse written book, as those of you who know Cook will probably agree. He overwrites shamefully, his heroine goes through agony after agony in a curiously unrealistic way, and the various men who vie for her hand are ridiculously drawn. Cook is not a natural and fluent writer.

But it doesn't matter if what you want is a couple of hours of plot-driven

entertainment. Because the one thing Cook does well is keep the events rolling toward a resolution. He promises you this in the beginning, and he maintains the pace, and he delivers in the end.

What he delivers is the solution to why all these people have been killed, one set of them by overdoses of injected cocaine. His heroine is a forensic pathologist for the City of New York, who can't get anyone to pay attention to the fact that none of these people were known cocaine addicts, taking cocaine by injection is relatively rare, all of these people were bright and upper level, all the cocaine doses were from a single batch, and, just generally, they didn't fit the picture of cocaine addiction.

Oh, and she has an overbearing father and a fussy mother, and she can't make up her mind between the police lieutenant and the fabulously successful ophthalmologist, etc. That's the stuff Cook writes in to pad out the book and also because I believe he sincerely thinks people want that. And he's right, although they don't necessarily want it quite so crudely.

In both these books, one gets the sense that the author spends many hours typing stuff he doesn't particularly care for. In Cook's case, it's all this lonely-hearts agony. In Sanders's, it's all the stuff toward the end in which he actually has to sort of tie up the pieces of the plot before he can get to the jokes. One can hardly feel too sorry for them – both of them will, again, reap the rewards of best-sellerdom, which can be considerable and satisfying.

But that's what it is; the production of something that will bring in lots of bucks, and, even for Sanders, the joy of writing is not relevant to that process. What I'm saying is that neither Cook nor Sanders are in it for much more than your money. Bear that in mind as you pass over your \$21.95.

19 January 1992

Michael Crichton: *Rising Sun*

This time Michael Crichton has done it. His *Rising Sun* (Knopf, \$22) is a very good book and I recommend it to all comers. It's a two-pronged story. What it says is that Japan to all intents and purposes has taken over large segments of America's markets; against this background, it has laid the story of murder done at the opening of a Los Angeles building owned by the Japanese, a murder solved by John Connor and Peter Smith.

Smith is the young liaison officer from the LAPD to the various Asian communities within Los Angeles, though he is mainly concerned with the

Japanese and is learning Japanese. Connor is the semi-retired, almost legendary Japanese-speaking policeman who has worked in Japan several times, has a great many contacts with Japanese here and abroad, and has solved several vexatious crimes involving Japanese. There is a sense that this book is actually one of a series involving these two gaijin cops, but in fact this is the only one and will probably be the only one.

The murder is intricate. Connor initiates Smith into the differences between Japanese and Occidentals. No Japanese can regard an Occidental as better than a barbarian... so that Japanese suspects in a murder can and do react very differently from round-eyes, and nothing is as it seems. And it certainly isn't – Crichton winds his way through a series of extremely well-written scenes in which very little of the truth has to do with what happens.

And in a brief little gem of a scene, he incidentally shows that the Japanese are routinely uncomfortable with the truth as Occidentals see it. For a Japanese, truth stems from the situation rather than from some objective standard. Therefore, to round-eyed cops like Smith trying to solve a crime, Japanese appear treacherous, oblique and obstructive.

So Connor says as he points the way to a solution, nevertheless. Other cops disagree with Connor's findings. In fact, some of them say Connor is incompetent. Some of them claim that Connor is a lost soul, too Japanese by now to make real sense to a round-eye, and too round-eyed to really be accepted by the Japanese. Smith is urgently warned against taking Connor too seriously.

Some of this feeling stems from entrenched Japan-bashing. Some of it stems from Japan-bashing combined with an urgent need not to offend Japan, which is rapidly penetrating America on many levels, including Congress and the LAPD, in addition, of course, to the world of very big business.

Here is where Crichton really excels: the detailing of the many ways in which Japan has penetrated America, and the very real dangers this poses. The Japanese make no bones that to them business is war, and that a part of the war is conducted by neutralizing public opinion. Crichton shows, among other things, how apparently benign Japanese grants to various bodies – for example, the LAPD – paralyze opposition when it is most needed.

So, particularly in the light of President Bush's equivocal recent trip to Japan, this novel takes on an importance much greater than that of a mere murder novel – although, as a mere murder novel, it is a superior product. What it does is raise fundamental questions about a real problem. Many other

novels have done so. What Crichton has done is wrap them in a package of apparently pure entertainment, and render them very comprehensible, so that for a change they might even be understandable to the great mass of us.

Understandable. The book is far more than a piece of blind Japan-bashing. It does bash Japan, but it does so shrewdly and with seeming accuracy, at the same time it points out, repeatedly, that to the Japanese the issue is war, not vindictiveness. If you read this book as it was apparently intended to be read, you will gain a fundamental insight into the real situation, and you will be, I think, usefully frightened.

This is, in other words, one of those rare books that stands a chance of becoming central to a genuine issue. There is no telling where that may lead.

I have taken exception to Crichton's technique in the past, most recently with *Jurassic Park*, which I found to fall short in several serious aspects (although I knew it would become a best-seller, anyway). In reviewing the bidding, I find that Crichton writes science fiction with significant holes in the logic, and has since *The Andromeda Strain* – which does not keep him from making a great deal of money from his science fiction. But I also find that I usually at least like his non-fiction and his crime fiction such as *The Great Train Robbery*. Well, this is crime fiction combined with non-fiction, and I must say that Crichton has done an extraordinary job of it.

2 February 1992

Hammond Innes: *Isvik*

Hammond Innes has been around for a long time, threatening to break out into the forefront of popular consciousness, with such books as *Campbell's Kingdom*, *Air Bridge*, and *The Mary Deare*. The latter, for instance, was made into a 1959 film called *The Wreck of the Mary Deare*, an engrossing account of a marine inquiry that seemed not only to be well suited in its star, Gary Cooper, but to the rhythms of popular cinema in general.

But Innes has not been able to sustain. He has written some 30 novels over the years, and the best that can be said of his career is that he is among the leaders of the second rank of adventure novelists. He does not quite have the formula.

Isvik (St. Martin's, \$21.95), his latest, is a case in point. It could have been very good, but it defeats itself. It has plenty of thrilling scenes, and it moves from London to the west coast of South America, to Tierra del Fuego

and then the Antarctic and finally the Falkland Islands, but the pace is too hectic. Worse, it doesn't have a single character for the reader to identify with.

One can try. Peter Kettil is the viewpoint character – a young and out-of-work specialist in the preservation of wood, a sometime yachtsman and presumably the hero of this story. But one quickly learns that he is crucially indecisive, given to spending a lot of time thinking about big-breasted women, and completely out of it in the climax. So he can't be it.

There's Iain Ward, the enigmatic Scotsman. He has enough traits to satisfy anyone's hero requirements, from his ability to switch accents to his partially artificial arm to his broad education and money to his criminal background. And I believe this is the man Innes intended to be the hero, if anyone. But he is too arbitrary, too enigmatic, and in the end he disappears with a bag of Antarctic rocks which, presumably, represent some form of wealth – but Innes never says this is so, much less detail in what sense this is so. Ward simply climbs into a waiting helicopter with a bag of rocks gathered by another character – who promptly dies, his part in the book being over – who got them God knows where and God knows why, particularly since we thought the book was about the shipload of dead Argentinian *desparecidos* trapped in the polar ice.

Those are the only two candidates for the role of hero. For the role of villain we have Angel Connor-Gomez, "The Angel of Death", an Argentinian with a fearsome reputation, who actually, besides winging an albatross with his .22, does nothing and is killed offstage.

For a heroine, we have Iris Sunderby, but if she is really the heroine, there is something terminally screwed up in this book. I could go on – name all the additional characters who are introduced in great detail, but who come to nothing, and tell you about the plot-turns which make no sense – well, I have to tell you about the plot-turns, don't I? I'll try to clean it up.

Peter Kettil is at an English air base, finishing up a job for Pett, Poldice – his employer – when the station commander, for no reason I can detect, tells him about a mysterious derelict ship seen in the Antarctic ice by a glaciologist named Sunderby who subsequently was killed in the crash of his plane. Having recounted this anecdote, the station commander disappears from the story. Kettil meanwhile goes back to Pett, Poldice's office, only to find it deserted, except for a note on his desk telling him the company's been sold and he's been declared redundant.

Some time thereafter, casting about for work, he's invited to a conference aboard the museum clipper Cutty Sark, where he meets Iain Ward and Iris Sunderby. Iain Ward hand-wrestles an admiral, and....

Pardon me; I really can't summarize the plot, which takes one incredible turn after another, and is vaguely connected to the *desparecidos*, the "disappeareds" of the Argentinian military regime, the conversion of an old sailing ship to a radar-proof vessel, and her ultimate secret.

It is indeed horrifying, but does not explain why Ward wanted a specialist in the preservation of wood in the first place, or what Carlos really has to do with anything, or why Innes spent so much time detailing the purchase of *Isvik*, and the subsequent crewing and sailing of her in search of the ghost ship (or why he spent so much time telling about the journey down South America by four-wheel-drive car, when the cast could easily have flown in to the tip of Chile), when the whole object is to get to Antarctica so the story can actually begin.

As I said, I think this could have been a hell of a book. But it is mishandled in so many ways, in so many places, that I will, really, be a little surprised if you like it very much.

29 March 1992

Anthony Hyde: *China Lake*

Anthony Hyde's *China Lake* (Knopf, \$22) contains two principal pieces of unusual technique. One is brilliant, and I will not tell you what it is. The other – I doubt if Hyde knows this – was used by Graham Greene at the start of his career, with equally off-putting results. But let us soldier on for a while before we return to that matter.

China Lake is not only the name of this book, it is the name of a real location in the California desert at which, among other things, the Sidewinder missile was first tested in 1953 and 2½ years later was operational in large numbers. It was the first air-to-air missile and was spectacularly successful. It shot down 11 Chinese Communist MiGs in one day and instantly ended Beijing's designs on Taiwan.

Unfortunately, a few years later the Soviets equipped their aircraft with an exact copy. Not a counterpart – a copy.

In this book, David Harper – brilliant, absurdly young, and British, but working at China Lake – is strongly suspected of having given it to them.

Only Jack Tannis – the Navy intelligence officer in charge of China Lake’s security – is unconvinced. And the result is that Harper is never charged. But he is blackballed and never works as a scientist again. He and his wife, Diana, leave. Diana bears a child, but divorces David. David drinks a lot; eventually, he gets fired by every school where he has turned to teaching. Nobody has heard from him in a long time.

The book begins from Tannis’s point of view. Long retired, he still lives alone in China Lake because he has lived in the desert all his life, and could not comfortably live anywhere else. One night during the Reagan administration, an elusively familiar person calls him up but refuses to give his name. Tannis, the caller says, come to a restaurant called The Hideaway and find out something. Go to hell, says Tannis. David Harper, says the caller. And Tannis, of course, goes.

Thus begins a tangled, in fact skillfully woven series of events, which eventually includes not only Harper but the woman he loves, his grown son, some shadowy Germans, some very disquieting information on how the Nazis’ V-2 was actually built, and dozens of other facts.

Oh, and a gold mine.

But interesting and in fact fascinating though these events are, they suffer badly at the hands of Hyde’s writing style, which grows more and more opaque.

That is the technical feature Hyde borrows from the young Greene. He begins to spend altogether too much time on the metaphysical reasons and intertwinings which led everyone to the climactic pass. Toward the end, it becomes practically impossible to tell exactly what is going on.

Mind you, it does make sense in a way. Though the women in the book are just allowed to wander off into the night, that is not a major flaw – though flaw it is. It is that, as Greene realized, you either write “an entertainment”, however high quality, or you write a literary novel, but you can’t write both at the same time.

The plot of the entertainment – and in the case of *China Lake*, it’s a nearly brilliant one – will not support a novel. Too many things have to happen that are contrary to the way life works. That skewing of reality is precisely what the reader of entertainments wants, but it means – despite Hyde’s considerable skill with words – that the concept of a literary novel will not work.

Which is a shame, because if you strip away the metaphysics, and the

subtext, and the occasional scene that exists only in aid of the novel, you have an elegant and altogether delightful book. But you cannot strip away the plot and have a good literary novel; it just plain isn't there.

Well, maybe with Hyde's next book. Because look at where Greene wound up.

3 May 1992

Edna Buchanan: *Contents Under Pressure*

What I'm about to say may be difficult to understand. I have before me a book whose inside jacket is plastered with praise for the author and her works. Despite that, it's not at all a bad book.

In fact, Edna Buchanan's *Contents Under Pressure* (Hyperion, \$21.95) is a good book. It brings us the first in a series about Britt Montero, a green-eyed blond Cuban-American police reporter for a major Miami newspaper, and it rocks along quite well. The very ending is a little contrived, I'm afraid, but that's after the actual business of this book is concluded.

Britt Montero – single, plagued by a mother who wants her to get married and sell clothes – is a top-notch reporter who can't keep from prying into a story after others are done with it. And she finds a few loose ends in the seemingly explicable death of D. Wayne Hudson, ex-University of Miami and Raiders quarterback, model citizen, black, who came back after he retired and became a hero to disadvantaged ghetto kids. And the more Britt Montero picks at the story, the more loose ends it develops.

The parallel to the Rodney King case is nearly exact. Buchanan wants to write about a Miami in flames.

She also, however, wants to show us that the death of D. Wayne Hudson was planned, deliberately involving a black good guy, so that certain nefarious schemes could come to fruition. This is crime novel, not a documentary. And while as a crime novel it is good – better than almost all crime novels of recent memory – it is not impeccable.

Edna Buchanan herself is a veteran police reporter for a major Miami newspaper, having won the Pulitzer Prize during her many years with the Miami Herald, and so her backgrounds are impeccably drawn. And unlike most reporters, she can write fiction (although comparing her to Elmore Leonard and Ed McBain, as was done regarding her last book, is reaching a little). Britt Montero – with an American Episcopalian mother and a Castro-

executed Cuban father – does not strike me as being Cuban in the least. She does strike me as being a likable character I will be glad to encounter again.

This is not, in other words, quite the crime novel it is made out to be, and Buchanan is not the writer she is made out to be; nevertheless, this is a better-than-average crime novel, and Buchanan is a better-than-average writer. It's not her fault that the jacket of this book is plastered with ecstatic blurbs that make her seem like the Second Coming.

And it's not her fault, either, that she is characterized as being "among the ranks of today's hottest women suspense writers". Not only is the grammar of that a little shaky, not only is the distinction between crime and suspense blurred, not only is the use of "hottest" a bit of an ambiguity, but what does Buchanan being a woman have to do with anything?

As I have said, Buchanan is a good writer, and she writes – at least on the basis of this one example I have read – a very readable, entertaining, and often exciting book. She is not yet quite on a par with a very few writers who have been at fiction a good deal longer and consequently have their early work well behind them. It is actually unfair to compare her with them.

But her publishers – and the critics, apparently – are bound and determined to insert her into the firmament prematurely. The end result may be that Buchanan's star fades before it has a chance to blossom naturally, and the publishers and critics will be touting someone else extravagantly in due course while Buchanan wonders what happened.

People do these things. Publishers want a hot property – the sooner the better. Critics want something to rave about and reach down into the bag of magic names. Blurb writers cannot restrain themselves at the same time that editors can't bring themselves to review what they've written. They do this to good writers, and the result, often enough, is tragic.

The new writer doesn't have time to develop. The mistakes in early work aren't caught – for a while they're presented as virtues, and the writer, if she be fool enough, figures they aren't mistakes. Mind you, this is always a writer whose mistakes are often more interesting than the excellences of an inherently mediocre writer; the bad part comes when the mistakes solidify instead of being improved on. And this is probably all the more likely when the writer is new to fiction but has a marvelous record of accomplishment as a journalist.

We'll see, I suppose.

30 August 1992

Tomorrow Speculative Fiction **Editorials**

1

This is the first issue of a new magazine, and all we are going to promise you is that subsequent issues will be pretty much like the first, plus gradual evolutions.

The magazine is open to science fiction, fantasy, and horror with a fantasy element, at any length. There is a bit of a bias towards newer writers, but we will in practice take anybody who writes a good story.

Similarly, we will take anyone who draws a good picture. The picture wants to be in pen and ink – no washes, no tones, no pencil. Why? Because I am emphatically not convinced that tones reproduce well on newsprint, which is what we use. And if they are going to reproduce in a mediocre manner, we choose not to use them. We will also, of course, use one full-color cover per issue.

In the case of either stories or artwork, we buy First North American Serial Rights only. Why are they called Serial Rights when very few serials are involved? In over four decades of work in this field, no one has ever told me. What the time-honored phrase means is that we will buy the rights to reproduce the story or artwork once, in one issue of the magazine, which we will distribute only in North America. The moment the issue appears, all rights revert to the authors and artists, and their work is returned to the artists. (Writers are presumed to have kept another copy.)

When it comes to stories, we want pieces with a beginning, middle and end. For more information on that, see my series on Writing, which starts in this issue.

When it comes to illustrations, we want a picture that will make us want to read the story. We are not interested in impressionism or page decoration, no matter how well done; we want an illustration, in which the artist has read the story, selected the most dramatic moment, and depicted that moment in a clearly comprehensible manner, without giving the story away. There are other ways to handle the illustrations, we know. But not for this magazine.

We pay variable rates for stories. If it's relatively short and by a mighty name, we will pay 7 cents a word. We pay less for longer work, and less for work by people who have yet to prove themselves in the marketplace, but we always pay at least 3 cents per word, usually more, and we have a \$50 minimum, no matter how short the story is.

Rates for artwork are based on \$100 per page, but we rarely use a full page illustration, as you will see. In this issue, you will find the same bias towards younger illustrators. One of them, Rachid Idriss, you have never heard of before. Rachid got paid at the same rate as everybody else. Why, when writers get paid on a scale? Because an illustration is: it succeeds in doing its job, and that's all there is to it.

In future issues, we will have a letter column.

And that's it. Welcome to tomorrow.

January 1993

2

An interesting thing happened. Pulphouse needed a little money, and we had a little money, so from now *Tomorrow* is being published by The Unifont Company, Inc., which is essentially my wife and myself.

It's not quite as cornpone as it sounds. My wife has been the top-notch staff assistant to the executive vice president of a rather large company for years. As such, she has come to know a very great deal about many aspects of business. Edna, whom some of you know as the nice lady who hangs around me at conventions and at writing workshops, is a different person at work. Equally nice, but quite different.

And I have been, among other things, operations manager of a rather diversified published company, a position to which I attained by taking the usual preliminary steps. So I'm not quite limited to the things you have seen me do in SF.

But none of that is as important as the fact that very little about the magazine has changed. The cover price has gone up from \$3.95 to \$4.00, which is a change that was going to happen anyway. (It has to do with the discounts to stores; easier to figure them now.) Other than that, nothing has changed; our rates of payment remain the same, and we smile cheerfully as we write the checks.

There will be a number of issues after this one – perhaps an infinite

number. In this, we're helped by not having a national distributor. We don't want one; for one thing, it means having to have an off-sale date, and consequently having an increasing number of stale issues. Instead, we sell to individuals, by subscription and single copy, and we sell to specialty stores. If you want a copy of Issue One, for instance, the chances are you'll find it on sale beside this issue. If you don't, your store can order it or, if you choose, you can get it from us direct. It also means, by the way, that if your store doesn't stock copies, you can direct them to us, and we'll take care of it.

Contents are not a problem. We have in inventory a number of stories I'll stack up against anybody's. And we have illustrators who can hold their own, at least, with anyone's. Our covers, as you can see, are not a problem either. So we're apt to be around for quite a while.

As far as advertising goes, we probably won't have as much as Pulphouse got, even after this issue. On the other hand, we're not geared to *need* advertising, and every page without an ad means an extra page of story. (I have the quaint idea that what spells success or failure for a magazine is the quality of the stories and illustrations, and very little else.) So it is with some measure of pride and confidence that I tell you about Unifont. It is not a new company, being the house that brought you Rand McNally's *Bicycles... How They Work and How to Fix Them*, years ago, and having done other spot jobs from time to time. It is new to speculative fiction... but I'm not.

I think, at bottom, that editing a speculative fiction magazine is just about the best job in the world, with the possible exception of publishing a speculative fiction magazine. Stay tuned.

April 1993

3

“A professional,” a famous science fiction writer once said in print, “is simply one who gets paid for doing what an amateur does for love.” But this is not true.

An amateur creates for the sake of expressing himself; the professional creates with markets in mind.

An amateur may very well write stories which are superior to the professional's at any given time; the difference there is that the professional met a deadline, probably many times, while the amateur took as long as it took to make one story feel right.

An amateur does not feel in control of how many stories he or she writes; the concern is with trying to write as many as the amateur has occur to him or her. The amateur can afford to spend years tinkering with a story. The professional must write enough to stay alive. If a story does not occur, he or she writes anyway, until one does.

The amateur says “How did I look to the audience when I wrote this?” The professional says “Did it work?” Above all, the professional goes on creating whether he or she feels like it or not.

The differences between an amateur and professional, then, are profound.

I think the professional knows a number of things that have not yet occurred to the amateur. He or she knows that creativity exists independent of state of mind. Some professionals do not, for instance, enjoy writing. But they do not know another way to make as much money with as little trouble or fuss. And, in the end, they usually enjoy having written. Most of them enjoy tremendously the fact of their being a writer. It is only the act itself that is unpleasant for some, but they can put up with it.

Another thing the professional knows is that he or she is not really in competition with any other writer, living or dead. The professional has carved out a niche for him or her self, and is utterly confident no other writer can ever fill it.

And in fact, once established as a professional, the professional can go on selling for a very long time, until age, infirmity, or falling hopelessly out of fashion finally make an end. But of these three, only age is inevitable. It is the amateurs who disappear when the markets shrink, as they periodically do. Somehow, they never shrink to the point of eliminating the professionals.

From the reader’s point of view, the work of a professional can be told from that of an amateur in only one way – there is more of it, delivered at a deliberate pace. Other than that, there is no distinction. Some of the very best stories are written by amateurs. Some of the very best stories are written by professionals with toothaches, bill collectors hounding them, bad spouses, booze or drugs impairing their abilities, and despite their fear of death. Equally true, some of the best stories are written by professionals in a good spell. There is no telling from the written product what the writer’s state of mind was. The amateur and the professional are equal as far as product is concerned. But only professionals normally have significant careers, because they are the ones who keep writing no matter what.

In these pages, you will find the work of amateurs and professional side by side. You will not be able to tell which is which on a story by story basis, but over the years, you will come to know who the professionals are. As will I. You will recognize bylines, you will remember that the owner of that byline will always deliver a reliable product, you will be able to settle down with a byline's work like an old friend.

In any given issue, you may be startled into particular pleasure by a story written by someone whose byline you have never heard before. And you will wonder if this person will be a professional; if he or she will be back many times over the years. No one knows. I can guess, but no one knows. I can hope.

July 1993

4

I was thinking about the differences between men and women, and I came across what I take to be a genuine difference (of which there are, to my mind, not many). The genuine difference I mean is expressed, in one of its more prominent manifestations, in how women relate to racism.

I am not referring to mob racism. In a mob, of course, all bets are off. A member of a mob is not much different from any other member. The victim of a mob will suffer terminal consequences without regard to any other factor, granted a woman will suffer more elaborately. But mob action is rare; what I really want to talk about is day-to-24-hour-a-day racism; polite racism, if you will. And there women differ from men.

By and large, women talk on streetcorners, waiting in line, or wherever, to any other woman. Being a woman transcends any other box a particular woman may be in. The sisterhood tends to override everything else.

Please do not pick nits. Of course, there are exceptions. But on a 24-hour-a-day basis, a woman almost certainly will talk to another woman. Not on personal topics, usually, but it would surprise you, I think, what some women will talk about readily. And they will chuckle together immediately at the stupidities of bureaucracy, or the fact that the bus is late, or bitch about the way they've been treated by a clerk, without much regard to race, or religion, or whatever else you have. And within very broad limits, without regard to how upscale or down the two of them are dressed. A woman fairly easily, and spontaneously, passes the time of day with another woman. And

will fairly often give a very broad definition to “the time of day”. Women, taken as a class, do not really pay much attention to men’s rules when men are not around.

Men are much more complicated. For one thing, they tend to aggress all women, until they are rebuffed; then the chances are the rebuff will be the kind that makes them draw back into a mumbling shell, though sometimes not. Men also do not care, really, about a woman’s race, for most purposes outside marriage. But they almost never talk; rather, they maneuver verbally, until the rebuff, which signals the start of another reaction-tree.

Men above all do not talk to other men, except as part of a narrow, bonded group which excludes most other men; all other men of other races, certainly. There are seeming exceptions, for certain situations, but these are not meaningful. No white man talks of anything truly important with O.J. Simpson or Michael Jordan, although they would be delighted to spend hours in their company.

Women will do easily what men do with great difficulty, in this respect. A woman, in the end, does not feel that she is putting herself in peril if she exchanges words with another woman of a different race. And if they happen to be members of the same neighborhood group, for instance, engaged in some matter of importance to both of them, they will think nothing of exchanging words at length. With men the barriers go down much more reluctantly.

As to why this is, I think it’s because women by and large understand that men are the common enemy, and this is the outstanding fact of their lives. Everything else is less important. A woman will allow a man to cozen her, or she will seduce a man, and live with him happily much of the time, but the great mass of men are the enemy; seen as untrustworthy, treacherous and rapacious. So a woman has more in common with another woman than she has differences, except in extreme cases. Whereas men, trying to make sense of the world and organize it in some way they personally understand, are beleaguered and baffled by women, and are also in competition with most other men.

Men are, in the end, solitary. Women are gregarious. Perhaps this is not truly genetic; perhaps it is just the consequence of millennia of conditioning. But I think if the latter, it has been going on for so long that it has crept into the genome nevertheless. Men are solitary, and pick at superficial differences from other men because that is a way to fragment their enemies and make

them forbidding. Women are less ready to see differences. Maybe not much, but it *is* noticeable.

August 1993

5

I went to the supermarket the other day, and leaned against the glass on the fish counter. (You are more or less tempted to, even though a hand-lettered sign says not to, if your shoulders and hips are sore and the guy behind the counter doesn't see you for a while.) The guy behind the counter finally noticed me and said, brusquely, "Don't lean on the glass." He did not ask me what I wanted, and after a while I went away, and with a sense of despair told Walter, a front-end man, that it seemed to me the fellow behind the fish counter could also have asked me what I wanted. But he didn't, and so I didn't buy the swordfish. Walter sprang to the interstore phone, without saying a word to me. And after a beat I went away.

You may wonder why. Well. (a) it seems to me that the first part of the ideal solution would have been for the supermarket to make the glass on its case more secure, or fix it to make it impossible to lean on. That's instead of telling the customers what they can't do. Then, (b) the guy behind the counter should have asked me what I wanted, and not brusquely. (c) Walter should have said *something* to me – preferably something nice – before leaping to the phone. Instead, the transaction was instantly between him and the guy behind the counter; I didn't matter a damn, and was at once completely out of the loop.

But this was the same supermarket that had a sale on ground turkey at 99 cents the pound, but continued to show \$1.29 a pound on the shelf. I had to check the price with the guy behind the meat counter, who told me that the price was 99 cents but they hadn't had time to change the sign. But it didn't matter, he said, because the checkout counter bar code reader would read it as 99 cents.

Which of course it did. But it seemed to me the point of the sale was being missed. So I told one of the big managers, and he thanked me nicely and said it would be fixed. But it wasn't. This after an ad campaign, blanketing an area with a population of about six million, talking about 99-cent turkey among other things.

Then, there's the matter of the tuna cat food, which for months was

hidden behind the chicken cat food because the label color is *almost* the same, so the shelf stockers didn't differentiate. Then there was the time the Taster's Choice coffee was the same in two different shelf locations, although one was supposed to be plain decaffeinated and the other was supposed to be robust blend decaffeinated. The shelf stockers had simply filled the shelf with the robust kind in both locations, pushing the regular sort towards the back. Which, incidentally, tells you they stock from the front.

And so forth. All this happened within a matter of two months, and is just the highlights – though I do want to say a word about checkout people who converse back and forth continuously without so much as looking at the customer, and who mumble 'Hello', when they say it at all, in as faint a voice as they can manage. They make mistakes, of course; one would have cost the store sixteen dollars if I hadn't taken the tape to the service counter and had them check it.

Now, you are wondering about a couple of things. One, what store is this. The answer is that it's part of an extensive supermarket chain, which is locked in fierce competition with a representative of the even larger chain, a few blocks up Chicago Avenue. And Two, what do I expect?

I'll tell you what I expect. I expect, in sheer self-interest, that this store – which is part of the Number 2 chain in what they call Chicagoland – would do what is necessary to not make the customer feel like he is an imposition on an otherwise smooth-running example of incompetence.

The chain in fact rebuilt this particular store after its grand opening a few years ago – I don't know why; the old store was fine, competently staffed, and, as I said, quite new – and while the interior is now more logical and in some ways even nicer, the competent help is more or less gone. I don't know why. Possibly they've dropped the scale of pay. Possibly something else. But the bottom line is that the customer is made to conform to the store, and apparently nobody has thought how much better it would be if the store took the customer into account.

Now, this would be a peculiar editorial for this magazine, if it wasn't that this store is just one example of a growing trend everywhere to make the customer wrong; to deal with him or her as an intruder, and, often enough, to put up signs which boil down to "Do Not Disturb Our Arrangements". I don't understand it. Things used to be much better in the bad old days, before merchants supposedly cared as much about customer satisfaction. I see it everywhere; the chain bookstores whose help does *not* know the stock and,

furthermore, doesn't care – with a major competing bookstore right up the street, and another major competitor right down the street. A fast food restaurant, which had to move heaven and Earth to get permission to come into Evanston – whose help is so busy being fast they don't have time to be good. A major chain copy shop which gives widely varying prices, depending on who's clerking in the store – and, again, there are rival copying shops within a block or two.

It's stupidity. Sheer, downright stupidity, every day of the year. And we are drowning in it. Think about it – how many times a week do you have to put up with it, and why do you have to put up with it? It's easier and cheaper to do it right; why do they do it wrong? Inimical Martians infiltrating our labor pool? What?

October 1993

6

AIDS is beginning to change. Now that it's obvious it's not a disease specific to blacks, homosexuals, and other groups below the pale – in other words, now that it's made significant inroads on the white heterosexual community – it is being given very sophisticated handling. On the one hand, frantic efforts are being made to find a cure. On the other – because no cure has in fact been forthcoming – we are beginning to hear things like “Well, heart disease and cancer kill far more people a year”, and “It is, after all, a purely preventable disease”.

The idea, apparently, is that people with AIDS – except for a few cases that were apparently innocent, and got it through blood transfusion (though of course we can never be sure of absolute innocence) – could conceivably not have gotten it. Blacks, Latinos and homosexuals are understood to not have the power to deny themselves; white Anglo-Saxon heterosexuals, however, are made of sterner stuff, and are therefore more to blame. Unable to face up to what they are really saying, many commentators are therefore now saying the disease is not so terrible after all.

But it is. This is a point that I have not seen made elsewhere: the disease is terrible because it destroys one of the principal ways by which we at least temporarily disarm ourselves and truly share something with another human being.

Heart disease and cancer – which, by the way, are also at least partly

preventable – and kidney stones and hives and hangnails – do not as a rule affect us so deeply. AIDS is at the heart of what we are.

Perhaps you have never made love to anything. But most of us have, in some fashion, and there is, really, nothing like it. For many, there is a moment of tenderness and sharing that cannot be attained in any other way. And for many, frankly, that moment has been shared with many partners, out of love or out of habituation – and suddenly now that is fundamentally different. Even the monogamous have to approach the first time with a certain degree of fear, and for those who for any reason must have more than one partner, the odds in favor of death are very clear.

Death. Not just herpes, or syphilis, or the clap, or any of the hundreds of other venereal diseases that shorten and miserate lives, but at least can be lived with for a long time. AIDS brings sure death into the lovers' bower.

I am not prepared to entertain the self-righteous. I know, without your having to tell me, that the disease is preventable. Now prevent the impulse toward love. And if you tell me that love is meant for the marriage bed only – the heterosexual marriage bed to be precise – and everybody else can go to hell, I will simply walk away from you. You have not thought the matter through, and until you do, you and I have little to say to each other. But let me try. You have friends? Acquaintances on whom you depend for something important? Children? Do they love? Then don't talk to me about monogamy. And if you consign those people to hell, including any children who slip out from under your control – and some will – then I think your own place in Heaven is not fully secure.

It is in what it does to the human spirit that AIDS is the deadliest disease. I first became aware of this some years ago, driving through Missouri, when I happened to catch a radio program hosted by Doctor of Divinity Lilywhite and featuring as a guest a gentleman who was Ronald Reagan's Surgeon General. And Doctor Lilywhite explained soberly and calmly that AIDS was primarily a disease of black males, because all black males were bisexual.

And the Surgeon General did not get up and leave the studio. I thought to myself that this was by far not the opening gun in a barrage of calm and sober lies that would eventually sweep away every vestige of good sense and true love. I thought that in the fullness of time it would destroy so much that was valuable about being human, and erect in its place a race of fear-ridden, cold-hearted *doppelgangers*, coupling not out of love but out of hate... but

coupling, nonetheless.

Show me the cancer that can do that.

December 1993

7

One of the publishing trade magazines we get is *CPDA News*, a magazine that comes to us because we have that thing that looks vaguely like a toaster grid on our front cover. Twice a year *CPDA News* publishes the sales figures for the top magazine titles, and while we're never included, still there's a certain morbid interest.

The top twelve selling magazines by title for the first six months of 1993 were *TV Guide*, *The National Enquirer*, *The Star*, *People*, *Woman's World*, *The Globe*, *Woman's Day*, *Family Circle*, *The National Examiner*, *Weekly World News*, *Soap Opera Weekly* and *Cosmopolitan*. The top circulation, *TV Guide's*, was 5,659,323. *TV Guide* grossed \$130,956,734 during this reporting period. We didn't.

The top twelve titles by retail dollars were *TV Guide*, *The National Enquirer*, *People*, *The Star*, *Woman's World*, *Cosmopolitan*, *The Globe*, *Penthouse*, *Woman's Day*, *Soap Opera Digest*, *Family Circle*, and *Playboy*.

You will notice several things. In the first list, there were four, altogether, magazines as you and I understand them – five, if you count *People* – and the rest, including *TV Guide*, were something else. (Of the magazine titles, all were for women.) And no fewer than five on the list were not magazines at all, no matter how you count; they were supermarket checkout counter “newspapers”.

On the second list, interestingly, are the two leading men's magazines. It's the first intrusion of a segment of males into the world of leading magazine titles. (Old males apparently are content with *Golf Digest* and *Field and Stream*).

The top 12 unit increases are *Family Circle*, *Fitness*, *Smart Money*, *McCall's*, *Allure*, *The New Yorker* (with an increase of 490,519 copies, or 94.3%), *Redbook*, *USA Today*, *Men's Health* (might this have something to do with the ravages of age in males?), *Soap Opera Magazine*, *Details*, and *TVY Novelas* (which is a Spanish-language publication, and truly astonishing to find in this Anglo context). Except for Number 22, *Golf Illustrated*, with a 178,345 copy increase, or 128.9% (Aha!), *The New Yorker* is far and away

ostensibly the most spectacular of the publications on this list. Notice, too, that the checkout newspapers are apparently plateauing at last, despite Michael Jackson's troubles, Loni and Burt, and Lady Di's gym outfit.

At any rate, I was thinking for a moment of changing this publication's name to *The New Yorker Cosmopolitan Penthouse Playboy*, but then I took further thought. The real comer may be *TVY Novelas*; that's the one that possibly signals a wave of the future in big-time publishing. I wonder...
MAÑANA Ficción Especulativo?

February 1994

8

Like many of you, I suppose, I spent some time watching CNN and the repair of the Hubble telescope. And I thought about how far we have come, in the sense that the astronauts really seemed to have been trained to maneuver efficiently in space, and to have been able to use their tools with enviable proficiency. The fact that the telescope should have been orbited in working order in the first place notwithstanding. The fact that the orbiter was obsolete the day the first one was launched, long ago now, also notwithstanding. The fact is that human endeavor never proceeds at the ideal pace. The fact, I realized, was that "endeavour" will now join the list of words that Americans have agreed to have Anglicized.

It's interesting. When I learned to speak American, in 1936, "glamor" was the preferred spelling. Then, in the 1950s (I believe) *Glamour* the magazine came into existence, and bit by bit, very surely, Americans began adding the extra letter, apparently under the illusion that it lent tone. What it actually lent was confusion. "Glamour" was, for instance, the title of a horror story, in which it was made plain that glamor was the thing Hollywood actresses displayed, whereas glamour was a mysterious essence of delusion that was cast about certain objects, none of them in the least attractive. No one can reprint that story now; its point has been lost to a shift in the language.

And it's a peculiar shift. I have begun noticing references to "colour", as well as to "Endeavour". I have long noted references to "theatre", and of course the Vogue Tyre Company is still with us, but those I just smile at – they are affectations, and probably more than half of us realize they are that. But as the literary level drops, more and more people must be going around

with a feeling that their language is not actually theirs.

There is also, of course, the long-standing confusion about it's and its, potatos and potatoes, and those many, many motor homes and camper inserts which proclaim that herein live the Jones's and the Hammerantongers'. There are the people who write to me and feel compelled to address Algis Budry's (among many other variations on the spelling of my name). I think the people who do that are first possessed by the feeling that it can't be that simple, and then by the feeling they should stick in an apostrophe somewhere.

Then the TV ads are getting worse. *Moneysworth* was a publication for a while. Then Chrysler Motors began talking about "Getting your moneysworth", and others have followed. They can't mean getting the magazine, because that's long gone. So they probably meant getting your money's worth, but they didn't quite know that. Just today, I saw a TV promo for the Golden Globe's Awards; a beautifully produced network promo.

Then there are the "mechanics" on duty, and the people who wish you to be "of good cheer". They obviously don't know that putting quote marks around a term in that context means that it is of dubious value.

I take personal umbrage at *Sports Illustrated's* references to the "backseat" of a car and the "livingroom" of a star athlete. I can find no justification for these copyediting quirks. I also feel the same way about "alright".

But mostly I wonder about those additional letters, in glamour and colour, honour and endeavour. I can't really see the sense of it. Of course, I'm just a poor Lithuanian country boy.

April 1994

9

Pretty soon, as things go, it will be January 1, 2001 AD, and we will be living in the Third Millennium. Some people who keep the Christian calendar do not know that. They are aware, for the most part, that another century is aborning – though most of them think it'll be with the advent of the year 2000 – but they don't quite realize that it's not just another century. Not just yet, anyhow. By the time it gets here, the media hype will have gotten around to telling them, many times.

Like most media hype, it will not have told the full story, because it thinks that would be too complicated for the average person. For one thing,

lots of Christian calendars don't agree with ours; the difference is approximately ten days, and most of Eastern Europe follows that "Julian" one instead of our "Gregorian". For another, the Jewish and Mohammedan calendars – and of course the Chinese and lots of others – are completely different, and have counted over 5000 years, at least.

So our Third Millennium, for many, either will not come at the conventional time or will not come at all. Which of course will make no difference to those who do believe in the Millennium at the "proper" time, and believe that something will happen – a trump will sound, the world will end, or both, or Christ will appear again, or the Antichrist will appear, or both – you name it, somebody believes in it.

My interest is more personal. On January 1, 2001 AD by the Gregorian calendar, I will be sixty-nine years and three hundred fifty-six days old, if I live. When I was born, life expectancy for a white male was seventy.

I have a pretty good chance of making it into the Third Millennium, and I have been aware, all my life since I learned to count, that this was so. That it will also be an anniversary with no special events is doubtful, but I think they will not come from Heaven. I think they will come from the actions of people who believe something about it, absolutely. I think we have a measurable chance, for instance – measurable, not big – that some clown with access will set off a nuclear device. Maybe more than one.

But I don't really think so. I have seen too much – Hitler, Tojo. Stalin, the Cold War, and what have you – and we have muddled through. I think the Third Millennium will find us getting by, as usual; reeling, of course, from short-term problems we mistakenly take to be long-term trends; still convinced that we are somehow better than the guys in the next valley; absolutely convinced we don't really deserve to live, and absolutely hanging on to life like grim death.

I hope to finally die with a grin on my face. And you?

June 1994

10

I am about to get a number of people seriously angry. I am going to say something very much politically incorrect. I suggest you read every word carefully. And if you are under about the age of 54, I suggest you not bother to write in. No matter how much you've read or said on the subject, you

weren't there.

The Japanese nowadays make my car, which is an '85 Toyota Celica with 250,000 miles on it. I've never had the head off, it's only gone through two clutches, I replace the alternator brushes rather than install a new alternator, I have had to have the radiator boiled out, and that's essentially it. I understand American cars are beginning to catch up, some of them, and I guess I believe it, but it's an abstract – the Toyota apparently will go on for quite a while, yet.

But there is another Japan. It has turned Hiroshima into an international shrine, which is more than OK with me, but it has also made the Americans into the villains in that respect, and that is not OK with me. Here's why:

Most of you do not remember World War II. I was 14 when it ended, with the bomb on Hiroshima. (Actually, it was with the bomb on Nagasaki, a week later. No Japanese to my knowledge speaks much of Nagasaki, reserving his remarks for Hiroshima. I think I know why this is.)

I feel for the Japanese. I really do; one day they had cities, and the next they didn't. It was a considerable shock, and I don't blame them for reacting to it. But I remember, too, the price we had to pay: first Pearl Harbor, and then Midway, Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Iwo Jima, the Philippines and a thousand islands, large and small, in between. Islands. Sons and husbands dying by the thousands in the surf of a hundred beaches, for years.

One thing we learned, very well, was the tenacity and courage of the Japanese. We called it "fanaticism" then; that will serve to describe the degree of courage they displayed. And we came, finally, under the cloud of Japanese suicide bombers cutting up our fleets, suffering terribly but coming on nevertheless (I went to college with a man who had been aboard the *Franklin*), to the shores of the Japanese home islands.

I have spoken, at length, to an executive of the American Bridge Company who, not seven years earlier, had been a combat engineer, part of the Army of Occupation, steaming into one of the Japanese harbors. And he felt, without question, that we would indeed have sustained a million additional casualties; 100,000 dead, many of the rest maimed for life, if we had attempted a conventional invasion. His particular job was to be part of a team inspecting the defenses the Japanese had built, and it was his job to reach that kind of estimate. We would have done it, as we had taken all the other islands, one after the other, bodies lying in the sand with the land crabs and the sea birds picking at them, but any alternative was welcome. And we

had the alternative.

How many Japanese would have died, I don't know. Nobody does. The Japanese had elaborate plans for suicide defenses, for instance, and there is no telling how many of them would have worked before they were finally overrun. But I think there's no question but that the figures would have been substantially higher than the total lost in the bombing of Hiroshima (and Nagasaki).

We had bled enough, I think. And it was the Japanese that had made us bleed, steadfastly and courageously. I want you to remember, friend, that Hiroshima *was not enough*. It took another week, and another city, before they surrendered. So much for any talk of a "demonstration" on some uninhabited isle instead.

I don't like war. I didn't like it before it became fashionable not to like it. But I felt, and I feel, that the Japanese brought it on themselves. It was the crumpled bodies on the beach, far from home; the helmets awash, the rifles bayonet-down in the sand. They brought it on themselves, and though I sympathize with them, I sympathize with us, too... and so, at the time, did the rest of the American people. It is a more advanced generation, to whom World War II is just a TV show full of grainy black-and-white film, that feels somehow ashamed.

August 1994

11

I thought it might be useful to describe what happens at the manuscript-reading end of this magazine.

In the morning or early afternoon of every day but Sunday, I go to the Main Street post office. I deposit the mail I've processed, and go to the box to collect today's mail. And I begin to form impressions immediately.

For instance, there are always a small number of #10 (business-sized) envelopes. The slim ones usually contain money, in one form or the other, and I'm glad to see them. The thicker ones contain requests for guidelines, which I'm always glad to fill. Some of them contain checks for \$4.00 for a sample issue, which they learned about from the *Writer's Digest* listing. I am glad of those, too, because I don't really see how you can expect to sell to a magazine without even seeing an issue first.

I am less glad to see that the applicant often stopped reading right there,

and didn't notice that it also said to send an envelope and postage. Among those who did read a little further, a fair number enclose a return envelope (no postage, usually); a #10 envelope. But, what the hell, some of these actually pay off with a good story later, so I don't really mind.

The thick #10 envelopes I regard with deep suspicion. They contain stories – usually short, almost always about Adam and Eve turning out to be the hero and heroine (frankly, I don't believe in Adam and Eve, I don't believe they were called Adam and Eve in tribal legends until the comparatively recent invention of the English language, and I have in any case read that story before, Often).

I wish people would realize that a story which is *about* a story is not going to do it. For some reason, people who fold stories and stuff them in #10 envelopes very often don't know that, far more often than the people who use 9" x 12" envelopes. No, I don't know why this is.

And I quickly look through the 9" x 12" envelopes, because once in a while the envelope is intended for someone else, and because I want to segregate the catalogs and the magazines, leaving nothing but story submissions. And then – provided I don't have a little yellow card that says to stop at the desk for mail that has to be signed for, or for returned subscription copies that have gone astray in one way or the other – I stop at the bakery for a cup of coffee and a sweet roll before getting into my car and driving home.

At home, I begin slitting envelopes, confirming my suspicions about the #10s. The 9" x 12"s (and occasionally odder, bigger sizes), contain likelier material. Most of them aren't very likely, but that's to be expected. I reject most of them, send one of two back to their authors with requests for rewrite, maybe buy one outright, and maybe not.

I also get, about once a week, a story without a return envelope – or, sometimes, an envelope but no postage. Or, once in a great while, a story without a return envelope, no name on the manuscript and, it turns out, no name or address on the original envelope. All those I file, for a few months; then I throw them away.

I also do not welcome covering letters, but I get them in copious number. I especially do not want those which contain a (sometimes very extended) synopsis of the story, together with a detailed summary of the author's other accomplishments. I don't know why people do that. The only thing that counts is the story itself, and for that nothing else is necessary or desirable. The only covering letter I want to see is the one that tells me the

story is a simultaneous submission. That spares me the need to read the story.

And I go upstairs and fire up my computer, so that I can write my letters on the stories and send them back, or, occasionally, buy them. The next day, I do it all over again.

I do other things; lots of things, to keep the magazine going. And Kandis Elliot does a lot of things, I going up the road to Madison, WI, once in a while so we can put an issue together, and I occasionally going up the road to Des Plaines, IL, to see the printer.

But nothing is as important as checking the mail every day that I'm in town, and processing the manuscripts quickly. Despite the various problems – which I volunteered for, knowing full well they would come – it is the most vital, and the most satisfying, of all my activities. There is nothing quite like the feeling I get when I realize that I am reading a keeper; there really isn't. The hairs on my forearms stand up. So don't stop sending them.

October 1994

12

I don't dance. It's a species of shyness on my part. But I appreciate dance; I'm not a balletomane, exactly, but I like ballet a lot. Other forms of formal dance, too, from ballroom dancing exhibitions to figure skating, find me rapt, sometimes with tears in my eyes. Similarly with painting, sculpture and drawing, similarly with song.

The thing is, all these frequent human things to do are, in fact, useless.

The purpose of feet is to walk and run. It is not to do steps in a circle. The purpose of painting and drawing is to do signs: **NO SMOKING; WIPE YOUR FEET; POST NO BILLS**. The purpose of having a voice is to communicate hard data. Who was it who, first of all the human race, moved his feet to express a feeling? Who was it who, in beating a drum for the purpose of communicating a message, suddenly burst into rhythm? Who sang? And why.

I do not think there are very clear answers to these questions. I repeat that there is no apparent survival value in them. Not in any of what we call "the arts". That in fact you can draw a distinction about any human activity; if it is useless, then it is an art. If it has some representational value, then it is a skill, like baseball.

So the question comes down to what it is that makes every single human

culture, without exception, and no matter how far back we go, give rise to the arts, and artists?

Without exception. And usually also not without contumely and attempts at suppression, often enough severe. Most artistic young people have to fight their parents, often viciously. Most cultures regulate the differences between permissible and impermissible art. But no culture survives if it tries to suppress all art; if it does, it is quickly overthrown.

Curious, don't you think? The stuff is useless, but if you don't have it, you die.

I have noticed that frequently enough, art is the only redeeming feature of some people, and some cultures. Except for their art, they are petty, grasping, sometimes homicidal. Which means that 90 percent of the time, those are their overriding traits. The art is the only thing that is in the least attractive about them.

Is that it? Did the feet of the first dancer track through the blood of the man he had killed? Was the first song a perversion of the cry of agony? Is it that God, in confronting the generally ill-natured thing He had made out of clay, said wearily: "Oh, all right, I'll give you Art."

Think about it. When we speak of the mighty cultures of the past, we illustrate the lecture with photographs and drawings of the art. Not the downtrodden peasant, not the raped female, not the greedy glitter in the secretive face of the miser; the art. And when we illustrate with the art, we somehow forget the repression, the blind, dogmatic ignorance, the appropriation of another party's territory and possessions. Yet which is more true, day to day?

We speak of the artless joy and love of children, and it is true. At about the time that we develop the instinct for art, we leave indiscriminate joy and love behind; we detect differences between our playmates and ourselves; we form cliques; often enough, we begin to persecute those who are somehow different from us. At about the time that the instinct for art kicks in. Isn't that strange?

Children frequently go through a period that resembles art; the child draws, or dances, or sings. But when puberty sets in, this false dawn frequently disappears; the childish soprano becomes a croak, the drawing somehow does not get better, the dancer gets fat. It's only starting at puberty that the genuine stuff truly appears, if it's going to. And of course it appears together with that other bad stuff.

Now, one thing I want to know is, are we all actually artists, but some of us manage to nurture the thing, often desperately, while most of us give up and live “normal” lives? Is art the perversion, or is “normality?” One clue: you’ve got to have at least one banker, one lawyer and one real-estate agent, or your artists’ colony fails. So very likely, neither type is the final answer. Very curious.

December 1994

13

They are once again spreading the news that certain clearly identifiable segments of our population have lower IQs than certain other clearly identifiable segments, and the controversy is raging, as usual. Curiously enough, each time this happens there is no reference whatever to previous times the same discovery has been made and trumpeted; perhaps that, too, is a casualty of the storm, since if it’s happened before there might be something to it, which a large segment of our population does not want to admit. But it doesn’t really matter.

What they are missing is that IQ is irrelevant.

First of all, IQ is just a score on a test produced by academics. Generally speaking, the closer you are to being an academic, the better you will do. But, ignoring that for the moment, what does a high IQ – or a low one – prove about one’s actual performance in life? Very little.

I happen to have an IQ which is identical with Norman Schwartzkopf’s published score. I have a military family background, and a number of other similar interests. We’re approximately the same age, and we even have the same somatotype. How come I’m sitting at home and publishing a magazine and he’s the hero of the Gulf War?

The answer, I think, is that in some cultures, a lonely and ostracized kid – me – often turns to books; in other cultures, he or she turns to something else. The kid is essentially the same; the cultures are not. It has nothing to do with intelligence – I would much rather have to do with a street-wise person of any color than with a *naif* of any color, because street-wise he or she is *smart*, and furthermore interesting. He or she may not be able to spell “cat”, as the saying goes, but he or she can tell you in great detail about any number of vital things – provided you can hold *their* interest. And he or she points to a cat whenever that is relevant.

They do a terrible disservice to kids by giving them IQ tests, and eventually they will realize that – not in my lifetime, apparently, but perhaps in yours. Perhaps originally these tests were intended only to measure potential, in the young. I think the very existence of the tests is an indicator of something invidious; the notion that one can identify the individuals to whom special attention should be paid... which means there are many more individuals to whom no special attention should be paid.

But in any case, nowadays the influence of the IQ test has spread much farther... as can be seen by the publication of a book which attempts to segregate adults into categories according to IQ.

All right, let's look at it as adults... let's bring in to the discussion our experience in life. How many of us do not know a variety of persons who are (a) reading disabled or (b) under-educated or (c) both, and nevertheless doing a terrific job of living? IQ is irrelevant to what they do or how well they do it; what counts is interest, willingness to work effectively, and all that other unquantifiable stuff.

And how many of us know super-educated people who can't pour sand out of a boot? They may know a great deal about a narrow speciality – though that's open to question on a number of counts – but they have almost completely withdrawn from the world, and speak only to others of their own class of students of narrow specialities. They rise only to one stimulus – the colleague from across the street who has also studied the same speciality, for the same number of years, and has a diametrically opposed opinion.

Intelligence doesn't cut it. What cuts it is hard work, and what helps is common sense. And "intelligence", whatever that really is, has in fact not ever been measured in any meaningful, universal way.

Nor – I know what a thing I'm saying here – should it be. I lived for years under the burden of "not living up to my potential", harped at me by people with IQs much lower than mine, and I would not willingly allow the same to be done to anyone else. I cannot imagine the benefit of such knowledge, and I defy anyone to test intelligence and refrain from letting the subject know what the score was, however indirectly he does that.

No. If we want everyone to be like everyone else, we have got to work on the cultures, not on the scores. And of course we have got to allow for the fact that I, and Jimmy Switchblade, and probably one or two other people, would rather die than be like everyone else.

February 1995

14

I bought a new computer the other day. Oh Boy, did I buy a computer!

I had learned, more or less, on an Atari 800, and worked my way up through an Atari 1200, and finally an Atari 130 XE. I wound up owning several 130 XEs. They served me well.

And I was happy; really happy, and in complete control of what I was doing. But the 130 XEs became more and more obsolete. By and large I was happy when my oldest son, Jeffrey, suddenly gave me his sixteen-bit Atari Mega 2, he having bought a Mac. (We were both into Ataris because Steve, the real computer genius in the family, part-author, among many other things, of *Killer Football*, at one time thought Ataris would rule. It did take extraordinary maneuvering by Atari to lose the home computer market.)

But, although many issues of this magazine were produced on the Mega 2, I was never completely comfortable with it. And one day it crashed, corrupting what files it didn't obliterate. So I began very quickly searching for a replacement. And after the usual indecisive-ness, and looking at alternatives from Madison into Chicago, I was driving by a chain discount store one day, and just stopped in on an off-chance. And there I saw a Mac Performa 405, for \$800 and change. Also, there was all kinds of software loaded into it, including a faxmodem program (and fax-modem), and a Claris program which would do lots of things besides word processing, and a dictionary, and God knew what all else. Furthermore, you could buy it on time, and there wasn't any interest charge, according to the sign on the unit. I went home and thought about it, and called the store, which confirmed there wasn't any interest charge, and it seemed a very good deal to me. So I went back to the store. Oh, boy!

It soon developed – among the three people who waited on me, none of whom knew squat about computers – that the no-interest feature was for one year only, and that if I didn't have it paid off in a year, they would charge me over 20% on everything – including whatever I *had* paid off. The same clerk who had assured me over the phone now explained that this was a promotional gimmick designed to draw customers into the store. Then it turned out that they didn't really intend to let me go until I signed up for two years' maintenance, at \$100 a year. I kept saying No, and I kept saying that I was too old to put up with this kind of sleazy merchandising, and was about to leave. Then all of a sudden it turned out that this was a floor model, and

they would let me have it for \$700 and change, and would cut the two years' maintenance to \$50.

This seemed all right to me. And what they didn't know was that I had a line of credit at the bank which, if push came to shove, would let me borrow the outstanding balance at less than nine percent, not their twenty. So I bought it and brought it home. And guess what? They had inadvertently given me the software package for a much more expensive model – CD-ROM discs, and all like that – which would have been all right, I thought, but, well.... So I brought the software back, and, after a frantic search among the cartons for the more expensive models, they found my Performa 405 software. So I took it home, and tried to fire up my computer, and it didn't work. My model was not only a floor model, it was a demonstrator; none of the promised software was in there, in favor of a demo program. So I went back to the store... where, it turned out, the manager wasn't in, and nobody was quite sure when he'd be in. So I started waving my two-year maintenance clause at them, and the manager appeared in a puff of smoke and began calling an Apple service line.

Well, Apple Service was incessantly busy, so I told the manager to keep trying, and eventually, a day later, he got through. Whereupon Apple assured him the software was loaded in, whereupon I said "No, it's not," and we went 'round and 'round and after a while Apple agreed to Fed Ex the software to me. Which they eventually did, and it looks very nice.

Meanwhile, I had discovered that the modem would send stuff out but would not accept incoming material, unless I paid extra for the other half of the program. Also, I discovered a book full of coupons for goodies of various sorts, except that they all expired in 1993.

My son Jeffrey offered to upload his software into my machine, which software was two years advanced over the software that Apple was sending. My modem would work in both directions, for instance. But of course I couldn't do that, because it was licensed to him, not me. But the thought was nice. And Jeffrey suddenly gave me his printer, a Hewlett-Packard Deskwriter C, as a combined Christmas and birthday present, because he was getting a new one. And I bought Ram Doubler, and a trackball mouse, and all was well.

So that's how I bought my new computer. Oh boy!

April 1995

15

I went down to see Tim in northern Arizona. Tim is one of my four sons. He had just fathered my first grandchild, Zia (means “Dawn” in Navajo), and I felt like having a look. (Did; everything satisfactory, mother [Mary] and child doing well.) Tim lives in a very interesting house.

First of all, you have a hell of a time getting there – ten miles of back-country highway, turn left into miles and miles of unmaintained dirt road, turn right onto a thousand yards of what you might call unimproved surface, go past the junipers to Tim and Mary’s place. This is not the touristy part of Arizona.

The house sits in twenty acres of juniper forest and consisted, two years ago, of an open cut into a hillside, facing south. Tim and Mary had bought plans for an “Earth Ship”; a house designed to be either completely or almost completely independent of municipal services. And the first thing they did was get a truckload of used tires, which they filled with dirt, compacting it with a sledge hammer, and stacking them brick-fashion, dividing the hole into three equal spaces. Then they filled in the space between tires with emptied aluminum cans. (The idea of the Earth Ship is to utilize scrap materials.) And then they applied adobe, thus hiding the tires and cans, and creating a very nice ambiance. They got vigas (peeled, straight logs) to support the roof, which is made of shiplap lumber and has skylights, and is clad on the outside with synthetic rubber sheeting. The roof slants slightly downward, and then takes an abrupt turn upward, creating a gutter down which rainwater can flow. The front of the house consists of panes of thermal glass, almost floor to ceiling, in wooden frames. The result is cool on summer, warm in winter. They do have a woodburning stove, in addition to a propane refrigerator and stove for cooking, but the woodburner isn’t usually needed, despite their being at an elevation of over a mile.

In the front of the house runs an indoor planter, and in this they will raise vegetables; at the moment, they have pots of many flowers.

The house actually looks modern as the day after. It isn’t finished yet – it’s labor-intensive, and even with neighbors pitching in, it’ll take a while before all three rooms are finished. But it’s very pretty, already.

There’s wiring, and 12-volt lights fed by two solar panels and a battery. As soon as they get the generator repaired, they’ll have a temporary source of 115 volt, and eventually they’ll have enough solar panels so the generator

will be just a standby. Plumbing is by outhouse right now; eventually, they'll have a composting toilet. They have the beginnings of an orchard, they're landscaping the grounds, the house is snug and warm, and Zia looks very happy.

Tim and Mary make custom-fitted shoes. They charge from \$150 for low, shoe-like shoes, to \$500 and up for elaborate knee-highs covered with appliques and bead-work. They take an impression of your foot, and go from there. The final result is totally comfortable and lasts for years. They work in a house about 100 yards up the road, which has power and water (and which feeds water to Tim and Mary's house via garden hose when they need it. Drinking water comes from the store.) They work Renaissance Fairs; they're in Apache Junction, AZ, every weekend right now.

Earth Ships, by the way, aren't unheard of; Taos, NM, has quite a few, and Dennis Weaver has one that has sixteen rooms and cost a million dollars.

In time, they will be essentially independent of anything, except for the phone. And many of their neighbors are or will be, and this is just one of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of communities like it. They run into the town proper once in a while, and those of them who need it maintain a post office box in town, but essentially they are not tied significantly to anything. And very few people even know they are there.

It's an interesting lifestyle; one you wouldn't think of right away. And I keep thinking of how warm and snug the house is, and how it will be there for generations, taking what it wants of new technology, and only what it wants. Makes you ponder.

June 1995

16

Here's a column I wrote in April, 1968, after returning home from a business trip. I wrote it for my regular book review column in *Galaxy* magazine. It, sadly, bears repeating now:

From the air Washington, DC, looked dusty in the late afternoon. In the main terminal at National Airport, ticket clerks had been suggesting there might be seats on flights from Friendship Airport. They had no suggestion as to how long it might take the regular limousine service to get through downtown Washington to Friendship, which is near Baltimore. But there were certainly

no seats to Chicago, Milwaukee or St. Louis at National. So I took the shuttle to New York and that was how I saw the burning like a barricade across the city at 14th Street. The flames were Da-Glo orange.

My plan was to take a Chicago plane from LaGuardia. I settled for a cab ride to Kennedy and the last seat on a flight home via Cincinnati.

The nation's capital, as I was saying, had been burning. From National, with its panoramic windows, the historical monuments along the Potomac had stood out clearly against the rosy smoke. We had gotten to National, usually a twelve-minute cab ride down Connecticut Avenue from the Shoreham, via Georgetown and the Key Bridge. Whether you know D.C. or not, what this means is that for five tired businessmen who had been strangers until they struck their bargain with the cabbie, the Insurrection up to this point had been an hour's traffic jam.

The flight path from Kennedy to Cincinnati crosses Baltimore. D.C. is off the left wing. Doubling back as I was, at something like 10:00 P.M. local time, now, I was sitting in a First Class left window seat with a double whiskey sour in my hand, partaking of a little Mozart through the headphones of my Astrostereo.

Washington from the air at night is one of the world's great visions. When I see it, I think of the superdense cities traced out far below our England in the Arthur C. Clarke story. It is like looking at a scanner display and making out the lovely, obviously intelligent webworks of an aesthetically conscious, persistent and prosperous alien people. At this time, it had rust-colored, very dark streaks across it.

In Cincinnati the bouncy stewardess with the Texas accent received a message that flight crews would not be permitted to leave O'Hare Field for their homes in Chicago but would have to bunk out at the field after the flight terminated. She asked me what Washington had been like. I couldn't think of how to put it.

"Like World War III," I said and she nodded happily, comprehending.

But later, when we swung in over the West Side of Chicago at midnight, she ran up and down the aisle, pointing out and crying: "Look it thet! Look it thet, my Gawd!"

Well, I got home all right, to suburban Evanston, in a cab driven by a man who blamed the whole thing on the Mayor of Philadelphia for taking away his policemen's shotguns. I also learned that he lived in all innocence on the 3000 block of West Madison and I was his last fare before he checked

in and went home. I'm not really a jerk but I didn't like the way he talked, so I just wished him pleasant dreams.

The next day, I checked with the local police for reassurance, and then my wife, my four sons and I got on our six bicycles and went up to the Baskin-Robbins store on the corner of Dempster and Chicago. The youngest is six and I'd promised him he could have a ride to the ice cream store when I got back home from the annual convention of Pickle Packers International, a very nice bunch of people I no longer work for.

As I recall, everybody had a double dip but David, the youngest. Despite his twelve-block accomplishment, he settled for one dip. The next day being Sunday, we dressed up neatly and took the bus to Raymond Park for the memorial service.

What all this has to do with science fiction (I wrote in April, 1968) is so obvious that its full implications still escape me. It was not at all like World War III. World War III in the movies is accompanied by sirens, crashing sounds and the crackle of flames. But the common element in all my insulated glimpses from real life was the absence of sound effects. In all the afternoon and evening, I heard one klaxon – on an empty ambulance headed for the Key Bridge away from D.C., probably toward a road accident on the chock-full highway to Dulles airport. Other than that, it was cab motors, turboprop and jet engines, arrival and departure announcements, coins dropping into telephones, ten pennies in a slot for a copy of the *Chicago Sun-Times*. That, and politeness; the very quiet, resigned AP wirephoto editor in Washington on Friday morning, when the headline was still D.C. QUIETS DOWN. He said he was glad to see me again, hoped I'd be back next year, but didn't really think he'd be able to do much with my 8 x 10 glossy of a pretty girl unveiling a sculpture of a six-foot eagle clutching a 2½-foot pickle in its claws. All of us were polite; the taxi man in Washington, the five of us in his cab, even when we were stuck immovably in that narrow Georgetown Street, with people walking rapidly and the hooter getting closer and closer. There was no shoving or shouting at National; the clerks worked quickly and without raising their voices. On the shuttle, a salesman put his knee in my lap while trying to aim his Nikon through the window, and I was very polite to him.

It had to be, of all things, a stewardess out of Steve Canyon who became my only exhibit for panic, and it was two other cab drivers, one in John Lindsay's New York and one in Dick Daley's Chicago, who spoke

confidently of locking their doors and “driving right through” crowds if the need ever arose. One thing their television viewing has apparently failed to show them is a car with its four wheels in the air. Or else they’ve related it to a movie about World War III. At 26,000 feet, with Mozart and whiskey sours, I gazed with fascinated interest on the subterrene jewelry of Washington at night and thought of Arthur C. Clarke. What difference does it make what you relate to?

What difference? Well, I’m not sure. The difference, if any, must be somewhere in the difference between the flashy and the enduring. So much of what we want is flash. Flash is often more fun. The novel of World War III is not popular by accident. And the mysterious figure with mysterious capabilities, spinning conspiracies or, conversely, righting wrongs with one morally superior stroke – he, too, is an enduring archetype among us because there are enduring needs within us and he meets them. A large part of what is generally called “science fiction” all in one lump, good and bad, flashy and enduring together, is wedded and bedded, part, parcel and calliope with a complex, communicative, communal, commutative, comprehensive social network which fosters and battens on the urgent, immediate need to make the future happen.

We want to escape from the incomprehensible here-and-now into a simplified world where an Avenger sets things right with one forceful blow after the “mealy-mouth politicians and fuzzy-minded social ‘scientists’ have muddled it up”. We want to have the Arcturians come down in search of Marilyn Monroe and knock aside things-as-they-are in the process. We want a new deal for ourselves, by being born again, this time fully conscious, into a world depopulated by the Plague, where all is still and all is ours.

We live in a flash world. The dimensions of things have gotten worked around to where they are larger than life as it was when the harmless entertainments of flash fiction were first created. Any one man with a degree in biochemistry, for instance – one poor, miserable, unsung cataclast with a mere ten years’ education, or just an ordinary lot of luck – could make such a Plague. We may all be dying tomorrow for one man’s gratification of a wish which should legitimately be sending a hundred thousand of us to the newsstands with seventy-five cents for the next John Christopher novel.

You follow me? So much of science fiction has nothing to do with the intrinsic things of science fiction. It has to do with the intrinsics of less than perfect humanity. It is predicated on the powerlessness of the individual,

rather than on the capabilities of the lucky few. The Plague, the Arcturians, or the Avenger, are needed to fill the lack of power in our lives.

Or they were. Here in the world of the future, our longed-for expertise of things has created innumerable places where once powerful authority has no monopoly on accomplishment, and where there are many weapons that are best wielded by empty hands. If he but be driven enough today, any man can be his own pulp hero, and those of us who want all their thrills vicarious will never again nod safe in their libraries.

That's what it all has to do with science fiction. It has to do with the difference between flash writing and good writing, because good writing is life and flash writing is the other thing. Good art has to do with life realized. We've always known that. What some of us appear to have missed is that life has changed fundamentally, and science-fictionally.

That's what it has to do with science fiction. The greater chunk of the old basis is dead as of April 4, 1968. We used to set stories on Mars and in the future not because we understood those places but because we didn't – which made them totally believable places in which to have momentous things happen. Life at home proceeded apace. But we live now in a time in which it not only can happen here – you name it, and it can happen, good, bad and indifferent, provided only it's flashy enough – it not only can happen here, it will.

August 1995

17

I used to write good English; I don't remember why. I learned to speak it at the age of almost six years, and something about it struck a harmony in me. I suppose I read a lot, too – I know I read a lot – and something about that drew me toward correct grammar and spelling... not that there was much incorrect grammar in written prose in those days. Nowadays I have forgotten my German, take a week in France before I can converse again, and even my Lithuanian is pretty bad, really, although my mother says it's wonderful. (Since my mother taught it to me, and since she's now in her nineties, she can be forgiven for her error.) Most important, I am forgetting correct English.

It comes from reading slush – that is, unsolicited manuscripts. It comes from year after year of exposure to it's for its, laying for lying, who's for whose, and lead for led. I'm not kidding – I now have to proofread my stuff

very carefully to catch myself. I who used to scorn dictionaries. I find myself accepting glamour for glamor (they're actually two slightly different things, but it's a very rare individual who knows that anymore), and alright for all right.

Some of those have been with us for a long time – alright, for instance. And glamour for glamor has been with us since *Glamour* magazine got started. But there is a species of error that seems to arise largely from spellchecking programs, and lead (pronounced led) is one of them, I think.

Spell checking is a purely mechanical process. The program compares your spelling to an internal word list that's called a dictionary, and adjusts your text accordingly. But the program does not *think*. It will happily substitute bear for bare if you give it the slightest excuse. And it will let who's go by because that consists of an acceptable word plus a possessive apostrophe ess, which is also acceptable. For the same reason, it will happily settle for it's every time, even when you don't mean "it is". Because although it's called a spellchecker when the nice person at the computer store sells it to you, that's not what it is. Spelling comes from the human brain, only. What the program is is an orthography checker, and you would do well to remember that. The program has to do with shapes, not with meaning. It can't have anything to do with meaning.

And while we're on the subject, please look your printout over before you mail it in. Printers are nice, but they make mistakes every so often; print a line on top of a line, for instance, and for no reason known to mortal man. Or suddenly paragraph where they weren't meant to, for another instance. Do not, in other words, trust your printer to have thought.

And as long as we're on *that* subject....

Take your printout apart into separate pages. And have a number on each page, and a key word of the title, and your name. And don't right-justify; that is, don't have your right margin be a straight line. Don't use fancy typefaces. Don't use italics – underline. Don't do anything to make your manuscript page look like a book page. It's not a book page – it's a manuscript page, with very different requirements, most of them having to do with the blasphemy arising from the production manager's corner. Don't do anything to get the production manager mad; all editors are scared to death of their production managers, and will rarely buy a manuscript that is not in manuscript form. Your printer may very well do a dozen impossible things before breakfast – most of them do – but you are well advised to throttle it

back to where it does its poor best to imitate a typewriter. Save the fancy features for letters to your mother.

Of course, some of you are still using typewriters. (For those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, a typewriter is a kind of laptop, only not as expensive as most.) I think that's a mistake – computers are far more flexible. But I understand, and I usually sympathize. But you can't blame your spellchecker when things go wrong, can you?

And don't single-space. Double-space, by which I mean an extra space between lines, not between words. (Laughter arises from the audience, but I get one or two manuscripts a month in which that error occurs.)

While we're at it, don't include most covering letters, don't list your credits, don't, for God's sake, synopsise the story. Let the story spring fresh and new on the editor's consciousness. Then, if the editor likes the story, and doesn't recognize your name, she or he'll ask about you – either in the letter of acceptance or when he or she's ready to make up the issue with your story in it. Almost all covering letters are counterproductive. If the story's no good, all the endorsements in the world won't help you. If the story's good, what other endorsement do you need? Tell me if the story's a reprint. Tell me if the story's a simultaneous submission. (If it's the latter, save your postage; I won't read it.) Otherwise, don't tell me anything. I know there's a listing in which I ask for 25-word biographies and stuff. I didn't write the listing, and pretty soon there'll be a corrected edition of the listing.

Well, this began as one species of editorial and ends as another. Sorry.

October 1995

18

It began, I guess, with one or another of my readings; conventions gave me a little room and some time, and I had read from my works quite a bit. Sometimes it was short stories, and during one seemingly interminable stretch it was parts of my novel in progress – which took seventeen years to complete. (I'm on another one now; hopefully, it won't take as long.) At any rate, it seemed to me I had a fairly smooth delivery, and other people commented more or less favorably, when they commented, and one day this year it came to me I could do a cassette. If I did a cassette, people could listen to it, and they could even put it in their car stereo, all this assuming that anyone would actually want to do this.

It didn't hurt that my youngest son, David, was a professional recording engineer. He's done all kinds of groups – a Bolivian folk troupe, a Northwestern University chorus, for two – and lots of rock bands, and the occasional single performer. Why it took me so long to put two and two together, I don't know. But I proposed the idea to him, finally, and he said sure, no problem.

Yes and no. I went down to his studio with a selection of stuff, and he sat me in a chair. Then he put two microphones about an inch from my face, and a screen – to keep the moisture in my breath from fouling up the microphones – about a half inch from my face. I couldn't move my head, he told me, or the recording would screw up. He threw a bunch of switches on racks of equipment, put a set of headphones on, got a level, and he was ready.

Well, there I was, trapped behind electronic gear. And I was supposed to read as if I were free and unencumbered. Dave gave me a cue, and there was no escape. We began.

Actually, it went pretty well. The first story had to do a partial re-take, but the rest of it went more or less in one shot, and I was feeling pretty good about the whole thing. Oh, I knew that when I read I occasionally swallowed a word, but those were like the typos you see in published prose and yet don't; they blend into the background. And I swallowed some words now, but when I did I just read the sentence again, because Dave has lots of editing equipment. So, as I say, I was feeling pretty good, and when I was done I left the studio. Dave stayed.

And stayed. Truth to tell, it had gone better than he expected; only several hours of work intervened between my reading and coherence. Then an hour or two of making everything fit, and an hour or two of this and that.... It turns out there are some profound differences between a person reading and a person being recorded. I am a humbler man for having discovered that. Oh, it's me on the tape, all right – there are still plenty of little things left on it to make me a writer, not a voice-over actor – but it's a me with some very skillful editing, nevertheless.

I will draw a veil over what I had to go through to get some J-cards printed – those are the insert into the cassette box – and what I had to go through to get some cassette labels printed. That turned out to be a little adventure in itself, particularly the labels, because they print in sheets of twelve, precisely positioned. Kandis Elliot helped immeasurably, though, as she always does.

Then there was getting the bar-code film, and transferring that onto the J-card. Actually, that was pretty easy; it was the wrong size, but Kandis managed to shrink it. (That part's not easy, at all, but I just had to sit and watch her be an expert.)

Now it's done. It's an audio cassette, and when you hold it in your hand it doesn't look as if any work went into it at all. And that's the story of *82.4 MINUTES OF ALGIS BUDRYS*, which you are supposed to put in your stereo deck, or your car's stereo deck, or your motor home's, or your boat's, or your airplane's, and like that.

Oh, and I hope you like the stories. I almost forgot – that's what the whole exercise was about, wasn't it. They're from diverse sources; one is from Issue #2 of this magazine, and the others are from old *F&SF*s and Larry Shaw's *Infinity*.

December 1995

19

Some years ago, I was a pretty fair book reviewer, both for *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*. I am pleased, as a matter of fact, to report that various other journals came to me from time to time and solicited my services. But I didn't take them up on it, not only from a quixotic sense that I should dance with the guy who brung me but also, frankly, because it was more work than it looked. And I had other fish to fry. (Also, I was in Los Angeles much of the latter days of those assignments, and Federal Express closed for the day at 7:00 p.m. out there. A definite factor.)

Then, by coincidence, I quit both jobs on practically the same day. The *Sun-Times* had gotten burned by a guy who claimed to be one of their sports writers but was actually pandering. And an ex-con. He was, however, a stringer for them – that is, a person who, if he chanced across a story, could call in and see if the *Sun-Times* was interested. Well, the important part of that was that I was technically a stringer too, although I had a regular column. And *Sun-Times* management, to protect themselves in the future, had all their stringers fill out a form that began with name and address, but three pages later was down to inquiring as to whether I had car insurance, and what the company was. I found I couldn't do that – I told you I was quixotic – and there went that job.

Simultaneously, I was offered the editorship of this magazine – that is,

of *Tomorrow* – in the one issue that Pulphouse, Inc., would publish. (After #1, I took over the publication.) And there went the *F&SF* job. It seemed crystal-clear to me that I couldn't both buy stories and review stories at the same time. It still seems crystal-clear to me. But some people keep expecting me to run reviews, and me to do them. Nevertheless, the conflict of interest seems inescapable. (Also, the time lag between doing any review, by anyone, and publication, is such that most of the titles mentioned would no longer be available.) But I also came to realize, finally, that we in SF had crossed over another bridge. And, as usual, there is no going back.

Conflict of interest used to be rampant in this field. Editors in the late forties and early fifties used to routinely publish their own book reviews. (Some editors still do, I suppose. Some editors also still publish their own stories – me included.) And more complicated games were played. Nepotism was routine. And one new SF magazine at one point was owned – and edited – by a man who was still employed as the editor of a competing magazine.

The thing was – flagrantly illegal dodges aside – that there weren't enough of them. There were only a half-dozen people in the entire field who were fit to be first-rank editors, and if they were also the only good book reviewers around, so be it. And the number of writers was sharply limited. The number of everything was sharply limited, and, a couple of factions aside, what that meant was that after working hours they all drank together, gossiped together, and, well, sometimes made off with each other's wives.

That of course is unheard of today. (For one thing, many of the best editors and writers are female, and somehow you don't hear of them running off with other people's husbands.) More to the point, there are enough of us now – oh, boy, are there enough of us now!--not to require nepotism, or any of the other reprehensible things we used to practice.

I miss them. We can't go back, and we shouldn't go back – we mustn't go back. And I miss them.

February 1996

20

Well, one piece of news this issue is that the price is going up again, because the price of paper has gone up again. I hate it, and as soon as the price drops we will add pages. Why is the price of paper going up again? Because inordinate amounts are being purchased by Oriental buyers. They are

building their own paper plants as fast as possible, because they don't like the point to where they've driven the price of U.S. and Canadian paper either. But it will be a while before those plants are up and running. Once they are, the U.S. and Canadian paper price will drop. Hold your breath.

I want you to understand something else; the overwhelming majority of readers love this magazine, and understand what I'm doing. If we had a letter column, we wouldn't have a letter column, because it would be filled overwhelmingly with praise. What I hope at this juncture is that you'll love it a extra 50 cents' worth. I think I'm right about that.

Another thing we're going to be doing is running serials steadily. That's the other piece of news. From issue 21 on, the only reason why we won't have a three-part serial instalment is that something has temporarily gone wrong. We will fix it. We don't claim to be perfect (God knows). We do claim to catch up to errors as fast as humanly possible. We haven't had an issue free of error yet, and we probably won't have, ever. But that's our goal, nevertheless.

The first serial will be Michael Shea's *In the Mines of Behemoth*. It's a sequel to his Fantasy Award-winning *Niff the Lean* and it will – unless we are in error – be one of the signal events in SF magazine publishing this year. The serial after that isn't bad, either.

We are, unabashedly, very proud of this magazine. Kandis does a remarkable number of things with it, and I do the rest. That's it, gang – two people, three hours apart by highway, with my wife, Edna, as backup, and our printer, besides printing, also seeing to the bulk of the shipping. But I flatter myself our product compares to the best of the pulp magazines, in any era. If that's true, it *is* something to be proud of.

Stay with us. The best is yet to be.

April 1996

21

You remember my editorial published after the Oklahoma City bombing. (It was, in fact, a reprint of part of the book review column I did for the old *Galaxy* after the assassination of Martin Luther King. But it didn't matter, because the column didn't refer to the event except indirectly; its new application, to the bombing, was equally obscure.) I wanted to write on the topic (the topics) without so much reacting to the event as detailing my

feeling that the world had changed.

And the reason I reprinted it was because I had been right. I do not doubt that the bombing defendants will, first, deny all complicity, and, more important, be perhaps genuinely puzzled why people are upset. It was, after all, an act of war, and people should expect to be hurt in wars. I don't expect the defendants to understand that it was only on one side that the act was seen as an act of war. And I don't ever expect the defendants to realize that they're rationalizing. They'll sincerely call it an act of war, but down underneath there's just the little boy desire to crash something really big.

Another thing is I also expect that a fair number of people will feel in their heart of hearts that the defendants are right. The only reason they don't say much about it is that the scarred people of Oklahoma City, and elsewhere, would tear them apart in an irrational knee-jerk reaction. But in their heart of hearts they know which side is actually crazy... and it ain't theirs, of course. Furthermore, they will, under certain circumstances, defend to the death the right of the defendants to say so... joining with the people who also will defend to the death their right to say so from one hundred eighty degrees around the political spectrum.

We are foundering in sincerity. It was sincere acts that killed the Kennedy brothers, it was a sincere act that shot Martin King through the throat, it was a sincere series of acts by the Unabomber, it is a sincere – well, just ask them. Ask them if they feel any guilt. And if they happen on occasion to say they do, it's only because under certain circumstances it is politic to lie.

Suddenly, it's OK if people put their inner dramas ahead of the common weal... because they're sincere. God knows what was really running through the mind of Lee Harvey Oswald, but Sirhan Sirhan was apparently just an ordinary Muslim who felt that Bobby Kennedy was a devil. James Earl Ray is not entirely clear as to motive; quite possible he was hired to do the job. And that somehow makes it understandable. A mysterious figure decides that Martin Luther King must die, and James Earl Ray says "I'm your man!" Does the Unabomber, assembling his packages and putting them in the mail for years, really stop to think that some of them will go wrong and kill blameless people? Does he stop to think whether anyone gave him permission to kill *anyone*? Does he even for a moment think he should *get* permission?

But it's as I said in my book review column lo! these many years ago –

we have shifted from being a culture of the mass and become a culture of five billion individuals. And if the individual feels somehow put upon, or the person who hires him feels somehow put upon, why, whizz bang, without any thought for anything but the precise planning of *how* it is to be done (as distinguished from *whether* it should be done), smack dab it is done.

And I think we had better get used to it, because now there really is no alternative to doing that. The cold facts of the matter are that if you so much as get on a train, somebody may be planning to derail it in a bare spot in Arizona; if you walk into an office building, take thought; if you are the President of the United States, wear a bulletproof vest every day and pray that the rifleman doesn't have your head in his sights, as Lee Oswald did. And don't tell me about John Wilkes Booth or Giuseppe Zangara. Those people were *nuts*. I suppose a case could be made that anyone who kills another person is nuts, somewhere underneath if not on the surface. But those people didn't sincerely believe that they had a right to do what they did. Most modern assassins do, and you'd be surprised how, in their heart of hearts, many people agree with them. After all, they had a grievance of some sort, didn't they? And in our present culture, that's all the excu— Well, no, it's not an excuse. To have an excuse implies that you are concerned about other people. No, it's not an excuse; it's a reason.

That's all anyone needs, anymore – and you'd be surprised how many people agree. There have always been some who agree. The difference now is that many of those people who agree are building bombs of their own.

June 1996

22

I became an American citizen the other day. I was some months past the age of sixty-five – which meant I have been living in the States for sixty years – and I became an American citizen.

I was born in Königsberg, East Prussia, in January of 1931. East Prussia was of course a part of Germany, but I was a Lithuanian citizen from birth, because my father was in the Lithuanian diplomatic corps and just happened to be stationed in Germany at the time. Like they say, if the cat has kittens in the oven, you nevertheless don't call them biscuits.

An interesting note about Königsberg is that it disappeared late in World War II. It was pounded flat by Soviet artillery, and the site has since become

Kalliningrad, of the independent republic of Belarus.

Well, anyway. My father was quite a chap. In the 1920s, when he was a colonel in the Lithuanian Army, through an improbable series of moves he resigned from the Army, moved to the territory of Klaipeda, and became a farmer. (Improbable moves were part of his character – for instance, being in the Czar’s army at the time, he had walked to Lithuania from Vladivostok after the Revolution, which had been restored from generations of being Russian province.) Anyway, as I said, Klaipeda – which had the German name of Memel – was a seaport that the League of Nations stubbornly refused to give to Lithuania, calling it a “free protectorate” under the command of a French admiral.

One day Mr. Budrys had himself rowed out to the Admiral’s ship, his crew consisting of some of the crew-cut young farm laborers he had hired, and pointed out that a lot of his other workers were in the city, carrying bolt-action farm machinery, and would the Admiral mind packing up his ship and going home? And as he said this, the League of Nations flag fluttered down. In due course Klaipeda held a plebiscite and voted to join itself to Lithuania, and the young farm laborers rejoined the Lithuanian Army. Colonel Budrys became the Lithuanian military governor of Klaipeda until he joined the diplomatic corps and, with my mother, moved to Königsberg. (Mom had been a young clerk in the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, sent to Klaipeda to do code work.)

Well, around about 1935, with the Nazis coming to power, mobs began forming in front of the Lithuanian Consulate General every night and hurling brick-halves through the windows. This was because the Nazis felt that Klaipeda was Memel, of course. The police held them back, and every day the Consulate General would receive a set of glossy photographs to show the police correctly keeping the mob from coming up on our lawn, but, still.... My father would sit in the darkened living room, his pistol in his lap, and my mother would sit in another chair with me in her lap, and the only light in the whole apartment would be the green pilot bulb on our gramophone. This gets tiresome. So we took in a young French girl, to teach us all French, and Dad began making moves toward a transfer to Paris.

Something went wrong. Dad wound up in Manhattan, instead, where he died – by then the senior foreign consul – still in the saddle, in 1964, which made him somewhere in his late seventies. I was the only one who learned French, on top of my Lithuanian and German, and Denise, the French girl,

came with us at her mother's urgent request, and became my best friend.

I spent a fair amount of time hotly denying that I was a German boy. On the other hand, the U. S. government never recognized the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, which came in May of 1939 after the Russo-German Nonaggression Pact, so my father kept his job.

Well, after Dad died – I was by then editor-in-chief of Playboy Press, which is not quite the same as being editor-in-chief of *Playboy* – Mom stayed in the Consulate, working. And the Russians still held Lithuania, which meant, among other things, that it would be very impolitic for me to become an American, although by now, of course, you could have stepped up to within a quarter-inch of me (ladies only, please) and not have known. There was the matter of my name, and there was the matter of my not being able to travel beyond the borders of the U. S. – but other than that, the fact that I couldn't own a liquor store didn't bother me much....

Time passed, and Mom got a green card! Well, sir, so did I, and began to travel some, not without difficulty, at times learning to curse the foot-dragging of the Immigration and Naturalization Service with the best of them. But my American wife (mother of my four American sons) and I got to see a bit of England, and Paris, and Copenhagen, just like tourists. And then, finally, the day came when Lithuania obtained her freedom, which meant I could become a U.S. citizen. I made application to the USINS, and sent in a check for the required amount.

And waited. And waited. And waited. But I knew better than to complain, by then. And lo and behold, one day the INS called me in, and spoke to me briefly, and told me to report to the Chicago Amphitheater promptly at 12:15 on Friday, May 25, and that would be that.

Yessir. I will draw the curtain over what I went through to make it on time. Half of that part of Chicago was flooded. Then, promptly at 3:30, I raised my right hand and, in company with 5,000 people, took the oath. (I felt peculiarly misty. I had claimed a place at last.) They had processed another 5,000 people that morning... a ceremony repeated that same day in Los Angeles and New York, so that 30,000 souls became U. S. citizens on that day. And now I have a certificate.

Take my word for it, folks – it's worth the wait.

August 1996

My wife's car began grinding instead of starting, and it turned out – I wasn't too surprised – that it needed a new flywheel. And she said to me, roughly, "Flywheel? What is that?" And so I was reminded that there are parts of cars the average citizen has never heard of. Not little bitty parts that nobody but the engineers and a few specialist mechanics know the actual catalog names of; big parts, like the flywheel.

It's a rather large, usually iron, massive device that's fitted to the end of the output shaft. By rotating, it keeps the engine running smoothly. Also, the clutch presses against it, and also – which is where my wife comes into this – it has a set of teeth around the perimeter, and these, in turn, mate to the gear wheel on the output shaft of the starter. Occasionally, some of the teeth break off, and then the starter grinds, intermittently, whenever the toothless part of the damaged flywheel happens to be in the right position. It costs a small fortune to fix, because you can't. You have to get a new flywheel and carefully install it. Hardly anyone stocks them, so you have to buy from a dealer.

The world is full of flywheels, so to speak. Practically all of us, these days, use a computer. Can you name the parts? Do you even have the faintest idea of what lurks behind the bland gray façade, and how it all interacts? I don't mean knowing that if you push a particular key a particular thing will occur. I mean knowing what the key connects to, and what that connects to, through all the steps – it may be hundreds, or thousands, perhaps millions – that pop a particular symbol onto the screen in the blink of an eye. You don't know? Cheer up – neither do I, and neither do any but a vanishingly small percentage of the world's population.

How about the telephone? Could you, for instance, build a receiver from scratch? It can be done. Do I know how? I don't think so... though I might, if I absolutely had to, figure it out. But a transmitter to distant locations? Forget it.

A radio? A TV? A VCR? I guess my point is that most of us rely on instruments, every day, that we are almost completely ignorant of. We know where the switch is, and a few control buttons that lead to God knows what, and that's about all. Yet we do, every day, rely on them absolutely. And when things break, we call in a specialist, and pay him or her – pay through the nose, most of the time and not for the part that actually broke, some of the

time, but the part that the swindler could make us believe broke. And the choice is between relying on the specialists, with all the perils and financial outlays required, or taking the time to learn how to fix it yourself. (Hah!)

You can't fix it yourself, most of the time, no matter how much you learn; you don't have the required tools. Which are generally (a) quite expensive and (b) not needed through most of the time because you are not a professional. You could *become* a professional, now, of course – but weren't you doing something else when the thingumabob went wonky?

Very few of us know more than our immediate specialty requires. I know about flywheels, specifically, because I was, for three-and-a-half years, the boss of the PR account for the Motor Truck Division of the old International Harvester Company. Now I'm an editor, and I make only casual use of a skill which, for a while, occupied most of my time. My wife works for a life insurance company – for the Senior VP in charge of computers, so that she knows a good deal about computer skills and computer uses, and a good deal less about life insurance *per se*. But she needs the car to drive the forty-five minutes to work every Monday through Friday. She relies on it... on the flywheel, to be exact, and she didn't even know she had one. I, on the other hand, don't know half as much about computers as she.

That is what they mean by civilization. It depends on all the people in the world cooperating despite the fact that they really don't know much about most things.

November 1996

24

Well, a funny thing happened on our way. Pay attention, please. We are going electronic, at WWW.TOMORROWSF.COM, and we will print no further issues. Also, the next three issues (#s 25, 26, 27) will be free; current subscribers will have their subscriptions extended to reflect this fact.

If you are a subscriber but not on the Internet, and have no intention of getting on the Internet, write to me at Unifont, Box 6083, Evanston IL 60204, and tell me so. We will refund the balance of your money.

Continue to use the snailmail address for all correspondence, including the forwarding of unsolicited manuscripts; send hard copy. (We'll ask for a disc if we want one later.) Our email address is ajbudrys@tomorrowsf.com, but remember what I said in the first sentence of this paragraph.

To get the magazine, use **www.tomorrowsf.com**. Do *not* use www.tomorrow.com – that’s another magazine, which we have nothing to do with. Besides, as of this writing, it’s a registered address but isn’t being used yet, so you’ll get absolutely no joy from it.

We’re very excited about the change. We were at first extremely skeptical, but are now a very firm convert. Over the next issues, we hope to show you why.

We will have book reviews, and a letter column, unlike the print magazine. We will have an art gallery, and many other goodies; some of them right away, others coming soon as our grasp of the medium becomes firmer. And we hope, very much, to have you with us. Over the past few years, we have developed a corps of readers who understand what we’re doing, appreciate it, and say so. We hope to continue to satisfy most of them.

Now, as to why we’re doing this: I had thought it was money. Printing, paper, and distribution costs have gone up rather enormously. The magazine was in a sharp downward spiral financially. And, the nation’s distributors are also feeling the pinch. Many have gone out of business, or merged, or have abruptly refused distribution of some magazines. Some, sadly, continued to take shipments of magazines from publishers, but at least in our case stopped paying us.

I am thinking particularly of Fine Print Distributors, Inc., of 500 Pampa Drive, Austin TX 78752, which has continued to send out cheerful letters containing quite a few lies. And some stores have done the same, on their own scale; I am thinking particularly of The Science Fiction Shop, 214 Sullivan Street, New York NY 10012, which has owed me \$137.50 for 6 issues ending with #20. Bob Canino, of Orion Marketing, 1807 Cold Springs Road, Liverpool NY 13090, had sent me a small check but owes me a larger one. He has twice over the months told me the check was going out in the mail, and now is not returning phone messages. Large and small, they have introduced another aspect of negativity into what was already a pretty bleak picture.

Most stores have, on the contrary, been loyal and friendly. I think particularly of Chris Drumm, 202 East Van Dorn, Polk City IA 50226; of Robert Madle, 4406 Bestor Drive, Rockville MD 28053; of Pandemonium Books and Games, 36 JFK Street, Cambridge MA 02138; of The Stars Our Destination, 1021 West Belmont, Chicago IL 60657; and of Robert Weinberg, 15145 Oxford Drive, Oak Forest IL 60452. Many of these stores

have extensive catalogs of magazines and books, new and sometimes used. I urge you to patronize them. They will happily do business by mail.

But as I said, I had thought it was money. And to a large extent, it is money – electronics offers a very inexpensive medium. It has become, however, not all money, by any means. As I looked farther and farther into the field, I became more and more excited by its possibilities. The printed page cannot truly compete, given only the requirement that the reader have a computer, and a printer to download what he wants to keep. There were quite a few things we couldn't do, in the print medium. Now Kandis and I are launched on what is already a greater journey than we had imagined. Please come along.

February 1997

The next twelve editorials (25 to 36) are also numbered online in the final version of the Tomorrow SF website as First Editorial to Twelfth Editorial. Despite this clear-seeming succession the website numbering soon becomes confusing, with issues designated 10.4, 12.2 and so on to the final farewell at 17.0, here numbered as editorial 37. According to SF magazine historian Mike Ashley, there were 40 issues in all, 24 printed and 16 online: presumably some, in that final online year when Tomorrow SF published only reprinted stories by Budrys himself, had no editorials. [Ed.]

25: Welcome to *tomorrowsf*

Welcome to the first electronic issue of **tomorrowsf**, which you will notice is no longer *Tomorrow Speculative Fiction*. There are several reasons for this, the most compelling of which is that it fits the page better. But also because (in a phrase stolen from John Beynon Harris when he became John Wyndham) because it was time to break a new bottle of champagne over my bow.

It isn't my bow, *sui generis*, of course. There's Kandis, whose work you see all around you. There's Scott Frey, of Hyperion Studios. And Sarah. And my wife. And all sorts of other people. I would not have you for a moment think I can do all this by myself.

And what you see is not all you will see, as you learned when you read the Welcome. Tom Easton does the first of many science articles to come; a

talented guy from Vermont will do our book column. And cetera. What does it feel like to stand here and contemplate all this?

I never would have believed it. Over the years, more than several people have promised me their magazines when they retired. It never worked out; truth to tell, after the second one, I quit figuring on it. I went on, writing the very occasional book, editing all sorts of things in and out of the field, doing all kinds of odd jobs, and I was reasonably content. Then Dean Wesley Smith offered me *Tomorrow* – actually he offered me a magazine, and I picked the title and everything else about it except the size – and I thought I had died and gone to Heaven. Well, Dean ran out of money, suddenly, after the first issue. It really shouldn't have surprised me. Not that Dean had anything to do with it, really. It was that the Fates didn't want me to have a magazine, and I should have known.

Well, sometimes it takes a Lithuanian longer than most people to get the truth through his head. So my wife and I – she's a very patient woman – decided to take over the magazine and publish it as well as edit. And I found Kandis Elliot, an incredibly talented person, to be my production manager – also one of my most engaging writers, one of my best artists, and, now, my key Internet person – and we were off.

And it's worked out all right so far. We do dumb things, once in a while, because I am, really, doing the work that half a dozen specialists should be doing. And do do, at our competition. On the other hand, we do some amazing things, because there're no meetings to stop us. I think our way is better. I know some of you agree. Maybe there are a lot of you.

Stay with it.

?January 1997

26

So. This is Issue #26, otherwise known as the second Internet issue. It isn't really a one-piece issue; it will take eight weeks for the whole thing to unfold, a week at a time, on Thursdays. Also, the projected shape of the magazine is still revealing itself – to us as well as you. This issue, we'll start the letter column, and some other things. But we won't, as I said, do everything we're eventually going to do. We don't even know for sure what we're eventually going to do.

The cartoons have moved from a separate section to appearing at the

bottoms of some stories. We just never found a way to have them load rapidly enough; also, I think the new way is the way for cartoons in any case. We have a feature called Viewpoint. It's not science fiction, fantasy or horror. It is a viewpoint – by a human person named Laura Post, in this case – that you ought to take a look at, and possibly learn something from. We have several science articles. The one by Tom Easton deals with the implications of cloning, and goes farther in exploring that topic than any other we've seen yet. The one by James Killus takes an in-depth look at our atmosphere, hole in the ozone layer and all, and is by a premier source in that field.

We have poems, of course, and several other features. We also have an expanding Mplace, with a growing number of products you might enjoy, including back issues of this magazine. And including facsimile manuscripts of my novels, starting with *Who?* and *Some Will Not Die*.

In general, though it's early days yet, the magazine seems to be definitely attracting readers. We're well past the top circulation achieved by the print version, and we expect the figure to keep growing. Some of you subscribers have asked various questions. The answers are that we are polling our readership to find out how much to charge for subscriptions. Meanwhile, the magazine is free to all until July, and these three issues, starting in January, will not count against your subscription. We will have, not too long from now, a sign-up form for persons who want to be subscribers, and starting in July a number of features will be available only to people who have their passwords. In the editorial for the last print issue, we said a subscription would be the same old \$23 dollars for six issues. Forget that; it was an error. As I write this, I don't know how much it will be. But we will know reasonably soon.

We would be remiss if we didn't note that among our stories in this issue will, of course, be the middle installment of *The Falcon and The Falconer*, by Sheila Finch. We're happy to say that many readers have expressed approval for Part 1, and are eagerly waiting for Part 2. It'll be along in about four weeks. One of the neat features of the Net is that we can update every week, and so Part 1 is still running; the neater feature is that even after it goes off, you will be able to retrieve it. Among other things, that means no synopsis is necessary with any of the succeeding parts. Synopses are a pain in the behind to write unless you have a knack for it, and are also problematic to read, at best.

Which brings us to William Esrac, author of *Dance to the Sun* in issues 7, 8, 9, and 10. Baen Books will be bringing out the book shortly, and to celebrate that we're going to publish his novelette, "Transitions", in this issue – toward the back half. *Dance* is Bill's first novel. He lives in South Australia, and is a dance teacher, and a farmer – as I gather most South Australians are... farmers, that is. He came to our notice with a story we published in one of the L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of The Future volumes, years ago. That involved bringing him to Los Angeles for the launching of that volume, and my wife and I were extremely pleased to make his acquaintance; he's a neat guy. We're happy to see him continue to progress.

By the way, Michael Shea's recent serial in our pages, *The Mines of Behemoth*, will be out from Baen in the Fall. And so, in due course, will be *Black as Blood*, the serial by Rob Chilson that starts in July. Rob couldn't believe the good reader reaction to "As if He Were of Faerie", the short story that helped lead off last issue. One reader – a grumpy old man, I might add – wrote in to say it had made him cry. I had told Rob that any honest story could do that. Glad I was right.

1997

27

I – or, rather, my wife and I – got back from Minicon, in Minneapolis, about a month ago. And tomorrow morning, as I write this, we will climb into my car and go out to Des Moines, Iowa, for Demicon. I was Guest of Honor at Demicon last year; in Minneapolis this year. Come July, I will be Guest of Honor at Readercon, in Massachusetts, and in September I will be Guest of Honor at Worldcon, in San Antonio. I tell you this in wonderment. What did I do, exactly, to make myself eligible for this fest of GoH stints? I will be damned if I know.

I have been writing professionally for forty-five years, which is ridiculous on the face of it. I haven't lived forty-five years... unless I count up the years since 1931, and then 1952. I'm pretty sure I was born in 1931, I'm pretty sure I sold my first story in 1952, and I'm pretty sure this is 1997. What I'm not sure of is the interval between these three dates. Something's wrong. I have not, I swear, lived through all of that time.

And I'm pretty sure there's been a mistake somewhere, with this Guest

of Honor business. Sure as hell, when I get to Readercon, or, worse, San Antonio, they'll look at me strange and say "Listen, we don't know how you got up the nerve, but you – whoever you are – are *not* anything like the Guest of Honor, and sit down and shut up."

I've had a pretty good career as a writer, but I don't know that any of it has been spectacular. I've been an editor, but the same thing is true – in spades. And I've done a couple of other things, but they haven't shaken the world either. Some of it antagonized a fair number of people, as a matter of fact, and puzzled quite a few more. For that matter, I'm doing things with this magazine that include some puzzlers for some people. I don't know that I have ever won very many popularity contests.

Speaking of popularity contests, I've never won a Hugo or a Nebula, and it seems unlikely that I ever will. I've won a few awards – The Invisible Little Man, for one, which incidentally tells you something. About the only real claim to fame I can make is that I've been around, and apparently everybody at the same time ran out of big people to have for a GoH. I'm serious. What have I done, of late, that would cause people to think of me? Not much.

Well, the wife and I will show up, and there are plenty of people who will tell you that she's a nicer person than I am. Lord knows, I think so. She doesn't go around in SF circles as much as I do, but in her own milieu she's quite something. For her pains, she'll get to sit smiling quietly at the banquet table while I get up and try not to make a fool of myself. But you old married folk out there know how that goes.

That's another thing; I got married in 1954, and now it's 1997, but I'll be a monkey's uncle if Edna and I have known each other for forty-three plus years. Our kids, yeah, all right, they're in their thirties – well, actually, they're close to forty – uh, one of them is over forty – how did that happen? How does time move in belts of varying speeds?

Guest of Honor. Well, actually, in Minneapolis I was co-Guest with C.J. Cherryh, and at Readercon I'm co-Guest with C.M. Kornbluth, who as you should know has been dead for quite some time. Funny – he was ten years older than I when he died, but now he's still in his thirties. And at San Antonio I'm co-Guest with Michael Moorcock; in other words, I'm having to liberally apply spurs and whip in order to cross the finish line somewhere near the front. So maybe I shouldn't be so puzzled; I'm sort of part of an entry, going off at 30 to 1. That would fit.

So I'm back where I started. I can't imagine what would prompt people to make me a GoH, but they're doing it. And I'm grateful – don't mistake my meaning. I'm very grateful. And I'll try to live up to the honor. But the one piece of advice I can give to those who would like to be a GoH themselves, one day, isn't much. It's "Live long enough." But, frankly, I didn't expect that I would live long enough this soon.

28

The dinosaurs lived on Earth for 160,000,000 years. Think about that, and your head spins. Species came and went, of course, but, my God, 160,000,000 years. Let me put it this way – 160,000,000 months is 13,333,333 years. 160,000,000 weeks is 3,076,538 years. Or, putting it another way, 160,000,000 days is 44,444 years, give or take a little. (Which, by coincidence, is about the length of time there have been humans – as we recognize humans – in existence. In other words, the dinosaurs were the lords of Creation 365 times as long as us, so far.)

And in all that time, dinosaurs never evolved intelligence. Not enough to chip one piece of flint. Not enough to write the letter A, not enough to count to 4. Apparently, from everything we have been able to learn – and we have learned quite a bit, none of it to the contrary – what they principally did, for 160,000,000 years, was munch.

I find that amazing. In all that time, they apparently never had a serious enemy, which is one of the principal candidates to argue for the evolution of human intelligence. Really? Dinosaurs didn't terrorize each other? Flesh-eaters didn't lord it over plant eaters? Big didn't stomp on little? Really?

Well, they didn't have opposable thumbs. Really? All of them? I can't be dead sure, but I think some of them did. Apparently, they used them to hold each other. And that's all.

Well, they didn't climb trees. But some of them did, yes, indeed. Almost any ecological niche you can think of was filled by a dinosaurian, usually more than once. In 160,000,000 years, they pretty much tried everything. Except intelligence.

I think, in other words, that intelligence – what we simians mean by intelligence – is not the inevitable result of evolution. And if it's not the inevitable result of evolution, then it also doesn't follow that other planets, capable of supporting some form of life that we understand as life, are just as

apt to be supporting intelligence. They may. They may not. I will, as a matter of fact, venture a guess that many alien races get through the day doing nothing but munch. (And, of course, reproducing, for sure, and eating and sleeping, perhaps.)

Intelligence, I think, is a thing that no one fully understands. We are building more and more sophisticated computers, and presumably we will go on evolving them. But there is a gigantic difference between an IBM computer that can beat Kasparov at chess and a computer that can think – a difference that there is no sign thus far is being understood and is being overcome. In any case, it does not tell us why one race – out of how many that have lived and are living on our planet – and only one race, has truly developed intelligence. (I know about whales and dolphins, yes. They're cute. I know about chimpanzees riding bicycles, yes. Has a chimpanzee ever run away on a bicycle?)

I find it baffling. I find it astounding that intelligence, furthermore, has led us to build rockets, and SETI radiotelescopes. I find it awesome to think that someday – someday – we will build starships. Is all that really necessary? Only if you reason that the survival of the race – not of an individual, or even a large group of individuals, going back through countless generations – depends on it. Let me get this straight – Unavarunaminithesh, clinging to his tree branch and eating a plantain, dimly aware that the mate he has today is the same mate he had yesterday, perhaps realizing that the little things clinging to that mate are children; his children – dreamed of starships.

Right.

I think we don't know enough about intelligence. We really don't know enough about intelligence. We don't know how we got it, we don't know what it is, and we don't understand where it's leading us.

Interesting.

1997

29

I have just come back from an odyssey. Every year in September I go on vacation, but this year it got out of hand. First, at the end of August I drove from Evanston to San Antonio, where I was one of the Guests of Honor at the Worldcon. Then I drove to Hollywood, for a meeting with an agent. On the way, I discovered that my Toyota – Fang, as I call him, with 310,000 plus

miles on him at the time – had begun leaking oil quite badly. Fortunately, I had had a suspicion that the front engine seal was about to go, so I had a case of oil on board. And about half of it had been used by the time I pulled in to the Hollywood Toyota dealer. Where, to my astonishment, it turned out to be the rear seal – plus the clutch, which was oil-soaked – and although the front seal was leaking a tad, they assured me it was essentially nothing, and I set out for Salt Lake City, where I had a date with Ginny Baker and Shayne Bell.

But I wasn't really surprised when the front seal went in Cedar City, about two hundred miles up the road. And that was replaced by a Toyota dealer in Salt Lake, with the explanation that quite frequently when they replaced one seal, the other would go shortly thereafter.

Thus given a car with a sound engine again, I set out for Pullman, Washington, where I had a date with Betty and Eric, and Moscow, Idaho – seven miles away – for Moscon, which I try to attend every year and accounts for my usual vacation. I made that without incident, with a stop in Lewisburg, Idaho, to buy an aftermarket cruise control. (Factory cruise controls cost \$500 installed.) [Fang is on his third cruise control; it seems to be a weak spot in the design. The current (dead) control is a Dana. Unfortunately, Dana has quit making them. Not only that, no one around Evanston in years has heard of installing an aftermarket cruise control.] Fine. I would buy a new control in Lewisburg, where I knew good sense still prevailed, and have it installed by my favorite mechanics anywhere in the U.S., who run a back-door garage in Lewisburg when they aren't prepping cars for Hollywood films. And I completed the first half of this plan; I bought an Audiovox control, and while I don't quite understand what Audiovox is doing making cruise controls, it looks almost exactly like the Dana, so I was not discouraged. For about ten minutes. The mechanics are gone. In fact, their entire block has been leveled in favor of a shopping mall. So I pulled out of Lewisburg in something of a huff (I am not above very bad puns), with the control in my trunk and the fallback plan of having the Toyota dealer in Moscow install it.

Well, that didn't work either. The cruise control didn't have any installation instructions, and for some reason the dealer didn't think to go next door to another car parts store and inquire. I did, and got a set, but by then it was late Friday, and the dealer doesn't work on Saturdays. However, he did tune the engine, which needed it, and did a couple of other useful things, and I left reasonably satisfied, but with the replacement cruise control still in my trunk. Where it is now, for the time being.

On Monday morning, with Moscon behind me, I set out for home. First step was one hundred and fifty miles through a national forest, beside the Clearwater River, which is always a great pleasure. Then came the run from Missoula to Hardin, Montana, at about ninety-five miles per hour. (Montana has no daytime speed limit for cars.) I will confess that at times I hit one hundred... maybe more. Pretty good going for a car with over three hundred thousand miles on it. I've never had the head off the engine; last compression check was done in Moscow, and all four cylinders clocked in at 180. Nice.

After that, it was Wyoming, and Nebraska, and Iowa, and finally Illinois. Then I answered the most urgent of my mail, packed my tuxedo, and in less than twenty-four hours was off to Cape Canaveral, where this year's Writers of The Future event was to be held.

In Cape Canaveral – which is reached by passing through \$5.00 worth of tollgates, but is otherwise essentially unremarkable – Dave Wolverton and I taught the latest class of Writers of The Future winners. We also went out to Merritt Island on Thursday night and watched the Atlantis launch, which also proved nominal. The thing went off on time, went off without a hitch, proceeded to climb for some time before the sound reached us, and remained visible as an increasingly dim star until it was some hundred and fifty miles downrange. All the actual drama occurred in the days preceding the launch – would NASA continue to support Mir, would the weather hold, would this, would that. Also, NASA milked loading the crew for all it was worth. “Phil Nowlan has temporarily taken the wrong seat so that Dick Calkins can slide by on his way to his seat; Phil has now moved to his correct seat, and Alex Raymond has commenced to enter....” etc, etc, for about an hour, two and a half hours before the actual takeoff.

Slapping at mosquitoes and spraying away madly in the face of the repeated warning that Brevard County was under an encephalitis alert, one hardly had time to grasp the fact that for the eighty-something time in history, a batch of people were sitting atop a giant Roman candle and hoping very hard that nothing went terribly wrong. True, they were setting switches and checking dials until the last minute; still, I think they spared a few minutes for silent prayer. And then they went up and that was that, as it almost always is. The crowd broke up, into a string of cars and busses so long that it took us two hours and forty-five minutes to get back to the hotel, and I feel rather confident that a measurable number of people were disappointed that nothing had gone catastrophically awry. But, that's not the sort of thing one talks

about.

The worst that happened was that on the morrow very few mosquito bites surfaced, and we all congratulated ourselves and sang the praises of whichever spray we had used. On the day after the morrow, we all scratched and itched like crazy – apparently, Brevard County mosquitoes have a 36-hour time delay. (No data yet on whether any of us got encephalitis.)

Friday and Saturday were spent on the annual awards ceremony for L. Ron Hubbard Writers and Illustrators of The Future. Thirteen more fresh faces to join the hundreds who have preceded them. All sorts of rather large, now, names have passed through the contests; I started to name some of them, but the fact is that if you don't know them by now, it's your oversight.

And so, home, by way of Birmingham, AL, where I met with Toni Weisskopf (and her daughter, Katie). Toni has moved to Birmingham from New York (you can do that in this age of fax machines and the Internet, which means that the civilization of Lewis Padgett's 1943 *Baldy* series is essentially here) and is my boss when I'm wearing my Baen contributing editor hat, and a very nice boss she is, too. I dropped off the edited disc of *Black as Blood*, the *Tomorrowsf* serial running now which will be a Baen Book this winter, and then set off on the final leg of my trip.

7,500 miles, give or take. And in all that time, I did not realize – until now – how much the furniture of the world has changed... and how casually we live in it. Which is how it should be, I guess. Because it is just furniture; the actual bottom-line world has not changed in all the time that there have been people. We travel farther, in fancy machines, but we travel. We laugh and cry as we always did. We rage, we exhilarate, we suffer mosquito bites. In all the time there have been people, the itchy bump on the skin has been the same... as has the itch to travel.

1997

30

I won't quarrel with the people who think the 21st century begins at midnight on January 1, 2000 AD. I've done that; either you know that it begins on January 1, 2001, AD, or you don't. What croggles me nowadays is the fact that hardly anyone has yet mentioned that we are not merely at the turn of a century, but of a millennium.

Centuries after all come around every mere hundred years, and the

chances are pretty good that many people will live to see one. Millennia, on the other hand, represent a far slimmer chance. We have only had two since the birth of Christ, and the chances are that people weren't even particularly aware of the first until somebody finally stuck his head up and said something like: "Hey! It's been almost a thousand years since Christ, and he hasn't come back yet!"

Now you know – particularly if you were paying attention the last time I talked about calendars – that calendars are a tricky thing. We don't even have unanimous agreement among Christians as to what day it is. And there are a majority – an overwhelming majority – of people on this Earth who wouldn't care what those crazy Christians thought about what day it is, except that Christians do represent a sizable bunch of people, and if they get excited, something loud and flashy may occur. Those other people are liable to feel that there are enough loud and flashy things going on already.

People being the way they are, they are liable to be harboring among them a significant percentage of individuals who want to set off something loud and flashy of their own, to prevent loud and flashy – But you see where I'm going with that. And, frankly, I don't want to go there. It'll either happen or it won't, with the odds being that general ineptitude will save us all.

Let us stick with the idea that the Fundamentalists are correct. God has singled out these people to be the only wholly right people in the world, and among other things this means the Third Millennium will clock in on schedule not only in terms of calendars but in accordance with some special plan of God's.

I am reminded of a description of the Rapture I heard in Sunday school a long, long time ago. "Newspapers all over the world will carry banner headlines!" the preacher said. "Thousands disappear!"

I can remember thinking: "Let's see – there are almost four billion people in the world, and he's talking about thousands?" Well, that was one country preacher, and possibly a naive man, at that. But he was a respected man in the community – certainly I respected him, though I did not like his arithmetic thereafter – and one has to wonder if he or his spiritual descendant(s) aren't thinking along the lines of God's really putting the big hammer down at the turn of the millennium. They would consider it their highest duty to make themselves ready.

The last time we went into a new millennium – 1001 AD – we had some pretty fierce dislocations. All sorts of things happened, ranging from the

individually silly and stupid to some rather massive and, generally, unwarm and unfriendly things. Many people felt that the Hour was At Hand, and under the pressure of that knowledge they tried to (a) force their opinions on others before it was too late to save them, (b) defend themselves against the onrushing forces of Satan, (c) give away all material possessions, (d) climb trees and gather on hilltops, en masse, the theory being that this placed them closer to Heaven's retrieval, (e) all of the above, and more.

And last time, we didn't even have automatic rifles. We didn't know that if you mixed fertilizer and a very few other things, you could shred a truck and whatever building it happened to be parked in or near. We didn't have computers, or the knowledge that there was a spaceship following Hale-Bopp to take us – well, some of us – away to a higher plane of existence. We didn't have any of that.

So I do think we are going to have quite a time, especially as soon as more people begin to realize what a significant anniversary it is. And this is without regard to the objective truth of the matter. It merely has to do with what people think.

Now, you – I know you're out there – may snicker at the foolishness of these people, especially if you think you're going to be able to steer clear of their actions. And you may be right. But I think the odds are you'll be wrong, because I don't think you can steer clear of their actions. For example, some of them are legislators, and some of them are legislative enforcement officials. Now, legislators – particularly at the highest levels of government, but also, in a diminishing percentage as you get down to the state, county and municipal levels – take a certain amount of thought to what they're doing. They cloak it in high-minded language, sometimes even from themselves. But they do the most amazing things, nonetheless. And the enforcers.... Well, we can't all be Rodney King, but sometimes things just work out that way.

Mind you, much of this goes on whether it's 2001 or not. But millennial panic – call it chiliasm, as Joanna Russ reminded us it was called, many years ahead of me and everybody else – is real. Which comes as no surprise – people dressed in white and clustered in trees tend to be conspicuous – but at times it is subtle enough to be inconspicuous, and quite often deadlier on account of that. I don't suppose we shall have Nightfall, in the Asimovian sense. But we shall most assuredly have something, from somewhere; quite a few somethings, unless I really miss my guess. I just, please, don't want it any louder and flashier than is absolutely necessary.

31

Well, no sooner had I published an editorial about practically nobody realizing we were at the turn of a millennium, not just a century, when BOOM, everybody and his brother began talking about it. Of course, lots of them still think it will begin in 2000, but I have some degree of faith that this, too, will straighten out and we will face 2001 shoulder to shoulder, bright smiles on our faces, our affairs in order and we all dressed in white sheets and climbing trees....

All right. Let's talk about how time is actually measured – which means we have to talk about the family Budrys, because it's the only example that won't sue us for getting too personal.

1997 was pretty stressful for us, and 1998 looks likely to exceed it. All of Edna's blood relatives died, except for her father – who is 96, and not in the best of health. All my uncles died. My sole older blood relative now is my mother, who is 94 and not in the best of health to say the least. Our cat, who was only ten years old and in excellent health, roamed outside, ate a poisoned bird, and died. Those are the high spots.

On the other hand, our oldest son got married to a lovely girl – well, she's an attorney, but she's lovely nonetheless – and we have a new cat, named Charley, who purrs and mews like crazy, and climbs heights not even the late, lamented Bert dreamed of – and we thought nobody was more daring than Bert. (Charley also does not go outside.) The son who got married also ditched his fancy floor restoration business and is off in Maine learning to be a wilderness EMT. That meant our youngest son suddenly had no employment, since he worked with his brother. So he went full-time in the music recording business, which he had done part-time, and is doing very well.

My point may be that in addition to pages being torn off the calendar, which you have to do every day whether it's really meaningful or not, time in a real sense does march on to its own drumbeat, and brings real changes.

Example:

Steve, our Number Two son, the computer genius, after working for an offshore outfit, and then working for a similar onshore outfit in Salem, OR, suddenly owns a cafe in Downey, CA. We don't quite understand that.

Downey has legal poker palaces, and Steve regularly takes them for medium large amounts, but you don't have to own a cafe to do that. For that matter, syndicates used to form in order to send him to Las Vegas to play blackjack, shortly after he became a chess champion and while he was a bridge player of some repute. And what does any of it have to do with computers? (Steve as young lad disappeared into his bedroom with an Atari 400 and a book on programming, and emerged after a few weeks qualified to run all sorts of fancy programs for, among others, Northwestern University – though he never went to college – and later a landscaping conglomerate owner in Canyon Country, CA... before moving offshore. And those are just the high spots in a rather impressive career.)

Tim – our #3 – will be coming up this summer from Arizona, with his lady and our granddaughter, to work the Bristol (WI) Renaissance Fair again. He makes made-to-measure shoes as Windwalker Moccasins at hundreds of dollars the pair, and he and his lady Mary work a circuit of various fairs. Our granddaughter now is three, which means we have a couple of years to go before much changes in the Tim and Mary household. (They live in an adobe house they built themselves, with tires buried in the adobe and a glass south wall.) I mention Tim because he represents the stable element in our family.

Edna works for the Executive Vice President in charge of the computation for a reasonably large insurance company. She doesn't run anything, apparently – but the entire department depends on her for matters large and small, and her boss won't let her retire. And I – Well, I write when I can, and publish this magazine, and lately I have been editing books – most but not all of which have appeared as serials in *Tomorrow* and *tomorrow's* – and one of which I actually agented. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that I will agent some more – I have a small list of other clients, and God knows where it will stop. Actually, I guess Edna and Tim represent the stable elements in our family.

And I don't think that our family is much different from anyone else's. Scratch the surface of practically any family, and you will find amazing branches, which are growing steadily in unexpected directions, sometimes being roots for a while, sometimes seeming to be entirely separate trees, but always growing.

One of my recently dead uncles, after coming over here after the big war, was a savings-and-loan vice president. He raised two daughters. One is a highly placed housewares PR person, and the other teaches exceptionally

bright children. My other recently deceased uncle was, at the age of seventeen, both the Lithuanian national soccer team goalie and the head of the Lithuanian academy of art. He was a world-class sculptor. In a DP camp, he stole a set of files out of an Army tool set, made charcoal, turned the files into woodworking chisels, and resumed sculpture. He also, for a while after coming over here, did the decorative carving in a furniture factory. He died of lead poisoning, having done a number of statues in lead. His wife is a ceramicist, also world-class, among other things. She did one of the venues on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington. Their daughter is a highly placed stock analyst on Wall Street.

My father was an army man – in three separate European armies – who became a diplomat. One sister married the chief justice of the Lithuanian Supreme Court; she herself was the *prima donna* of the Lithuanian State Opera... and ended her life as a seamstress in a New York factory. Her sister – who eventually owned a house in Great Neck, Long Island – had a daughter and a son. The son wound up running a radio station in Brazil. The daughter married a Venezuelan entrepreneur.

And I became an American speculative fiction writer, married to a girl from New Jersey. (Who produced the four sons mentioned early in this piece.)

I think my ultimate point is that it *isn't* pages torn off a calendar that make the passage of time. Seasons do come and go, but years are a slipperier concept. We hang all sorts of inventions on the calendar... this year's car models, this year's Academy Awards, this year's President, for instance... but they are largely inventions, largely wedded to rather arbitrary concepts. Meanwhile, people live on, popping out of the ground in unexpected places, taking shapes you wouldn't believe, having children who – is this really a surprise? – pop out of the ground in unexpected ways. And that is really how the passage of time is measured.

1998

32

We have this cat named Charley, who was born on the Fourth of July, and is thus about ten months old. He is quite different from all our previous cats in most respects.

True, Bert, his predecessor, was dragged over a fence, with his sister, by

their mother who had been mortally wounded by some clown with a rifle. Charley was one of a litter of four delivered by a mother who had been set on fire. But Charley's Mom lived, if in somewhat truncated form, and in fact was just about the sweetest cat at The Tree House, a cat adoption agency in Chicago. We picked Charley, instead of one of his siblings, because while the three of them concentrated on their food, Charley wanted to see what Edna and I were all about. We took this for a good sign.

Oh, boy! We took Charley home, putting his rather energetic wailing down to temporary upset. (Bert had been almost silent, and none of our previous cats had been very vocal.) Well, Charley is and he isn't. He has a remarkable range of wails, most of them friendly, and it's hardly any trick to get him to stop, and start a very loud purr instead. All you have to do is pick him up and pet him.

Naming him was interesting. The Tree House had named him Tamarind, because he's a beautiful orange tabby. But, somehow.... We tried several versions. David, the son who's living at home, has suggested calling him Chairman Meow. Edna chose Charley and that's that, but I wanted to call him Tailhook, both to keep the memory alive and because he has a tail hook. Which brings me within shouting distance of my first point, because it seems rather obvious to me that his sire was a Siamese. We don't know, of course. His mother was found, badly injured but determined, and thoroughly pregnant, in a Chicago alley. She is a black, orange and white cat, and quiet. Where would Charley – and his three siblings – all get the tabby look? With a hook in the tail. Where else would Charley get his vocalizations? What the hell was a Siamese doing on the loose?

But that's not my main point, as we shall see.

Charley is an acrobat. Of all the cats we've had, some have been high jumpers. Bert was no slouch. But Charley got up on the mantelpiece in our living room ten minutes after we brought him home, and a minute or two after that, he was up on top of the HiFi speakers, and a minute or two after that he was across the room and in the flower pots. In the dining room, there is no horizontal surface, no matter how high, he did not immediately explore. In the pantry, he was into the flower pots there, and in the kitchen he was up on a chair, up on the table, up on the breadboard and up on the refrigerator in, essentially, no time. He bulleted back and forth, climbing higher, and faster, than anything we had seen. He has slowed down some since, having grown, but when he has his foolish half hour he is liable to be in all those places at

once, repeatedly. As he is liable to be caroming around the basement or the bedrooms upstairs. His only real stop is at the various faucets in the house. He has a perfectly nice dish of water beside his food, but he prefers getting one of us to turn on a faucet for a few minutes every hour.

So here comes my real point: to Charley, our house is radically, substantially different from what the advanced simians perceive it to be. If you somehow plotted what the cat sees and smells, and hears, it would look very little like our house. All the reference points are different. It is much more vertical than what we see, for one thing. It is different horizontally, too. It is permeated by smells which are more important as locators, quite often, than anything he sees. He hears things differently – I don't know what he hears, but I will practically guarantee you that stories in which animals listen to the sense in human voice are a bunch of bologna. When he suddenly stops and pays momentary attention to a houseplant across the room, it may be that he is reacting to the minute rustle of leaves stirred by a human voice half a room away. That kind of thing.

He knows how to attract attention. When David has slept too long, in Charley's estimation, he knocks over a wastebasket in Dave's room. It's the only time he does that, and he only does it when Dave is (a) home and (b) was playing a late-night gig and did not get to bed until four. Charley knocks the wastebasket over at about ten-thirty, which is about the time he gets really thirsty, after Edna has left for work at seven. He can't get at me, usually; I keep my door closed. But later he will come upstairs and sleep in the pool of light from a lamp next to my computer, just as he will sleep on Edna's lap in the evening. David's job is to play with him, when he can spare the time from his music, his recording, or *his* computer. But he had better spare the time, or Charley gets vocal again, and neither Edna nor I can shut him up at that point.

My ultimate point is that we will have more trouble with aliens than casual thought at first suggests – even friendly aliens, or aliens who don't understand us but tolerate us... even aliens who barely know we're alive, but harmless. We may find ourselves hosting an alien spaceship, or landing on an alien planet, and *never* making actual contact. The senses of one race, and its survival behavior patterns, may make of the same piece of real estate two very different worlds... and nothing will bring them into congruity. We will be mired in a misunderstanding forever; let us hope that some compromise will be reached so that we will live in the same relationship as we and a cat... unwitting, unspeaking to much sensible effect, and only dimly understanding

what is important to the other party.

1998

33 [10.4]

This is an unusual editorial because it is actually three unrelated editorials.

1. Paul Lehr is dead. The man whose artwork appeared on ten of the twenty-four *Tomorrow* print edition covers has gone away. He was a tall, gregarious master of illustration, sixty-eight years old, vigorous, generous, and neither he nor anyone else knew he had pancreatic cancer until it was much too late to do anything about it.

He was a professional artist for some forty-five years, and he was at the top of his profession. Aside from innumerable paperback covers – he did the Grok painting on the first paperback edition of *Stranger in a Strange Land*, for instance – his work hangs in the Smithsonian Institution and in many other prestigious places.

I got to know him when, in retirement, he became first a judge in L. Ron Hubbard's Illustrators of The Future contests, and later the co-ordinating judge. He was a marvelous man – as Paula, his wife of a lifetime, was an extraordinary person too. Then, when I started publishing the print version of *Tomorrow*, I asked if he had any covers lying around that I could buy repro rights to. He immediately said he'd been painting for his own amusement since retiring, had lots of transparencies of that work and – here; take your pick. I damned near died; the work was so beautiful, so masterly, and there were scores of it.

As you can see in our special Paul Lehr Gallery.

There is little left to say. Paul is gone. His work will last.

2. I want to call your attention to the amazing Kandis Elliot's Mars calendar, which is for sale in our Mart section. For those of you who haven't seen it yet, I suggest you go look. The whole project is scarcely believable; an actual calendar for Mars which is useful also as a Terrestrial calendar, with illustrations by Kandis that depict Mars in various stages of terraforming as envisioned by James M. Graham, PhD, of the University of Wisconsin. The whole thing is both beautiful and very hard science, and I recommend it highly.

3. Now, we are changing part of the nature of this magazine. While the nonfiction, poetry and cartoons will continue to be bought, the fiction from now on is going to be all mine, most of it from a time before most of you were born. You have already seen the beginning of this effort, so far consisting of the first third of my novel, *Some Will Not Die* – with the reminder to be published in Issues Eleven and Twelve – and the stories from my first collection, *The Unexpected Dimension*. All these are illustrated by Kandis... and very good illustrations they are, too.

But what began as an exercise has now become policy. There are a bunch more novels, two additional short story collections, and God knows what all else. I think they stand up to reading, quite well. And they promise that the magazine will go on for a long, long time.

The evolution of this change is too long to detail. But evolve it did, and that's that. If any of you subscribers want your money back, I will gladly return it. But you might give it a try, first. I am not a bad writer.

This leaves two additional points. **First, I will not be buying new stories. And the simplest, and most economical, move I can make is to just refuse to accept mail that is plainly intended to be a manuscript submission. That includes the eight weeks' worth of stuff, unopened, that accumulated while I was pondering this change. I regret making you wait, but it seemed best.**

Second, I have got to return a bunch of stories that I had thought I was going to buy. That will require the writing of a bunch of letters, almost all of them to good friends, old and new. I don't envy me the task.

Third – I forgot a point up there – you will no longer be seeing the truly good illustrators – except for Kandis – that we built up over the years. I will miss them fiercely – Kelly Faltermayer, Bob Hobbs, Judith Holman, Margaret Ballif Simon, Darla Tagrin, and the rest. I loved seeing what they would come up with, issue after issue. I may be forgiven for thinking we had the best stable around. I don't suppose all of you will agree with me. But the magazine was always built around the principle that I knew what I was doing, and that was just as true of the artists as it was of the writers.

I still know what I'm doing.

4 September 1998

34 [12.2]

I don't usually clutter up these pages with replies to things. Actually, this isn't really a reply, since Mike Resnick ("Bwana") did not address it to me. But I thought I would share my response with you anyway. Resnick's remarks appear in *Speculations*, a magazine directed to writers.

I yield to no one in my admiration for Bwana. He says, plain and clear, what I would say myself, if I had the wit. However, in his latest column, he says among other things, taking the Contest very lightly: "I doubt if fans or pros can name the current Writer of the Future winners."

That's true. It's also because they are the winners of the previous year's contest. Wait a little while, however, and the names begin accumulating reputation... Robert Reed, Dave Wolverton, David Zindell, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Dean Wesley Smith, Karen Joy Fowler, K.D. Wentworth, Martha Soukup, and a hundred others who have published, between them, well over two hundred novels. The latest is Michael H. Payne, who has published *The Blood Jaguar*, a novel I highly recommend – as do Tom Easton, Norman Spinrad, and Rob Chilson. The one after that is *Nocturne for a Dangerous Man*, by Marc Matz, which will be out in July. I think most people, fans or pros, will be able to name them.

It is called L. Ron Hubbard's Writers of The *Future* (emphasis mine) Contest, and it works by selecting people who up to that time have published no more than three short stories or one novelette. The annual prize budget is \$14,000. Three winners are selected in each quarter, on a blind basis, by judges such as Gregory Benford, Orson Scott Card, Anne McCaffrey, Larry Niven, Andre Norton, Frederik Pohl, Jerry Pournelle, Tim Powers, Robert Silverberg, Jack Williamson, and myself. A Grand Prize winner is announced once each year, for \$5000. Previous winners include Robert Reed and Dave Wolverton.

I was Co-ordinating Judge of the Contest, from its inception in 1984 until Dave Wolverton had grown enough to take over from me. I am still a judge in the Contest.

These prizes have no strings on them, whatsoever. The winners take their money and that's that. We give them a one-week workshop, led by Dave Wolverton and me, so that they aren't simply abandoned afterwards.

There's more. Every year, Bridge Publications, which is LRH's publisher, offers the winners, and a few runners up, very good money in addition for one-time rights in their stories, and brings out a paperback volume, which *Locus* has called the bestselling original anthology of the year.

That's true – I've seen the sales figures.

(The stories are illustrated by the winners in L. Ron Hubbard's Illustrators of The Future Contest, which has similar prize monies, a similar panel of judges, payment by Bridge for one-time rights in the illustrations, and a workshop conducted by Ron and Val Lakey Lindahn.) I'm sure very few people know any of those names, either... at first. They will know the names of contributors of articles relating to writing, which are also published in the annual volume... names like Silverberg, Frank Herbert, Frederik Pohl, Frank Kelly-Freas, and many, many others, including L. Ron Hubbard.

Finally, all this gets together in Los Angeles once a year, and we hold ceremonies, announce the Grand Prize winners, tour, for instance, Universal Studios, and relax. A person would be a fool not to enter the Contest.

It is a first class experience, it is now a major feeder of SF writers into the field, and I am a little surprised that all this has somehow passed Bwana by.

10 December 1998

35 [14.3]

INCLUDING SOME THOUGHTS ON WRITING:

The fact is that stories about writers and their problems don't sell very well. The reason is that editors have learned, over the years, that the readers don't care.

Now, this seems strange, at first. Shouldn't the readers care? No, they shouldn't, because they don't care about writers.

That's a real startler. But the fact is that readers care about *bylines*, because they often mean the product will be "good", or "bad", depending on how the reader perceives the byline. But they don't care about the writers, and in fact the less they know about them, the better. They are uncomfortable with writers as persons. They build up an image to go with the byline, and they much prefer that. Anyone who has sold a fair number of stories has had the experience of being accosted by the reader, who in the most extreme case says something like "You don't look like you at all!" or "You don't sound like you," and in the least case says something like "It's been nice talking to you. I have to go now," very soon after the start of the conversation. The only real exception is the apprentice writer who doesn't want to know you, but will spend all afternoon, if you let him, picking your brains for the secrets of

success.

That's a fact. Remember it. If you think there are exceptions, the passage of time will disabuse you of that mistake. Writers are inherently magicians, even the least of them, and people are not comfortable around magicians.

Now – what does this really mean? Well, for one thing, it means that writing is not in fact self-expression. The reader doesn't relate to experiences which are too personal. What the readers want is some form of the universal lie... that is, the *illusion* of truth, which is in fact a truth broad enough to encompass many people, not so narrow as to represent real reality. Many stories that are “almost good enough” are stories that wander away from storytelling at the crucial moment because the writer yielded to the temptation to say something personally meaningful. You cannot do that if the “something” is really personal.

You should never wander away from storytelling for any reason. That's an ironclad rule. The story has seven parts, every part must be fulfilled, every part must relate directly to all the other parts, and you should not say anything more than – not one word. If you do all that, people will talk about what a great storyteller you are, meaning your byline delivers a reliable product. Personally, I have pretty much given up trying to get people not in the business to relate to me, and I notice that almost all the successful writers have withdrawn from the society of straight people. I will happily sign autographs – particularly in books – and I will happily move among the straights, provided only that I can control the conversation and then get out.

5 April 1999

36 [15.3]

Well, I did not, in fact, go to see the new Star Wars movie. The arrangements did not fit with my 10:30 am panel at VCon, and we will have to wait until my wife and I see it together at some point.

But even without that, I wasn't sure. Enough reviews and hype had ensured your humble and reticent reviewer that I would receive as a mixed blessing. And if that were true, I would have had trouble with it.

Carrie Fisher had actually started the hype, appearing on a lot of television shows just before the hype for the new film officially began, and talking a great deal about her experiences. And that, eventually, led me to

realize that less and less are films about their stories. More and more, films are simply the object for telling you all aspects about how the film was made.

Now, I am in love with Princess Leia in the first film, less so in the second, and not very much in the third. In the first film, she displayed a kind of gamin semi-innocence which struck me as just right. (Remember that she was not, as of the ending, in love with Han Solo. For that matter, to suggest that this Princess Leia was the sister of Luke Skywalker, or that she was somehow equipped to tune in to the Force, would have raised howls of derisive laughter.) But the overriding fact is that as Carrie Fisher talked, it became obvious that from the beginning she had not taken the part seriously.

Obviously, no part in a film can be taken wholly seriously. The actors go home at night, and live their own lives until it is time to return to the set. The actors are aware that they made other films before this one, and that they will make other films afterward. But many times, the actors carry some part of their current film home with them, and act differently from the way they would have without it. Cary Grant acted essential Cary Grant at all times... no different in *Only Angels Have Wings* than in *Gunga Din* or *North By Northwest*. But Jean Arthur acted in *Only Angels Have Wings* quite different from the way she acted in other vehicles; I think she was to some extent under the story's spell. And the story is ridiculous – as the Star Wars stories are – but they are not ridiculous to the people in them. Jean Arthur, I think, would have blinked in puzzlement at some of the things Carrie Fisher said. Carrie Fisher could only have said them if she went beyond the script.

Similarly, this week's *TV Guide* carries as its lead article the story – actually, only part of the story – of how *The Phantom Menace* was made... the supers, the costumes, etc. You know what that is? It is taking the magic behind such films and commercializing it. All the interviews of George Lucas, all the gadgets and dolls, *all of that* detract from the film. How can we believe in the magic of Jabba the Hutt when at the next turn of the page we are shown exactly how he is built? Does Lucas presume that once we have seen the film – assuming we have somehow seen it free of hype – we are now ready for the innumerable stories of craft in connection with the film? Doesn't he realize that, at best, this makes the moviegoing experience a one-time thing; that all our subsequent memories of it will be clouded by hype? That we will never be able to go back to it – as we can with, for instance, *Gunga Din* or *Only Angels Have Wings* – and treasure it for what it is?

He is not so much a film-maker as a man proud of his hype. And I am

sorry for him, and I resent what he is doing.

10 June 1999

37 [17.0]

Well, folks, the time has come. Tomorrowsf.com is changing over to being a static site. There will be no more “issues” of the magazine. We will complete the run of *Falling Torch* with this number, we will have a few more book reviews, but that’s it.

Those of you who have been paying attention know that for some reason – and the reason is my time, by the way – *Tomorrow* has been suffering from neglect. I have not been tending to *Tomorrow* as I should have. And now I have taken on added responsibilities, in addition to being an increasingly busy literary agent, and there simply aren’t enough hours in the day to do everything properly even under ideal conditions.

It has been an interesting time, with the usual consequences financially but with many good memories. I hope you share some of the latter with me, and with that said, goodbye.

2000

On Cyril Kornbluth

In the early 1950s, very few would have contradicted you if you said that Cyril Kornbluth was the best of us. Not only best, but different in some indefinable way that made his failures more interesting than most people's successes. And his successes....

He was seventeen or so, before the War, when as a member of the Futurians he sold his first stories. One of them was "The Rocket of 1955", which is still one of the great minor short stories in this field; others were by a score of pen names, often in stories shared with other writers within that group of street geniuses that also included Frederik Pohl, Harry Dockweiler ("Dirk Wylie"), Robert A.W. Lowndes, Walter Kubiilus, Don Wollheim, Damon Knight, James Blish and Richard Wilson, among others. Living in the shadow of John W. Campbell, they edited and wrote magazines that few ever heard of in the same breath as Campbell's *Astounding*, but it is noteworthy how many good, solid stories they wrote.

Cyril, like most others, went away to war. He had a stratospheric IQ, which in the case of somebody who looked Jewish and did not have a university education meant he went into the infantry, and eventually carried a 30 calibre machinegun. (There is no record as to whether this was a form of hazing.) In the Battle of the Bulge, he earned a Bronze Star. I don't know if anybody learned exactly what he did to earn his medal, but he manned that machinegun, and presumably used it.

He came out of the war and set about the remainder of his life. He resumed reading; he may not have had much formal education, but I wouldn't want to argue most intellectual points with him. He knew some remarkable people – the glass sculptor in "The Mindworm" lived up the road from him in Waverly, NY, for instance. He married Mary, and eventually had two sons by her. They were both handicapped. He worked for Transradio Press in Chicago for a while, which was a horse wire underneath it all. He suffered in the Hawk, which is what they call the Chicago winter wind. And he returned to science fiction.

Most people now who recall him remember him as the partner of Frederik Pohl on *The Space Merchants*. I'm sure Fred will not be too hurt if I say that at the time, people supposed that he was Cyril's junior partner. This

was due in part to Fred's doing everything he could to boost Cyril's reputation. It was also due to the fact that Cyril was turning out many stories, like "The Little Black Bag", "That Share of Glory" (for *Astounding*), "The Marching Morons" for *Galaxy*, "Theory of Rocketry" for *F&SF*, and "Two Dooms" for *Venture*. Which meant he was consistently hitting the top magazine markets. He also wrote *Takeoff*, *The Syndic*, and *Not This August*, which are books worth anyone's time to this day, among others, and as Cyril Judd he wrote two books in collaboration with Judith Merrill. And he did several additional sf novels with Frederik Pohl.

It was as a writer for Lion Library that he turned out a slew of mundane books written to the headlines – *The Naked Storm*, *Valerie*, *The Man of Cold Rages*, etc., etc. which are notable for the speed with which he did them, the number of pen names they sported, and a wealth of gritty detail which is otherwise the province of writers like James M. Cain and which is not too much seen in sf even today. And with Frederik Pohl again, he wrote a rather ambitious novel, *Presidential Year*, which Ballantine Books published and is, as usual, worth re-reading now.

It did not come to anything much financially. Nobody made much money out of sf – though that was beginning to change, partly due to Kornbluth and Pohl, not that it did Kornbluth any good. And he remained a rather plump, rather sardonic person whom, to look at, you would not put down as the world's greatest sf writer.

He had simply lived rather more than most people his age. He had lived it while starving as a Futurian, while walking incessant miles with that gun, while viewing the world through brown-colored glasses. His blood pressure, after the War, was so high that he was deafened by the ringing in his ears.

He fought the world, and the world fought back. His mother died of radiation poisoning, he said, in an attempt to cure her cancer. His brother – who survives to this day, I believe – does not seem to have much idea of his status. He had married Mary, and taken the M as his middle initial, he having been born without one, but it was not a truly satisfactory marriage. He lived for a while in Waverly, which is a marginal community in the lower tier of New York State, in a house without drinkable water, coming out periodically to stay with Fred in Red Bank, NJ, and write another novel. And, finally, he got a job as Assistant Editor to Robert P. Mills, the editor of *Venture* and *F&SF*. By then he was living in Levittown, Long Island, in a tract house with Mary and the kids. It had snowed. He shoveled his walk, went to the train

station to begin his first day on the job, had a heart attack in the station, and died. It was the early spring of '58, and he was in his thirties. The war had caught up to him. Some war had caught up to him.

He leaves behind a major legacy. A score of writers, to this day, write the way they do because of the influence of Kornbluth. For that matter, the field has only partly caught up to him; now it is usual to write sardonic, grittily detailed stories; then, it was not. Every so often, too, somebody still reprints one of the old stories, and people reading them are startled by them. He was a giant. I wish he were alive.

July 1997

A Man in Touch with Tomorrow

I was born on January 9, 1931, in Königsberg, East Prussia, Germany. I was a Lithuanian citizen from birth, my father being stationed in Königsberg as a member of the Lithuanian diplomatic corps.

When I was five, Adolf Hitler drove by my house. I watched from a second-floor window. The sidewalks and lawns of all the houses were full of hysterical Germans, uttering a wordless cry. I knew many of these people as my polite, softspoken neighbors, some of whom had had me as a guest for tea with their daughters. I began to seriously wonder if he had been born into a world full of werewolves.

As the parade approached, with marching battalions of *Sturmabteilung* and *Hitlerjugend*, kettledrums and *madchen* scattering flower petals, the cry grew louder and the tossing of arms in the Nazi salute intensified. As Hitler became visible – a rather small figure in the back of an open Mercedes – the salute became rigid, the cry became like nothing else I have ever heard, and I was fascinated to observe that some members of the street-level audience lost control of their bowels, trying to make it to the shrubbery at the front of my house, some pulling their pants down in time, others not. For a young boy recently emerged from toilet training, it was a compelling sight. And then Hitler passed out of sight, and the panting Germans gradually subsided and went back into their houses.

Sixty years later, half a world away, I still grow thoughtful at the memory. I have since learned that everyone is a werewolf, given enabling circumstances, but I was in the first minutes of beginning to grasp that then. I am convinced that Adolf Hitler made me a science fiction writer.

Adolf Hitler also drove me out of Germany. In the summer of 1936, mobs of Nazis stormed my parents' apartment house. My father, when younger and in the Lithuanian army, had taken a seaport – Klaipėda, or, as the Germans called it, Memel – away from the League of Nations and annexed it to Lithuania. The Germans in the 1930s felt it was rightfully theirs and tried to express this to my father by howling outside the windows at night and throwing brick-halves. I would sit in my mother's lap, and my father would hold a pistol in his lap, and the only light in the apartment came from the green pilot bulb on the gramophone.

This grew tiresome. So my father hired a young French girl to teach the family French and requested a transfer to Paris. Something went wrong, and my family wound up in New York City in the Fall of 1936. My father served there as Consul General of Lithuania until his death in 1964. The only one who learned French was me. The French girl, at her mother's request, came to the States with us and became in effect my beloved older sister, Denise. She died of cancer in 1980, and I miss her very much.

My father continued to serve because the United States, and most other Western nations, did not recognize the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1940. There never was a Government in Exile because of this, and the various SF references that say there was are talking through their hats, Brian Ash.

Konigsberg was destroyed by Soviet artillery during the War and has since been completely rebuilt as Kaliningrad, the capital of the independent state of Belarus. Lithuania, after breaking loose from the crumbling Soviet Union, flirted briefly with democracy, decided it didn't like it, and reinstated a native communist government. My mother – who is still alive at this writing – no longer notices very much. She met my father as a code clerk for the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry in the 1920s and continued to work for the Lithuanian government after my father's death. I remained a Lithuanian because to do otherwise would have been embarrassment to her. But time passes, and I became an American, at last, on May 24, 1996, and will never go back. English was my fourth language, but it has been my primary one for over fifty years. I can speak Lithuanian, after a fashion, but I cannot write in it. My German I have almost deliberately forgotten. My French is serviceable, given about a week to refresh it. But English – which I consider the Queen of languages for communication, while French is better for love – remains my instrument.

In 1936, I learned to speak and fumblingly read English and immediately discovered science fiction. *The New York Journal-American* Sunday comic section carried Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, and my favorite – Brick Bradford and His Time Top. Getting hold of the Sunday funnies was chancy because my parents took only the *New York Times* and various ethnic papers and only the *Novoye Russkoye Slovo* carried any comics at all, running a translated Tarzan daily strip. (And I couldn't read Russian). Also, my parents violently disapproved of SF, then and continuing for several years after I began selling. But then, my parents disapproved of almost everything I did, and I became

quite good at sliding things past them.

I went to school at the old PS 87 in Manhattan. (The present PS 87 stands in what was the parking lot.) There I was given copies of a magazine called *Young America*, which ran quite a bit of SF, including stories by Carl H. Claudy and Edgar Rice Burroughs' *At the Earth's Core* serialized. I have often wondered who the editor was.

In 1940, my parents bought an anchor to windward, in the form of a chicken farm in rural southern New Jersey. My father stayed in New York, working, and my mother and I stayed on the farm, where I lived until I was sixteen. When I was eleven I got my first rejection letter, from Malcolm Reiss at *Planet Stories*, and when I was fifteen I sold an article to a regional magazine. It took me a long time to learn how to write fiction – as distinguished from non-fiction, which I did well from the beginning.

At sixteen, I went away to college, where my education included such things as smoking openly, poker, 21, craps, and drinking from a hair-tonic bottle full of vodka which I carried in a back pocket. I don't think I gained any common sense for a long time – around the age of thirty – but I rather enjoyed college, being surrounded by veterans of the War, who protected me from the various things that would otherwise have destroyed me. We were all housed in a hurricane-wrecked Naval lighter-than-air base in the Everglades, sleeping in what had been barracks, on Marine five and a half foot bunks, recreating in what had been the rec hall, where I wound up running the movie projectors. And I discovered a *Planet Stories* letterhack, Austin Hamel, with whom I formed an unsuccessful writing partnership. (Austin was, at last forty-year-old report, working on a West Virginia paper and selling a story to *Manhunt* featuring a villain named Budres.)

When I came back from the University of Miami at the end of my sophomore year – during which I had found a bookstore in the bad part of Miami that carried things like *Adventures in Time and Space*, on a very high bookshelf away from the real books – the family had moved to Great Neck, Long Island, and was out of money. So I went to work at various jobs, including pick-and-shovel at Long Island's Levittown and being a counterman at the Plaza luncheonette in Great neck, and gradually accumulated enough money to go to the adult division of Columbia University. I passes a test and was admitted to the regular Columbia College, but never went – I sold my first story, and figured I had gotten what I had been paying for.

It was interesting how I did that. I had met Jerry Bixby, who had been the editor of *Planet Stories*, but was then the assistant to Sam Mines at the Thrilling group of SF magazines, and Jerry had been good enough to take me around to Horace Gold's Friday poker games – and to help me sell a few two-page stories to Thrilling's comic books. Jerry had seen a story of mine and had wanted to buy it, but Sam vetoes that. At Horace's poker games, I had met Frederik Pohl, who was then a literary agent, and Fred took me on as a client. The first thing he sold was the story that Jerry had wanted to buy, and which had been rejected by *Astounding* when I was eighteen. Now *Astounding* bought it, unchanged, and so at twenty-one I became an overnight success.

I sold easily and rapidly, to the top markets. The secret of my success was that while I was eighteen the market had been extremely tight, but now it had loosened up phenomenally, and if you could put two words together and put in something about ray guns, your chances were very good.

And so it went. I never went back to school – I have an honorary faculty member's certificate from the Lyman Briggs School at Michigan State University, however – and I rarely worked at a straight job. I also pursued a parallel editorial career, beginning at Gnome Press in 1953 and going on through *Galaxy Magazine*, *Venture* and *F&SF*, *Infinity*, and so forth, becoming editor-in chief of Regency Books in 1961 (succeeding Harlan Ellison), editor-in-chief of Playboy Press in 1963, and operations manager of the Woodall Publishing Company in 1973-74. I am at the present time the editor of *Tomorrow* magazine and president of The Unifont Company, Inc., which publishes *Tomorrow* and several other things.

I have had extremely good luck in my friends and acquaintances. Fred, who remains my career-long friend, John Campbell, with whom I got along quite well, to the point where he had promised me the editorship of *ASF* when he retired, and Lester del Ray, who taught me enormous amounts about many, many things. Arnold Hano, and Walter Fultz, of Lion Library. John Bohan, of Theodore Sills, Inc., who also has been around for a long time after navigating B-17s during the War. And Harlan, with whom I have had a very long and very complicated relationship, but who can always call me and I can always call him. I suspect that we are very good friends.

Well. After selling lots of fiction during the 1950s – *Some Will Not Die*, *Who?*, *Falling Torch* and *Rogue Moon* are some of the novels from that period, and a short-story collection, *The Unexpected Dimension* – I placed

more emphasis on the editorial side for a time. Then, the kids began eating ten dollar bills for lunch.

I had met – at Carol Pohl’s sly arrangement – Edna Duna in 1953, and by mid-1954 was married to her ... as I still am. She and I had four sons by 1962, and they began, as I said, insisting on eating and wearing shoes, and so forth. So I went to work for Theodore Sills, a food PR firm, in 1966. We had serious clients, and we had the wildest client of them all – Pickle Packers International, Inc. – 207 members in seven Free World Nations. I will draw the curtain over most of the things Sills did for PPI, but you should know that before the Picasso statue was ensconced in Chicago’s Civic Center Plaza, we presented the City of Chicago with a twelve-foot utterly realistic pickle – it even looked wet – in the plaza, and called it the Picklecasso. It was a marvel of split-second timing, and some manual dexterity, because the pickle was twelve feet long, it weighed about ten pounds, since it was made of chicken wire with fiberglass spread over it, and the wind was blowing.

After that, I was PR Director of the Chicago office of Geyer-Oswald, Inc., and then an account executive on the International Truck account at Young and Rubicam, Chicago, in 1970, finishing as Account Supervisor in 1973. It was all fun, and I got used to wearing three-piece suits, and so forth. I liked the trucks. I drove certain members of the Motor Truck Division crazy, because of the way I did things, but they cannot say they didn’t get their money’s worth out of me. And the big bosses loved me. But in 1973 I had the chance to go to work for the Woodall Publishing Company, and I took it, because (1) they had several magazines which conducted road tests, (2) I didn’t have to wear a tie, and (3) my life-plan was to work for Woodall’s long enough to get well-known as an automotive writer and then spend the rest of my life in borrowed vehicles, writing not only road tests but travel articles and, if the spirit moved me, science fiction.

(Secretly, the science fiction was my primary motive, but I couldn’t tell anyone a dumb thing like that.) And Curt Fuller was the publisher – also the publisher of *Fate*, which I suspect he did for his wife. At any rate, Curt was the only publisher whom I would allow to date my unmarried daughter, if I had one.

Well, the Arabs and their oil embargo fixed all that before it could come to fruition. We lost a hundred and fifty-four pages of advertising in one day, so certain economies were practiced. But just before I threw myself off the Tallahatchee Bridge, the SF business picked up, and I haven’t drawn a

paycheck since. It's been mostly SF in one form or another, though I did do the Rand McNally book about bicycles and several smaller projects for Rand.

These things happen. Larry Shaw, the editor of *Infinity*, and of one of the unrelated magazines called *Science Fiction Adventures*, was also the editor of *Car Speed and Style* and *Custom Rodder* (and *Untamed* and *Lion Adventures*, that being the nature of editing for Irwin Stein). This struck me as a happy thing, so I not only wrote for the SF magazines, I wrote for the hairy-chested men's "true" adventure books – all the stories were turned in with the working title of "Love-Starved Arabs Raped Me Often", even the one about Von Richtofen and the masochistic blonde – and I wrote for *Car Speed and Style* and *Custom Rodder*.

I not only wrote, I illustrated, having just enough talent. (Not enough to work for the SF magazines.) I even persuaded Irwin to start a magazine called *Cars*, which was about factory cars, because the manufacturers would buy reprints if we said nice things about their product. I had a column, called "Chipping Gears With Jeffries Oldmann", and every once in a while we borrowed a car from one of the manufacturers – I was really fond of the Chrysler 300E, although the Studebaker Hawk was not far behind – and drove to SF conventions. Also, incidentally, to roadtest.

Which is a way of explaining how I wound up on the International Truck account, years later. Where I swiftly came to love the big trucks – the F-5070 and its ilk – but did not, as reported earlier, fail to remember various Scout models, including the Aristocrat and the SR-2 in which I committed occasional felonies, and the Scout II, which I helped introduce to a breathless world. Well, it was a rough job, but somebody had to do it. And in due time, somebody else had to do it, because I went to work for Woodall's. And we know how that ended.

I had written a novel called *Who?*, years earlier, and sold an option on it to some movie company, and Judy del Rey called me one day and asked if she could have a tie-in edition for del Rey books, because according to her *Daily Variety*, they had made a movie of it and were planning to release it in about six months. I said sure, in a voice that barely quivered, and got on the phone and arranged to get it away from Lancer Books. That done, I conveyed it to del Rey and then had time to wonder about a world in which the author is the Last To Know.

It was worse than that. It had Elliott Gould and Trevor Howard in it, and a fantastic character actor named Joe Bova, but I saw it in a double feature

with a film called *Gold*, with Susannah York and Roger Moore, and I liked *Gold* better. Judy agreed with me. She'd seen *Who?* a good deal earlier, and nowhere on the del Rey Books edition is there a hint that it's a movie tie-in.

Then I'd also sold film rights, to Bristol-Meyers Corporation(l), in a non-SF story of mine called "The Master of The Hounds". Nothing more was heard of it, until years later, when a fellow on my wife's bowling team said, rather nervously, "Edna, are you married to a man named Algis?"

"Yes, I am," my wife said.

"Well..." the fellow said, "the other night I couldn't sleep, and I turned on the TV', and about two-thirty in the morning they played a movie called *To Kill A Clown*, and it said the original story was by Algis Budrys ..."

And that is how I found out that not only had the film been made, not only did it have Alan Alda and Blythe Danner in it, not only had it been shipped off to late night TV, but if I thought the *Who?* film had been kept secret from me, I now realized the British producers of that film had been models of openness and good fellowship compared to the folk who bought the *Master of The Hounds* film not from me but from Bristol-Meyers and snuck it out.

Since then – while working in Hollywood, but not in films, oddly enough – I met a USC film student who bought the right to make a student film of *Rogue Moon*. And made it. And only two years later sent me a tape of it. Let me put it this way – a lot of Hollywood film students have made student films, and then gone on to big things. For example, George Lucas and the *THX* film whose number I can never remember. My guy is not George Lucas.

Well, so it goes.

The next-to-biggest thing I've done lately is work on the L. Ron Hubbard Contests, which is what eventually brought me to Hollywood, where L. Ron Hubbard's literary agency, Author Services, is. It has graduated well over a hundred SF writers by now, who have written countless stories and over 200 novels. It has done the same for scores of artists. It has, in addition to giving them significant start-up money, taught many of its graduates at highly effective workshops, and it has published those people in an anthology series. I am very proud of that part.

One year, a fellow named Dave Wolverton won the top prize, with a novelette called "On My Way to Paradise". He was eye-catching enough so that he immediately picked up Virginia Kidd as an agent, and she promptly

sold a three-book deal to Bantam. Several years later, I made him a quarterly judge in the writers' Contest, and when I began to feel things were beginning to repeat themselves for me annually, I made him co-ordinating Judge and resigned as everything but a quarterly judge. This has worked well. Dave and I teach the annual workshop for the winners, I help judge an occasional quarter of the Contest, and the thing hums along.

The biggest thing I've done lately is run *Tomorrow* magazine. Just about the time I was finishing up *Hard Landing* – which is a damned good novel; short-list nominated for the Nebula – and looking around for the next thing to do, Dean Wesley Smith called me and asked if I'd edit an SF magazine for Pulphouse, Inc. I said yes.

Pulphouse was located in Eugene, Oregon, which is a cool town, and Dean had a bunch of titles out and a bunch of cool people working for him. And he told me I could pretty much do anything I wanted, including naming and laying out the magazine. So I searched the index to periodicals and discovered nobody was using the name *Tomorrow*, and I drove up the coast to where Alex Schomburg lived and picked up the last Schomburg painting that hadn't been used on a magazine, and I called Gene Wolfe and Cathy Ball and Virginia Baker and Shayne Bell and a couple of other people I knew who might have a story, and we were off. I wrote a story around the cover, I started a series on how to write, and I thought we had a pretty good first issue.

It started off really well, and I began accumulating stories for the second issue, and the third, and so forth, and about that time I got a call from Dean that told me Pulphouse was pulling in its horns. There weren't going to be any more issues... unless I felt like putting out the magazine myself. Edna and I spent days debating the possibility. And then we took the plunge, not without fear.

So from Issue 2 on, *Tomorrow* has been completely ours. I had an old corporate name kicking around from the Rand McNally days – it's Unifont, which is our phone number – and we proceeded one step at a time from there, trembling.

We couldn't have begun to do it if Kandis Elliot hadn't written and illustrated "The Laying of the Meridians" and sent it in. When we were frantically looking around for someone to set the magazine in type, etc., I called Kandis, who I didn't know from a hole in the wall, and asked her if she was qualified, and would she do it, and so forth, and the woman said yes.

And she lived only two-and-a-half hours away. And she had all sorts of computer publishing equipment and the knowledge to get the most out of it.

And as the issues went by, I kept on discovering new facets to Kandis – who is a botany illustrator for the University of Wisconsin – and I consider myself inordinately lucky. Now, we have shifted over from print to electronic format, using an outfit Kandis found, and we are, at this writing, growing by leaps and bounds. It is something to discover as I cross the fine line between sixty-four and sixty-five that I have been so fortunate.

I am working on a novel – a fantasy novel – and *Tomorrow*, and several other things for The Unifont Company to do. And I am a Guest of Honor at an SF Worldcon. I have my wife, I have my four sons, and I have a place in my profession. Not bad, considering that it started with Adolf.

August 1997

Appendix

The Butchery of Algis Budrys

This feature appeared in The Patchin Review #6 (March-May 1983) edited by Charles Platt, who wrote the introductory paragraphs below.

People who worship every golden word of a science-fiction “classic” should realize that not all of those words were written by the author. Many were inserted or altered arbitrarily by editors bowing to pressures of pulp-magazine publishing. There are also cases in which text was scrambled by careless compositors.

Algis Budrys discusses these factors in “Nonliterary Influences on Science Fiction”, in *Science Fiction Dialogues*, a book of essays edited by Gary K. Wolfe, published by Academy Chicago.

The ironic part is that, as it turns out, Budrys’s own essay has been tampered with editorially. It has fallen victim to an extreme case of the interference that the essay itself describes. Hardly a sentence has survived unchanged. On the next pages, an excerpt from the original manuscript is printed opposite the published version, for comparison. Following that, there is an explanation of how it all happened without the author’s consent or knowledge.

But first, a few comments from Mr. Budrys himself:

“Apart from the ridiculous punctuation and the introduction of nonsequiturs... there are also a number of places where assertions have been put in my mouth that I would never have made. These include statements of ‘fact’ which are false to fact.... They also include omissions from my text, made in such a way that I appear naive or pretentious considerably more often than I would naturally.

“I was asked to contribute an essay on an area in which I have a fair amount of knowledge. I find that someone – either editor Gary K. Wolfe or a publisher’s copy-editor – has in a slapdash manner restructured my thesis to the point where it is not only worthless but actively misleading. I leave it to you to compare the two versions.”

From Algis Budrys's Original Manuscript:

“Style” can be interpreted as an aspect of English composition, and this normal copy-editing requirement did, of course, exist.* But it can also be interpreted to mean the breaking up of all compound sentences into simple ones, the substitution of shorter words for all words containing more than a certain number of syllables, the breaking up of long paragraphs without regard to topic sentences, the mandatory inclusion of dialogue, the excision of “complicated” punctuation marks such as the semi-colon, and the manipulation of the prose in general to be as rapidly readable as possible.

* The “style book” in this sense was Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary at Street & Smith. Thus, *The Shadow*, *Doc Savage*, and the characters in Heinlein’s *Beyond This Horizon* all said “O.K.”, not “okay”.

What is important to the scholar here is not the effect on general style – an effect which was quickly anticipated by the most effective writers, who learned to pre-edit in the course of manuscript creation, and thus can be said to have made this speed-reading syntax their “natural” style. What has more bearing on scholarship now is that it is not possible even for a Leo Margulies to house-publish a “book” listing all the mandated short substitutes for all the polysyllables one might encounter. Rather, there would be a simple imperative to count syllables and find a synonym, or, considering that all Margulies’ editors punched time-clocks and were employed under timeclock management policies, the quickest near-synonym one could think of.

Similarly, it is not efficient to closely examine copy-edited manuscripts except as an occasional spot-check on the given editor’s performance. Rather, a supervisor of the Margulies sort would normally take a quick scan around the room and note whether the manuscripts showed the visible marks of ample copy-editing. Under time pressure, and in some fear for their jobs in a deadline-conscious merchandising industry at a time when editorial employment was scarce, some editors would be naturally inclined to edit in haste but conspicuously.**

** Others, community oral tradition tells us, would often carefully write back in the same words they had just blacked out. That practice, however, would depend on having sufficient leisure, and it is further likely that the same individual who preserved the text early in the production month would be slapdash toward its end.

These practices, in other words, did not proceed with respect to merit or

intention within the manuscript, but to essentially mechanical formulas. Furthermore, they did not show consistent quality within themselves. The same editor who might be the author's collaborator on one manuscript could be the author's censor on the next, and it doesn't necessarily follow that these two manuscripts might have come from two different authors or authors of markedly different quality. Nor, considering industry turnover, does it follow that the editing style on one story might be as intelligent – always within the “book” parameters, of course – as on the next.

Excerpts copyright © 1983 by Algis Budrys

From the Published Version:

The “style book” used at Street and Smith was *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. For this reason the Shadow, Doc Savage and the characters in Heinlein's *Beyond This Horizon* all said “O.K.” and not “okay”. Apart from this, editors at the chains broke compound sentences into simple ones, simplified all words containing more than a requisite number of syllables, used short paragraphs regardless of topic sentences, considered dialogue mandatory at certain points, removed “complicated” punctuation like semi-colons, and in general created prose designed to be read as rapidly as possible.

Most effective writers learned quickly to forestall editorial intervention by writing as simply as possible in the first place. However the substitution of short synonyms for a polysyllabic word caused serious interference with the writer's intention. There was no “book” for this; the harassed editors, who punched timeclocks, simply counted syllables and looked for an approximate short synonym. They also made sure to do a lot of copy-editing if they wanted to keep their jobs: hasty but conspicuous editing was therefore the rule. It has been said that some editors would write in the identical word above the black line; but such careful preservation of the author's intention would not be the rule.

From Gary K. Wolfe (who compiled the book of essays):

The only change I made on the Budrys essay consisted of giving it a new title and making his original title a subtitle. I consulted with him on this at the

time.

I also offered to read proofs on the volume, since I knew Academy Chicago was on a tight schedule in trying to meet the Labor Day publication date. (I mention that because I have since heard a rumor that Academy Chicago has claimed I refused to read proofs.)

Some time later, I received a phone call from the Millers (Anita and Jordan Miller, directors of Academy Chicago – ed.) complaining about the writing in some of the essays in the book. Anita Miller, who was doing the copy-editing, viewed some of the essays as redundant or stylistically awkward. She seemed most concerned about the academic essays, but assured me that her copy-editing would not alter meaning. I specifically apprised her of the professional reputations of Gunn, Aldiss, and Budrys. In A.J.'s essay, she informed me that she was changing references to himself in the third person to first person. I informed him of this also. But I came out of that conversation with the Millers feeling pretty much as though I was being accused of being a bad editor. I realize now that I should have insisted on seeing the copy-edited manuscript, even though that would have meant delaying the book beyond the Chicon publication date. I did assume that I would later have a chance to look at proofs.

The next I heard from the Millers was that because of some delay in the artwork, the book would not be out by Chicon. I also found that the page proofs had already been done and that the title of the book would be *Science Fiction Dialogues*, rather than any of the titles Jim Gunn and I had suggested....

About a month ago, I got a letter from Mack Hassler, who has an essay in the book, congratulating me on its being published. That was the first I'd heard of it. I went to Academy Chicago to pick up the book, and that was the first I learned of the full extent of their copy-editing. They even got *my* name wrong, by leaving out the initial. That may seem trivial, but after three books and fifty-odd articles under one version of your name, you become aware that a variant gets you split into two people in bibliographies, computer banks, and card catalogues. Other contributors have since questioned me about the editing of their essays in the volume, and although the Millers did invite me to refer any such questions to them, I have not had much luck in getting either authors or publishers to communicate with each other. The book has been well reviewed in both *Publishers Weekly* and *Library Journal*, but I'm not sure that is quite the issue.

I must perhaps plead guilty to naivete... publishers I have dealt with in the past have taken pains to assure that meaning is not altered, that authors are consulted, and that proofs are provided. Perhaps this is the usual practice of Academy Chicago as well, and perhaps the short deadline is what brought this on....

Let me restate that the title of the book is not mine, the name of the editor is not quite mine, and the editing, which goes beyond the scope of any copy-editing I have experienced, is not mine.

From Anita Miller (Director of Academy Chicago):

In response to your query in your letter (undated) about the Algis Budrys essay: yes, I edited it, and I should think that a comparison of the original with the edited version would tell you why I edited it.

I understand that you have never heard of so complete a rewriting job. But I do not think that you are familiar with book publishing practices. I can assure you that this is relatively common....

I think that you are not familiar with book publishing practices, because I am surprised that you would write to someone whose essay is in our book and ask for reprinting permission. Everything in that book is our property for the life of the book, and it is copyrighted in the name of the Science Fiction Research Association if it were to revert. It is our decision whether something in this book is to appear in another publication, since it is out money which has produced this book and the risk of losing it is ours. Certainly you cannot write to any author and ask permission to reprint: you write to the publisher. I thought this was widely known, and certainly it should be, by anyone who edits a periodical.

The original essay is of course also involved here: Mr. Budrys cannot print it elsewhere without putting the contract of the SFRA (Science Fiction Research Association, who instigated this project – ed.) with us into jeopardy. I should also be very careful about allowing Mr. Budrys to interfere extensively with the sale of this book, since our contract not only gives us the right to edit to our satisfaction, but also stipulates that authors will not interfere with the sale of the book, or hurt its sale. For obvious reasons.

Gary Wolfe was free to consult with Mr. Budrys, since I told him, loudly and often, when I read the manuscript, that it was not professional. Mr.

Wolfe only told me that Mr. Budrys handed it to him in a bar, and was still making changes in pen at the last moment. It read like it. Gary Wolfe made no effort to discuss this editing with me, except to say that he was grateful that I was willing to take the trouble, since he thought the kind of editor who bothered to revise in that way was extinct. I did not, by the way, alter the points he was making in any way, merely the so-called style of his essay, which I considered incoherent. I also reorganized the thing, since it had been written apparently off the top of the author's head – various “inserts” were provided here and there – and had never been put back properly together again. That I cut it goes without saying, since Mr. Budrys never seems to say anything once. I cut all the essays, incidentally, except Brian Aldiss's. If I had not, the book would have been twice as long and cost twice as much.

I do have the satisfaction of pointing out to you that *Publishers Weekly* found all the essays lively and well-done. I believe this happy situation results from my editing....

I am also a writer; I have a book with Garland Publishing Company, and I had edited a fairly successful newsletter for a few years. I think that the only time a writer's work should be altered is when it is bad work. And I think that Mr. Budrys does not realize that there is a world of difference between pulp work, and a book published for a literate general audience. In seven short years – which sometimes seem like seven long years – our press has gained a reputation among those who know it for excellence and selectivity. Books published by Academy Chicago are well-written, or they are not published. Hence we insist on editorial control.

I wish to remind you once more that we, as publishers, are the people to contact for permission to quote at length, or to reprint.

Editor's Note by Charles Platt:

I doubt this affair will ever be resolved to anyone's satisfaction. Budrys will never see his essay published in his own words; Wolfe has his name on a book which he is ashamed of; and Miller no doubt feels victimized by prima donnas whose petulance is a threat to her livelihood. It is indeed a pity that Gary Wolfe never checked the page proofs; if he signed a contract which did not guarantee him this right, he is, as he says himself, a bit naive.

As for the rather self-righteous response from Ms. Miller, I should mention that when I contacted Algis Budrys, it was not to obtain permission

to reprint his essay, but to *find out who controlled* such permission. (It is by no means always the publisher.) He told me that he had sold the essay on condition that it would be copyrighted in his name, and that he would control subsequent reprinting. I took him at his word and paid him for use of the excerpt in *The Patchin Review*. I have subsequently written again to Ms. Miller, asking about the exact wording of her contract, and offering to pay her the usual (i.e. insultingly low) *Patchin Review* rate for reprint of the essay excerpt, if indeed the contract does entitle her to control those rights. So far, I have received no reply. But in any case, a rule of thumb in publishing is that one has the right to quote, without permission, up to 200 words from a book for purposes of review; the quote that I have taken from the published work is almost exactly that length.

In lecturing us on “standard publishing practice,” Ms. Miller omits to mention that most publishers consider it a courtesy to check with the author if they rewrite almost every sentence of his work and cut its length by almost fifty percent. In his essay about editorial interference, Algis Budrys dealt primarily with the days of pulp magazines; he evidently assumed that the cavalier treatment that writers received then, at the hands of editorial dictators, has become a thing of the past. To his cost, he has discovered this is not so.

Publishers often complain that writers are “difficult to work with” and resist editorial advice. In this case, I know otherwise. When Algis Budrys submitted to *The Patchin Review* a long essay for our second issue (September 1981), I suggested substantial cuts; we discussed them over the phone, and everything was settled amicably in less than half an hour. If Ms. Miller had chosen to collaborate with the author in this way, rather than view him as a mixture of dullard, minion, and adversary, timewasting acrimony could have been avoided.

Of course, she may be correct; her rewrite may have improved Algis Budrys’s manuscript. This I leave for the reader to decide.

March 1983

Happily, the full original text of “Nonliterary Influences on Science Fiction” was published as a Chris Drumm Books chapbook in 1983, and it is this approved version which appears in *Beyond the Outposts: Essays on Science Fiction and Fantasy 1955-1996* (2020). [Ed.]

The Logics of Mankind

A bonus item from 1946 which came to light in 2021. It would seem unduly cruel to bibliographers to change the ebook subtitle again for the sake of this minor essay published when our man was 15 years old. [Ed.]

In the past few years there has arisen a goodly host of deeply imbued pessimists, who have managed by sheer vocal and literary power to convince the world that it is doomed. They have, by grit and determination, “proved” that mankind has grown illogical, purposeless, and that it has strayed from the path ordained to it by nature and evolution. As a clincher to these narrow-minded arguments, they point to the Atomic Bomb as the final symbol of Terrestrial savagery, and, in voices filled with the wrath of God, have proclaimed to mankind in general that it is not “ready” for this awful weapon.

To these I say, “Bosh!” In your passionate speeches, your dramatic writings, you have made the world forget one salient weakness in your whole doctrine, you have glossed over the one little fact that would discredit you.

ALL THAT IS MERELY YOUR OWN OPINION. Because you are incurably pessimistic, and because you believe that man was born to be deluded, fooled, all of his life, you have reached back into your musty books, and have drawn “precedents”.

Man is an animal, and as such, as a living, breathing organism, he evolves. He moves, and he changes. And in frequent intervals, those changes amount to so much that, in effect, he becomes a new species.

Consider the stone age man. Scholars of today speak of him as a dead end, or at best, a mere evolutionary step. The Stone Man was put on earth for a definite purpose, as was everything else. He, with his rugged body, his tremendous strength, was needed to wipe out the predatory animals of his time. He had no need of great brains. He was to make way for the first farmer, and in his lifetime, brains would have been a handicap.

After the Stone Age Man, who cleared the way for him, came the farmer. His duty was to plant the earth, to till, and to make the ground work for him, yielding food instead of his having to hunt for food. And with him began thought, and the first PEACEFUL tool in the world. And after the farmer came the builder. He furnished the homes for man, and the seaports,

and the market places. And the FORUMS. A split occurred in his ranks, and the architect appeared, and he invented MEASURES. The foot and the inch and the gallon and the litre. For he was in need of EXACTITUDE.

And then came the Thinkers, and of necessity, the pessimists. And here occurred the manifold split, and from the one branch of the Thinkers, there sprang the Doctors, and the Philosophers, and the Scientists, and the Rulers. From the Doctors sprang the Specialists, and there occurred the creation of the Dentists. From the Philosophers came the Historians, and the Writers, and the Artists. And from the Scientists there came a myriad of Specialists, including the PHYSICISTS.

Here the Tree of Life, which had at first a single shoot, then a bush, and finally the oak that it is today, became too complex for the pessimist. And he classed man as a single type, and established a norm where unnormality is the only thing that the different types of man have in common. And he set up a way of life that only one of his own kind could follow. And he tied man into a straitjacket, and men who would have made great scientists became shoemakers. And men who would have been good shoemakers became scientists.

But, in the great plan which the pessimists could not visualize, Nature had taken care of that. Man went into another subtle mutation, and he began to think for himself.

The pessimists had not included America in their plans, for they did not know of it. And to America came the optimists. The men who saw a city instead of a dirty settlement, and those who saw highways where there were trails. And they built in America a country which was FREE. Free in mind as well as body. There the sons of the poor and the sons of the rich learned together, and each man became what he wanted to be.

And the Physicist sat in his laboratory, and from his mind came Atomic Power and the bomb, but 'twas not ahead of its time. It WAS ahead of the time of the pessimists. It was ahead of the time of those who sat and waited. But it was not ahead of the new people. It is these people who will build a world of Doers.

We, of course, are but the predecessors of a greater type of man, but we have done much. We should be proud.

(This is my personal philosophy. I believe that a greater type of man will deal with the problems that confront us now. However, there is no reason why we shouldn't try!)

Spring 1946

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Original Appearances

- “The Butchery of Algis Budrys” – *The Patchin Review* #6, March-May 1983, edited by Charles Platt.
- “Chipping Gears” – column as by Jeffries Oldman in *Cars: The Automotive Magazine*, August 1960, edited by Larry T. Shaw.
- “Dimensions Reviews” – *Dimensions* 14, May/July 1954, edited by Harlan Ellison.
- “dubious” – from the fanzines *dubious* #1, May 1960, and #2, August 1960, both edited by Algis Budrys.
- “George R.R. Martin, Dark Harbinger” – introduction to *Songs the Dead Men Sing* by George R.R. Martin, Dark Harvest, October 1983.
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December 1986; *Madonna Red, Call for the Dead, A Murder of Quality and Nightwing*, 29 March 1987; *The Last Cold-War Cowboy*, 24 May 1987; *Patriot Games*, 2 August 1987; *Sarum*, 6 September 1987; *Heaven and Hell*, 18 October 1987; *The Infant of Prague*; 22 November 1987; *Winter*, 20 December 1987; *Mortal Fear* and *Thai Horse*, 31 January 1988; *The Fast Men* and *Man With a Gun*, 28 February 1988; *Blood Heat* and *The Revolutionist*, 24 April 1988; *Peking* and *Lenin*, 3 July 1988; *An Eye for an Eye, The Cardinal of the Kremlin* and *Timothy's Game*, 31 July 1988; *The Last Hero* and *Wyvern*, 9 October 1988; *Fire Arrow, The Icemen, Final Flight* and *Sword Point*, 30 October 1988; *Wildcat*, 29 January 1989; *Day of Reckoning* and *Father and Son*, 26 March 1989; *Rolling Thunder* and *The Power of One*, 4 June 1989; *Polar Star, Captain Butterfly* and *Day of the Cheetah*, 16 July 1989; *The Pillars of the Earth*, 20 August 1989; *The Man Who Heard Too Much* and *The Blue Gate of Babylon*, 26 November 1989; *Spy Line*, 24 December 1989; *The Evening News*, 29 April 1990; *Get Shorty*, 29 July 1990; *Spy Sinker*, 9 September 1990; *The Eagle Has Flown*, 10 March 1991; *Siro*, 7 April 1991; *Memorial Bridge*, 12 May 1991; *Drover*, 2 June 1991; *The Last Good German*, 8 December 1991; *McNally's Secret* and *Blindsight*, 19 January 1992; *Rising Sun*, 2 February 1992; *Isvik*, 29 March 1992; *China Lake*, 3 May 1992; *Contents Under Pressure*, 30 August 1992.

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* The starred items from various US and Canadian newspapers are all syndicated articles with original publication credits to the *Chicago Sun-Times*. “From” indicates an extract, usually the remains of a multi-review column after the most substantial part had been extracted for *Beyond the Outposts*.

¶ Items so marked have been reconstructed from differently cut or otherwise edited versions from the two cited newspapers.

Index of Books and Authors Reviewed

[0](#) [A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

[3-D Eye: Michael English](#)

[The 1979 Annual World's Best SF: Donald A. Wollheim, editor](#)

[The 1981 Annual World's Best SF: Donald A. Wollheim, editor](#)

[Ahead of Time: Henry Kuttner](#)

[Airflow: Philip Castle](#)

[Aldiss, Brian: *Pile*](#)

[The Alien: Victor Besaw](#)

[Alien Landscapes: Robert Holdstock and Malcolm Edwards, editors](#)

[And Having Writ...: Donald R. Bensen](#)

[Anderson, Poul: *The Earth Book of Stormgate*](#)

[Anderson, Poul: *Fantasy*](#)

[Anderson, Poul: *The High Crusade*](#)

[Asimov, Isaac, editor: *Isaac Asimov Presents the Great SF Stories*](#)

[Astounding Science Fiction, July 1939 \(facsimile\): John W. Campbell, editor](#)

[At the Narrow Passage: Richard C. Meredith](#)

[Attanasio, A.A.: *Wyvern*](#)

[Baen, James, editor: *The Best of Destinies*](#)

[Barrier Island: John D. MacDonald](#)

[Bear, Greg: *Beyond Heaven's River*](#)

[Bensen, Donald R.: *And Having Writ...*](#)

[Berent, Mark: *Rolling Thunder*](#)

[Besaw, Victor: *The Alien*](#)

[The Best of Destinies: James Baen, editor](#)

[The Best of L. Sprague de Camp: L. Sprague de Camp](#)

[Bester, Alfred: *Golem*¹⁰⁰](#)

[Beyond Heaven's River: Greg Bear](#)

[Black Holes: Jerry Pournelle, editor](#)

[Blindsight: Robin Cook](#)

[Blood Heat: Steve Pieczenik](#)

[*The Blue Gate of Babylon*: Paul Pickering](#)
[*Boyer, Elizabeth: The Elves and the Otterskin*](#)
[*Boyne, Walter J.: The Wild Blue*](#)
[*Bridges to Science Fiction*: George E. Slusser, editor](#)
[*Brien, Alan: Lenin*](#)
[*Buchanan, Edna: Contents Under Pressure*](#)
[*Buckley, William: The Story of Henri Tod*](#)
[*Budrys, Algis: "Walk to the World"*](#)

[*Caidin, Martin: Cyborg*](#)
[*Call for the Dead*: John le Carré](#)
[*Campbell, John W., editor: Astounding Science Fiction, July 1939 \(facsimile\)*](#)
[*The Cardinal of the Kremlin*: Tom Clancy](#)
[*Carr, Terry, editor: Universe 9*](#)
[*Carroll, James: Madonna Red*](#)
[*Carroll, James: Memorial Bridge*](#)
[*Castle, Philip: Airflow*](#)
[*Changeling*: Roger Zelazny](#)
[*Chaykin, Howard V.: Empire*](#)
[*Cherryh, C.J.: Well of Shiuan*](#)
[*China Lake*: Anthony Hyde](#)
[*Clancy, Tom: The Cardinal of the Kremlin*](#)
[*Clancy, Tom: Patriot Games*](#)
[*Clavell, James: Whirlwind*](#)
[*The Claw of the Conciliator*: Gene Wolfe](#)
[*Clement, Hal: Star Light*](#)
[*The Complete Venus Equilateral*: George O. Smith](#)
[*Compton, D.G.: Windows*](#)
[*Condon, Richard: Prizzi's Family*](#)
[*Conroy, Pat: The Prince of Tides*](#)
[*Contents Under Pressure*: Edna Buchanan](#)
[*Cook, Robin: Blindsight*](#)
[*Cook, Robin: Mortal Fear*](#)
[*Coonts, Stephen: Final Flight*](#)
[*Correy, Lee: Star Driver*](#)
[*Courtenay, Bryce: The Power of One*](#)
[*Coyle, Harold: Sword Point*](#)
[*Crichton, Michael: Rising Sun*](#)

[Cyborg: Martin Caidin](#)

[Daley, Robert: *Man With a Gun*](#)

[Day of Reckoning: John Katzenbach](#)

[de Camp, L. Sprague: *The Best of L. Sprague de Camp*](#)

[Definitely Maybe: Arkady Strugatsky and Boris Strugatsky](#)

[Deighton, Len: *Spy Line*](#)

[Deighton, Len: *Spy Sinker*](#)

[Deighton, Len: *Winter*](#)

[Delany, Samuel R.: *Distant Stars*](#)

[Delany, Samuel R.: *Empire*](#)

[Dickson, Gordon: *Naked to the Stars*](#)

[Diehl, William: *Thai Horse*](#)

[Direct Descent: Frank Herbert](#)

[Distant Stars: Samuel R. Delany](#)

[A Double Shadow: Frederick Turner](#)

[Dragon's Egg: Robert L. Forward](#)

[Drover: Bill Granger](#)

[Dunsany, Lord: *The Ghosts of the Heavside Layer*](#)

[The Eagle Has Flown: Jack Higgins](#)

[The Earth Book of Stormgate: Poul Anderson](#)

[Edmondson, G.C.: *To Sail the Century Sea*](#)

[Edwards, Malcolm, editor: *Alien Landscapes*](#)

[Effinger, George Alec: *Heroics*](#)

[Eisenstein, Phyllis: *Sorcerer's Son*](#)

[The Elves and the Otterskin: Elizabeth Boyer](#)

[Empire: Samuel R. Delany and Howard V. Chaykin](#)

[Encyclopedia of Science Fiction: Robert Holdstock, editor](#)

[English, Michael: *3-D Eye*](#)

[The Evening News: Arthur Hailey](#)

[An Eye for an Eye: Gerald Seymour](#)

[Fantastic Lives: Martin H. Greenberg, editor](#)

[Fantasy: Poul Anderson](#)

[Far Rainbow; The Second Invasion from Mars: Arkady Strugatsky and Boris Strugatsky](#)

[The Fast Men: Tom McNab](#)

[Father and Son: Peter Maas](#)

[Federation: H. Beam Piper](#)
[Ferman, Edward L., editor: *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*](#)
[Final Flight: Stephen Coonts](#)
[Fire Arrow: Franklin Allen Leib](#)
[Follett, Ken: *Lie down with Lions*](#)
[Follett, Ken: *The Pillars of the Earth*](#)
[Forbath, Peter: *The Last Hero*](#)
[Forward, Robert L.: *Dragon's Egg*](#)
[Franklin, H. Bruce: *Future Perfect: American Science Fiction of the Nineteenth Century*](#)
[Future Perfect: American Science Fiction of the Nineteenth Century: H. Bruce Franklin](#)

[The Genesis Machine: James P. Hogan](#)
[Get Shorty: Elmore Leonard](#)
[The Ghosts of the Heavyside Layer: Lord Dunsany](#)
[God Emperor of Dune: Frank Herbert](#)
[Golem¹⁰⁰: Alfred Bester](#)
[Granger, Bill: *Drover*](#)
[Granger, Bill: *The Infant of Prague*](#)
[Granger, Bill: *The Last Good German*](#)
[Granger, Bill: *The Man Who Heard Too Much*](#)
[The Great Science Fiction Series: Frederik Pohl, Martin H. Greenberg and Joseph Olander, editors](#)
[Green, Roland: *Wandor's Flight*](#)
[Greenberg, Martin H., editor: *Fantastic Lives*](#)
[Greenberg, Martin H., editor: *The Great Science Fiction Series*](#)
[Greenberg, Martin H., editor: *Isaac Asimov Presents the Great SF Stories*](#)
[Greenberg, Martin H., editor: *The Science Fiction of Mark Clifton*](#)
[Grey, Anthony: *Peking*](#)
[Griffin, Rick: *Rick Griffin*](#)

[Hailey, Arthur: *The Evening News*](#)
[Haldeman, Joe: *Infinite Dreams*](#)
[Halter, Marek: *The Scroll of Abraham*](#)
[Harrison, M. John: *A Storm of Wings*](#)
[Heaven and Hell: John Jakes](#)
[Heinlein, Robert A.: *The Notebooks of Lazarus Long*](#)

[Heirs to the Kingdom: Kennedy Hudner](#)
[Herbert, Frank: *Direct Descent*](#)
[Herbert, Frank: *God Emperor of Dune*](#)
[Heroics: George Alec Effinger](#)
[Higgins, Jack: *The Eagle Has Flown*](#)
[The High Crusade: Poul Anderson](#)
[Hogan, James P.: *The Genesis Machine*](#)
[Holdstock, Robert, editor: *Alien Landscapes*](#)
[Holdstock, Robert, editor: *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*](#)
[Hudner, Kennedy: *Heirs to the Kingdom*](#)
[Hyde, Anthony: *China Lake*](#)

[The Icemen: M.E. Morris](#)
[If All Else Fails...: Craig Strete](#)
[Ignatius, David: *Siro*](#)
[The Infant of Prague: Bill Granger](#)
[Infinite Dreams: Joe Haldeman](#)
[Innes, Hammond: *Isvik*](#)
[Isaac Asimov Presents the Great SF Stories: Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg, editors](#)
[Isvik: Hammond Innes](#)

[Jakes, John: *Heaven and Hell*](#)
[Jones, Peter: *Solar Wind*](#)

[Katzenbach, John: *Day of Reckoning*](#)
[Kornbluth, C.M.: overview](#)
[Kornbluth, C.M.: *The Syndic*](#)
[Kuttner, Henry: *Ahead of Time*](#)

[L'Amour, Louis: *Last of the Breed*](#)
[The Last Cold-War Cowboy: James Park Sloan](#)
[The Last Good German: Bill Granger](#)
[The Last Hero: Peter Forbath](#)
[Last of the Breed: Louis L'Amour](#)
[le Carré, John: *Call for the Dead*](#)
[le Carré, John: *A Murder of Quality*](#)
[Leib, Franklin Allen: *Fire Arrow*](#)
[Leiber, Fritz: *Night's Black Agents*](#)

[Lenin: Alan Brien](#)
[Leonard, Elmore: *Get Shorty*](#)
[Lie down with Lions: Ken Follett](#)
[Lord Valentine's Castle: Robert Silverberg](#)

[Maas, Peter: *Father and Son*](#)
[MacDonald, John D.: *Barrier Island*](#)
[McNab, Tom: *The Fast Men*](#)
[Madonna Red: James Carroll](#)
[The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction: Edward L. Ferman, editor](#)
[Malzberg, Barry N., editor: *The Science Fiction of Mark Clifton*](#)
[The Man Who Heard Too Much: Bill Granger](#)
[Man With a Gun: Robert Daley](#)
[The Many-Colored Land: Julian May](#)
[Martin, George R.R., editor: *New Voices II*](#)
[Martin, George R.R.: overview](#)
[May, Julian: *The Many-Colored Land*](#)
[McNally's Secret: Lawrence Sanders](#)
[Memorial Bridge: James Carroll](#)
[Meredith, Richard C.: *At the Narrow Passage*](#)
[Meredith, Richard C.: *No Brother, No Friend*](#)
[Meredith, Richard C.: *Vestiges of Time*](#)
[Morris, M.E.: *The Icemen*](#)
[Mortal Fear: Robin Cook](#)
[A Murder of Quality: John le Carré](#)

[Naked to the Stars: Gordon Dickson](#)
[New Voices II: George R.R. Martin, editor](#)
[Night's Black Agents: Fritz Leiber](#)
[Nightwing: Martin Cruz Smith](#)
[Niven, Larry: *The Ringworld Engineers*](#)
[No Brother, No Friend: Richard C. Meredith](#)
[The Notebooks of Lazarus Long: Robert A. Heinlein](#)

[Olander, Joseph, editor: *The Great Science Fiction Series*](#)

[Patriot Games: Tom Clancy](#)
[Peking: Anthony Grey](#)
[Pickering, Paul: *The Blue Gate of Babylon*](#)

[Pieczenik, Steve: *Blood Heat*](#)
[Pile: Brian Aldiss and Mike Wilks](#)
[*The Pillars of the Earth*: Ken Follett](#)
[Piper, H. Beam: *Federation*](#)
[Pohl, Frederik, editor: *The Great Science Fiction Series*](#)
[*Polar Star*: Martin Cruz Smith](#)
[Pournelle, Jerry, editor: *Black Holes*](#)
[*The Power of One*: Bryce Courtenay](#)
[*The Prince of Tides*: Pat Conroy](#)
[*Prizzi's Family*: Richard Condon](#)

[*A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction*: Baird Searles, editor](#)
[*Rick Griffin*: Rick Griffin](#)
[*The Ringworld Engineers*: Larry Niven](#)
[*Rising Sun*: Michael Crichton](#)
[*Roadmarks*: Roger Zelazny](#)
[*Rolling Thunder*: Mark Berent](#)
[Russ, Joanna: *The Two of Them*](#)
[Rutherford, Edward: *Sarum*](#)

[Sanders, Lawrence: *McNally's Secret*](#)
[Sanders, Lawrence: *Timothy's Game*](#)
[*Sarum*: Edward Rutherford](#)
[*Schrödinger's Cat*: Robert Anton Wilson](#)
[*The Science Fiction of Mark Clifton*: Martin H. Greenberg and Barry N. Malzberg, editors](#)
[*The Scroll of Abraham*: Marek Halter](#)
[Searles, Baird, editor: *A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction*](#)
[Seymour, Gerald: *An Eye for an Eye*](#)
[*The Shadow of the Torturer*: Gene Wolfe](#)
[Sheckley, Robert: *Untouched by Human Hands*](#)
[Silverberg, Robert: *Lord Valentine's Castle*](#)
[*Siro*: David Ignatius](#)
[Sloan, James Park: *The Last Cold-War Cowboy*](#)
[Slusser, George E., editor: *Bridges to Science Fiction*](#)
[Smith, George O.: *The Complete Venus Equilateral*](#)
[Smith, Martin Cruz: *Nightwing*](#)
[Smith, Martin Cruz: *Polar Star*](#)

[Solar Wind: Peter Jones](#)
[Songs from the Stars: Norman Spinrad](#)
[Sorcerer's Son: Phyllis Eisenstein](#)
[Spinrad, Norman: Songs from the Stars](#)
[Spy Line: Len Deighton](#)
[Spy Sinker: Len Deighton](#)
[Star Driver: Lee Correy](#)
[Star Light: Hal Clement](#)
[Starship and Haiku: Somtow Sucharitkul](#)
[Stories: I. Yefremov](#)
[A Storm of Wings: M. John Harrison](#)
[The Story of Henri Tod: William Buckley](#)
[Strete, Craig: If All Else Fails...](#)
[Strugatsky, Arkady: Definitely Maybe](#)
[Strugatsky, Arkady: Far Rainbow; The Second Invasion from Mars](#)
[Strugatsky, Boris: Definitely Maybe](#)
[Strugatsky, Boris: Far Rainbow; The Second Invasion from Mars](#)
[Sucharitkul, Somtow: Starship and Haiku](#)
[Summers, Ian, editor: Tomorrow and Beyond](#)
[Susann, Jacqueline: Yargo](#)
[Sword Point: Harold Coyle](#)
[The Syndic: C.M. Kornbluth](#)

[Thai Horse: William Diehl](#)
[Thomas, Craig: Wildcat](#)
[Thompson, Steven L.: The Wild Blue](#)
[Timothy's Game: Lawrence Sanders](#)
[To Sail the Century Sea: G.C. Edmondson](#)
[Tomorrow and Beyond: Ian Summers, editor](#)
[Turner, Frederick: A Double Shadow](#)
[The Two of Them: Joanna Russ](#)

[Universe 9: Terry Carr, editor](#)
[Untouched by Human Hands: Robert Sheckley](#)

[Vestiges of Time: Richard C. Meredith](#)

["Walk to the World": Algis Budrys](#)
[Wandor's Flight: Roland Green](#)

[Well of Shiuan: C.J. Cherryh](#)
[Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang: Kate Wilhelm](#)
[Whirlwind: James Clavell](#)
[The Wild Blue: Walter J. Boyne and Steven L. Thompson](#)
[Wildcat: Craig Thomas](#)
[Wilhelm, Kate: Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang](#)
[Wilks, Mike: Pile](#)
[Wilson, Robert Anton: Schrödinger's Cat](#)
[Windows: D.G. Compton](#)
[Winter: Len Deighton](#)
[Wolfe, Gene: The Claw of the Conciliator](#)
[Wolfe, Gene: The Shadow of the Torturer](#)
[Wollheim, Donald A., editor: The 1979 Annual World's Best SF](#)
[Wollheim, Donald A., editor: The 1981 Annual World's Best SF](#)
[Wyvern: A.A. Attanasio](#)

[Yargo: Jacqueline Susann](#)
[Yefremov, I.: Stories](#)

[Zelazny, Roger: Changeling](#)
[Zelazny, Roger: Roadmarks](#)

The End

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Table of Contents

A Budrys Miscellany
Contents
Introduction David Langford
Dimensions Reviews
Special Review: I. Yefremov
Who Killed Science Fiction?
dubious
Chipping Gears
Why Is a Fan?
Notes on Storytelling
Mind Control Is []Good []Bad (Check One)
The Politics of Deoxyribonucleic Acid
Introduction: "Walk to the World"
SF Capsule Reviews 1978-1983
Michaelmas and Me
George R.R. Martin, Dark Harbinger
Pop Lit: Reviews
Tomorrow Speculative Fiction Editorials
On Cyril Kornbluth
A Man in Touch with Tomorrow
Appendix
The Butchery of Algis Budrys
The Logics of Mankind
Acknowledgements
Original Appearances
Index of Books and Authors Reviewed