

**the inside guide
to science fiction**

**The
Complete
Patchin
Review**

**edited by
Charles Platt**

The Complete Patchin Review

Edited by Charles Platt

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Introduction

Charles Platt

In 1970 I moved from my British homeland to New York City, where I worked as an editor for a couple of publishing houses and became acquainted with other editors and writers. I have always been interested in the process by which books come to exist, and I gradually realized that in science fiction, many aspects of the writing and publishing process were undergoing extreme changes. Fantasy had been introduced as a separate category, and *Star Wars* (the original movie) had redefined science fiction as a dumbed-down form of mass entertainment.

Some writers became best-sellers. Others hoped to emulate them, and were disappointed. Some new editors were not very well informed about the history and rationale for science fiction, yet were under pressure to find books that would sell hundreds of thousands of copies. Traditionally, a typical paperback original in the science-fiction field had sold maybe 20,000 or 30,000 copies, and had made just enough money to justify itself. Books of this type were now an endangered species.

Increasingly, I saw that editors were afraid to publish serious or experimental science fiction. A writer such as Philip K. Dick had broken into the field in the early 1960s writing short novels, each of which appeared as half of an Ace Double. A few years later, a writer such as Thomas M. Disch had imagined he could make a living writing serious literature such as *Camp Concentration*. I didn't think that either Disch or Dick would have been able to find a publisher if they had begun writing in 1980.

Because I lived in New York City, and knew all the editors, and also knew most of the writers in the United States and Britain, I felt I was in a position to publish a small magazine of commentary that would be frank about the changes that were occurring and could agitate against some of them. That was my intention in *The Patchin Review*. I also decided to have some fun by publishing a self-satirical gossip column. I hoped that people would buy the magazine for the gossip and then read the more serious features.

The name of *The Patchin Review* was derived from the address of my

apartment on Patchin Place, in New York's Greenwich Village. If you look up Patchin Place in Wikipedia, you'll see that it has a literary pedigree, having accommodated e.e. cummings and some other famous names, all of them much more serious than myself.

While most science-fiction fanzines are given away, *The Patchin Review* was free only to contributors, and then only one copy per person. There was no free list, even for editors, much to their astonishment. I figured that if the magazine had any value, people would pay for it – and they did. I sold 1,000 copies of each issue, through subscriptions and through science-fiction bookstores that used to exist then. The bookstores were horrified when I refused to accept returned unsold copies, but they got used to it. I paid contributors a small sum, and overall, the magazine broke even.

Right from the start, it caused endless trouble for me. The first issue contained a feature by Harlan Ellison that he had pretty much demanded to write for me. It was a fairly scurrilous attack on another writer, John Shirley. I wanted to give John the right of reply, but when I expressed that intention, Ellison demanded that I should return his article. “No,” I said. “I already bought it from you, and if I also want to publish something by John, I have every right to do so.” Ellison immediately threatened to seek an injunction against publication, thus ending an uneasy 10-year friendship. (In the end, John Shirley very kindly offered to postpone his reply to the second issue, so that Ellison wouldn't drag me into court.)

The gossip column angered some people, and alienated some of my friends. Ed Bryant's column had a similar effect on his friends. My thumbnail book reviews annoyed the publishers who sent me free review copies.

The worst incident occurred when I published a short feature under the byline “Sue Denim”. The writer Lew Shiner had used that pseudonym for some very nasty reviews (not in *Patchin Review*). Shiner made a habit of attacking writers and then meeting them socially, seeming to enjoy that they didn't know he was the one who had excoriated their work. The Sue Denim pseudonym was a closely guarded secret, till I found out about it. I loved the idea that someone else could use the pseudonym, and there would be nothing that Shiner could do about it.

I was taking a shower when the first angry phone call came through. I had a phone in the bathroom, so I could answer the call with water still running over my head. Lou Shiner was on the line (no surprise there) and he was not amused. “You're an asshole,” he said, and hung up. A few minutes

later Bruce Sterling called, while I was still in the rinsing process. “A writer’s name is his most sacred property!” Bruce screamed at me. “You have stolen it! If I ever find out that you wrote that piece as Sue Denim, our friendship is over!”

And so on. Incidentally, I am proud of the fact that no one ever learned the identities of any of the writers who appeared anonymously in *The Patchin Review*, or under pseudonyms.

The magazine was very effective at causing trouble, but didn’t seem to have much impact on the publishing business. All the editors read it, but they still continued to participate in what I regarded as the debasement of science fiction. So I ended the experiment.

From the point of view of production, *The Patchin Review* looks primitive now but was state-of-the-art at the time. I had written my own word-processing program for an Ohio Scientific C4P desktop computer (manufactured around the same time as the Apple II). The program was customized to drive a daisywheel printer. All columns were right-justified, and I took a lot of trouble to run text around illustrations. Each page was created on paper and reduced to two-thirds size by the printing company. Screened halftones were made photographically by a local imaging business. Bear in mind, desktop publishing did not exist at this time.

Looking back, it was a folly. But it was also a lot of fun, and if you browse through the gossip columns now, you can infer a fairly accurate picture of what the science-fiction publishing business was like from 1980 onward. A whole generation has disappeared since then, and I miss them. I also miss the editors such as David Hartwell and Donald Wollheim who made the field what it used to be.

Personally I gave up writing science fiction in the early 1990s. I became a senior writer for *Wired* magazine, which was much more lucrative and allowed me freedom that I had never really enjoyed as a fiction writer.

After I visited a Nebula Awards ceremony in 2016, I fantasized about restarting *The Patchin Review*. Clearly, there were a lot of new and tempting targets to write about, as the takeover of the field by women seeking reparations came to fruition. Even my own daughter was involved in efforts to make conventions “safe spaces”. But with old age comes laziness. I’m happy living in the Arizona wilderness, totally disconnected from the publishing industry. And maybe the publishing industry is happy that way too.

Charles Platt
June, 2019

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The Patchin Review is published approximately every two months.

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This first issue dedicated to Michael Moorcock, for old times' sake.

Editorial

Do we really need another little magazine about science fiction? Of course not; there are too many already. But I think we do need a journal which is more than “just another” little magazine – one which is authoritative (written by people who work in the field) and perhaps a little idealistic.

I see a particular need for idealism as an antidote to the ennui which

developed in the 1970s and has yet to leave us. Despite the increase in popularity of science fiction, few really important authors are emerging, and the promising names of the late 1960s (Zelazny, Moorcock, Disch, Aldiss, Ballard, Delany, Malzberg, Silverberg, et al) never did remake the field in their own image as it once seemed they might. For the most part we remain stuck with the old plots and adventure scenarios of the 1950s, plus a new, large helping of fantasy (some would say *too large* a helping).

Many of the science-fiction writers I know are very impressive people whose world-views and belief in the future seem truly important. They are by nature innovators; and yet few of them ever have the time, money, or confidence to explore the most challenging themes, take risks, and stretch themselves as writers. They tend to play safe, because, they say, editors won't accept anything too unusual.

Many of the editors I know are literate and imaginative people who claim that they really would like to publish innovative material. But they say they can't persuade their sales departments to push it into the bookstores, they doubt the bookstores will display it, and they doubt that the public will want to buy it. And so the editors become defeatist and the writers become cynical.

Meanwhile, each time I teach a science-fiction literature class at a local college I encounter readers who seem to want a break from predictable science-fiction adventures and fantasy sagas. My students are not necessarily representative of the mass-market audience, but they aren't unusually literate or "bookish", either (many of them are majoring in art). They actively enjoy, for instance, the idiosyncratic short stories of John Sladek (now in print only through the efforts of David Hartwell at Timescape Books) and the supposedly "difficult" novels of J.G. Ballard (now almost all out of print in America). Yes, I've always been biased toward this kind of writing myself; no, I don't expect the field to flourish on an exclusive diet of experimentalism. But there is so much predictable adventure, so little risk-taking and real creativity; and every semester I meet college students who are bored with the former and eager for the latter. Why, then, doesn't the publishing industry meet this potential demand?

It seems to me the problem is fundamentally a loss of faith in ourselves and our audience. Idealism is, after all, unfashionable these days. Rather naively, I hope that by acting as a forum for strong views and idealistic values this little magazine can help to ameliorate some of the cynicism which

is so pervasive, and even restore a little necessary faith. Those are the lofty aims of what is no doubt a self-indulgent and cliquish venture. I intend it to be some fun, too.

In this first issue Barry Malzberg writes about the current condition of science fiction, Harlan Ellison issues a challenge, “John Smith” complains of scientific sloppiness among writers, John Shirley names the overpraised and the indolent, and we have an editor’s outlook on greedy authors plus an ex-wife’s perspective on science-fiction husbands. There are also gossip and advice columns, both to become regular features.

Some of the contributors are hiding behind obviously false identities, to allow frank opinions without damaging friendships. It seems to me that frank opinions are essential if our field is to remain healthy; the alternative is to pay polite lip-service which can only lead to complacency and mediocre work. The real identity of any contributor who chooses to write as “Jane Doe” or “John Smith” is known only to me, incidentally, and no manuscript pages or written records are kept. All text is stored anonymously on computer disks.

Next issue will contain a lengthy, powerfully opinionated, and important article by Algis Budrys, a wry look at Hollywood by Alfred Bester, a strong reply from Thomas M. Disch to his critics, plus an “in-depth diatribe” against John Varley, a warning against the ominous growth of fantasy, and (I hope) a letter column. I am also expecting contributions from Edward Bryant and Janet Morris. I think this is an impressive lineup for any magazine, especially a small-press publication on a minuscule budget. If you’re not already a subscriber I hope you’ll send in \$12 for the next six issues.

The second *Patchin Review* will be printed at the end of August, in time for the world science fiction convention in Denver.

– Charles Platt

Barry Malzberg wanted to write about the “death of science fiction as we used to know it.” “That sounds a little, ah, negative, Barry,” I responded.

“How about something celebrating the birth of whatever you think has replaced it?” Ever obliging, he complied.

Con Sordino Barry N. Malzberg

My concern here is with the leading edge of science fiction: that which is

coming into the field and which has not been seen here before. The leading edge of the 1980s is action-packed, as they say, and without a detectable position; Lords and Snow Queens voyage in pursuit of the lost castle while, on the other side of the planet, sexes and social roles are surgically implanted; the hotline keeps communications with the universe at a low-key level while the voyagers can stop in Callahan's franchises along the way, swap a few drinks and lies; out there on the further world snake charmers practice a romantic kind of medicine; and so on. It is a distance from the drowned landscapes and bombed-out craters of the late sixties, the gleaming machines and obliterated souls. Even Asimovian protagonists of a decade ago had nervous tics and a sullen intimation that, despite technological access, matters were not working terribly well, but the Snow Queen and Valentine have no such problem. Sexes can be traded in like wardrobes and time and again the Magic Snake, rising, enacts its will.

"The leading edge of the future is the non-voting electorate," one might now say, and this is not necessarily without merit. Two decades of opinion have, after all, led us to the edge of the pit where, blinking, we decided we did not like the contents very much at all. "He's published half a million words," someone I know said of a major figure of the late seventies, "and I don't know how he feels about a single thing; I don't know what his position is. This is not good writing or important writing." And yet J.D. Salinger, for instance, has published upward (barely) of half a million words, is a major figure and might well deserve the same comment.

What interests me more than its possible merits is how much science fiction's Unvoicing of the eighties might be ascribed to evolution or devolution of the genre itself, and how much could be said to have been imposed from without by editorial or market forces. Certainly forties science fiction, in which the leading edge indicated that technology would either take over the world or do it in, can be seen as a response to or a reaction against the vision of a single man, John W. Campbell. In the fifties H.L. Gold, Fred Pohl, Anthony Boucher and a few others began to solicit and propound a science fiction of satire and doom; in the sixties Michael Moorcock and Harlan Ellison, by pressuring for and proclaiming a literature of catastrophe, got a great deal of it. Science fiction is an insular field; throughout its American history it has always been possible for one powerfully placed editor to wreak change, within a short time and for the short term, simply through buying one kind of story and rejecting another. The group of editors

who have moved to the center of science fiction publishing in the period beginning in 1975 are no exception. (Science fiction is no longer a magazine field, a point which I trust does not have to be argued here.) Most of these editors (not all) have little reading background in science fiction prior to the assumption of their posts, and none of them has ever written it. (The central editors of previous decades were all writers or people who had at least attempted to write in the field.) For many of them (again, not all) science fiction editing is a way station, an apprentice position on the way to editing something – anything – other than science fiction. They regard the field as a kind of minor league of American literature: its players may be trapped in unheated locker rooms but the managers, whose future is not as closely linked to their skills, can hope to move on. One way to move on is to win the pennant, of course; but that is risky and often impossible on a low team budget. A more assured way is by not making trouble.

Not making trouble. Conglomeratization: that these editors work for minor implements of publishing companies which are themselves minor parts of conglomerates is a point that has been made often, and probably the Conglomeratization of publishing will continue to have a numbing effect upon most work that does not fit neatly into the balance sheet. “Literary” work, that is to say, or work of political or social controversy.

It is less a question of censorship than of self-censorship. Possessing only a marginal understanding of science fiction and only a superficial grasp of its history, contemporary editors, publishing what looks to them like science fiction, impose a view which is necessarily parochial and, granted the nature of Conglomeratization, not without fear. “Most science fiction editors seem mostly to seek the assurance that they are doing nothing wrong,” Samuel R. Delany writes in *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw*, “and since I cannot grant them this assurance I stay away from most of them.”

The nature of professionalism is adaptation, and there is no denying that a clever and talented writer can produce work of consequence even under the severest strictures. One need only reflect for a moment upon the careers of Gogol or Gunter Grass. Still, it is all very wearying, and energy that might be expended in more ambitious directions is merely applied to the detail work: Castles and Queens and Hotlines can be depicted lovingly; snakes (outside of the Book of Genesis) are not political. One must go where the market is; in previous decades it was possible for a certain kind of science fiction writer to create his own market, but science fiction was then something of an outlaw. It

is now a minor subdivision of Pillage and Homogenize, Inc., presided over in almost all cases by the same group of people.

One could find all of this reasonably discouraging, and perhaps I do, but Queens and Castle are reaching an audience much larger than all of the work of the previous thirty years in toto and audiences are not contemptible to any of us; never were. That all of the Queens and Castles reek of fantasy, that the lines between science fiction and fantasy are being rapidly obliterated, and that the leading edge is moving away from science fiction as it evolved for half a century, is more distressing; but that is the topic for another screed in a different time. It is the fibrillating heart of science fiction itself to which I would like to administer CPR had I but the wit, the cunning, and the cool refusal to panic.

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A writers' "gunfight", with Remingtons at 3,000 miles? Just another Harlan Ellison stunt, you say. But in this discussion of competitiveness, posterity, and ambition, Harlan makes it clear that the profound implications far outweigh the obvious humor and ironies in his "High Noon" challenge.

A Punk Is Not a Pistolero **Harlan Ellison**

As the hands of the clock in the belltower close toward the missionary position at high noon....

As I stand, shorter than Gary Cooper, in the center of the trailtown street....

As the peachfuzz kid with the fast gun stalks toward me from the O.K. Corral....

As the years of hard work drain their weight into my trembling gun hand....

I remember a line he wrote me in 1979. "I saw the eclipse at a replica of Stonehenge & thought I saw you materialize in the shadow of a monolith."

Now, puffed up like a banjo player who had a big breakfast, he comes for me: to gun me down. Three novels, some short stories, and a few songs in his saddlebags, he looks to make his rep by facing-off the weary, toothless pistolero; the gunslinger past his prime. "You sorrowful old codger," he has written. "You remind me of a starveling, senile, slathering dog who bites the

hand that tries to succor it. ...You are certainly no literary luminary to be cozened up to. You are a fairly decent secondclass writer (most of the time, with a few flashes of 1st class stuff) who has written a couple of highly functional metaphors that will last. That is the best I can say about you – and I said it to comfort you. Death licks your ear.”

I have heard he writes in a style that sometimes echoes my own. I wouldn't know. I haven't read his work. I've been too busy tending my own field. But he apparently wants me down in the dusty street, down on my face at his feet.

“I'm a born rocker,” he has written. “You are the imitation. I am the real thing.” I don't understand how, having begun to work twenty years before his first story was published, *he* could have taught *me* everything I know. Perhaps it is the essence of “Dada sanity”, of which he has also written.

I always said that when the moment came, when I couldn't write something new and original and worth reading, that I wouldn't be as self-deluded as so many others I'd grown up reading; those who had stayed on past their time. I'd often said that I hoped when the darkness pressed in that I wouldn't be so desensitized by success or the empty praise of readers easily pleased, that I wouldn't know I was played out. I'd said it, and meant it: that I hoped someone who loved me would tell me gently but persuasively that it was braver to close the cover on the machine and spend the twilight years collecting pewter figurines.

The tragic sight of men and women who had spent their best years and best work speaking to a tiny audience (that was neither demanding enough nor bright enough to recognize their genius) was a constant reminder to me that one day the stream dries up for all of us. Mario Vargas Llosa had come to the realization that he had said everything he could say, and he had stopped writing. But in the world of science fiction, where too many seminal years had been spent writing for a penny a word, success had come to many of the “giants” long after their song had been one freshly sung. Yet as literary zombies, creatively no more than the walking dead, they live on; writing fat and moneymaking books that are nothing more than short stories pumped full of hot air. I didn't want to present that sort of bearbaiting spectacle. I'd never thought that after only twenty-five years the moment would come so unexpectedly. But here I stand in the dusty street, waiting for the kid in the cowboy suit to come and gun me down. And I wonder: is he right? Am I all done? Or is he merely full of shit up to his strabismic eyeballs?



Meaningful interludes. Random minutiae, scattered paradigms. Arguing from the obscure to the specific.

Wilfred Sheed, speaking of Hemingway's inescapably adolescent need to "beat dead men at what they have done", observed:

"To put it one way, he was forever weighing and counting his fish. He was not just competitive, but competitive in a sporting context, where there had to be winners and losers in every single event. Thus in later years, instead of being content like most writers to be

one of a kind, Hemingway had to *beat* some particular opponent with each book. The claptrap about climbing into the ring with Tolstoy started early and stayed late. The bigger he got, the bigger his opponents had to be, until one pictures him barging around Olympus, as he barged around saloons, demanding a fistfight with the toughest guy in the house.”

From a letter to Faulkner from E.H. in 1947:

“You should always write your best against dead writers ... and beat them one by one. Why do you want to fight Dostoevsky in your first fight? Beat Turgenev – which we both did soundly. Then nail yourself de Maupassant (still dangerous for three rounds). Then try to take Stendhal. You and I can both beat Flaubert who is our most respected, honored master.”

Sheed concludes his absolutely on-target analysis of this tragic and ultimately destructive syndrome with the following judgment: “By the end, old Hem was sending, to friends who presumably hadn’t asked, his daily weight and blood pressure totals – as if he expected them to send back Tolstoy’s. To the end he was weighing in for the great bout where the winner would take all and he could finally quit fighting, with no more Papas to kill.”

This is an assumption, but I think it’s historically valid (and Algis Budrys will correct me if I’m off the mark): because of the pulp magazine antecedents of science fiction, for a writer prior to, oh, say for the sake of convenience, 1950 to ruminde openly about a concern for posterity’s view of his/her work, was to risk naked derision from his/her contemporaries.

Derision? Hell, it was to let oneself in for a judgment by one’s peers most politely phrased as *pompous ass*. Poul Anderson once made a remark about what we did, as writing for “beer money”. (Poul has been unfairly chastised for that remark. He never intended to say that what we wrote was low-quality garbage that was meant to compete on the level of, say, Sidney Sheldon or Judith Krantz offal. What he meant was that in a nation where reading is considered an elitist activity, we were vying for the pocket money the masses might more readily spend for beer or Pringles. That’s quite a different interpretation from the twisted one laid on Poul’s words. Yet the twisted version is the one that, in fact, a majority of pre-1950 science-fiction writers accepted in their secret hearts.)

I think what Poul meant was that we had to write so damned well that

the masses would consider our fables of futurity more necessary, more pleasurable, more important to their well-being than beer or Pringles. But because of the “beer money” philosophy, most writers pre-1950 had to denigrate themselves as no more than humble shitkickers in the fields of literature. Once, when I was just getting started, I made the error of saying to Lester del Rey, off whom I was mooching room and board, that I wanted to be remembered for my work as James Joyce was remembered. I was very young. I should have known better.

Lester made some fun of me. He didn’t do it out of malice, that’s for certain. He did it, I guess, because he had affection for me and genuinely wanted my road to be smoother than his had been. And he wanted to flense from my mind all that artsy-craftsy folderol about prestige and posterity and Art. Tell the story, he advised me; just tell the story well; and don’t get above your station, kid.

It’s probably what was said to Stanley G. Weinbaum, who also had some elevated dreams about being read seriously a hundred years after he was gone. So he wrote his silly little tales of aliens and spaceships that, despite himself and the good advice he had been given, managed to transcend the genre and bought for themselves in the dearest coin imaginable a slim chance for prolonged critical attention.

The only one who didn’t snigger at the Ellisonian reach far exceeding the grasp, was Budrys. But that’s another story.

And (again, he’ll correct me if I misremember) Budrys laid on me – for the first time – a perception that I was to validate many times through personal experience in the twenty-six years of writing that have followed. It is this:

In a field of creative endeavor that has stridently announced its obsession with “ideas” as a credential for its being taken seriously, there has *always* been a strong, a dichotomous, a crippling anti-intellectual prejudice. The paranoia that many of us manifest at the attentions of academia (and the hypocritical, frequently obsequious manner in which many lurch after such attention) is a hand-me-down of that bias. To this day, if one were to approach, say, Lester for an appraisal of the value to a young writer of widespread familiarity with “fine” writing, or craft workshops of the Clarion sort ... one would hear a catechized denunciation, an Olympian poo-pooing probably no different from the ones I sat through in Red Bank, New Jersey in 1954.

(Which is not to say that I find Leslie Fiedler's admiration for Doris Lessing's serene and vapid "science fiction novels" a proper response to the anti-intellectual bias of the Lesters in the coterie.)

But again, that's another story. One written about at length by Tom Disch, who codifies it far better than I.

Sometime between writing "March of the Yellow Death" for Paul Fairman and Cele Goldsmith at *Fantastic*, in 1957, for a fast \$65, at a penny a word ... and last week when *Omni* paid me two grand for the 4750 words comprising "On the Slab" ... I came full circle. The resurgence of the dream (that one should write to buy oneself a cushy spot on the cloud where the Famous Writers wait for a postage stamp to be issued bearing their likeness) manifested itself, likely closer to 1957 than last week. But the risk of being called a *pompous ass* is only slightly less than on one of those nights in Red Bank ... despite the cruel examples so prominently before us.

Bob Heinlein makes half a million for a book that on his slowest day he would have thrown across the room with contempt.

Alfie Bester recycles a brilliant short story as a spavined novel and despite having written two acknowledged classics still gets the kind of promotion Simon & Schuster reserves for first novelists, which is to say none at all.

Phil Farmer, after working like a pack mule for thirty years, having been ripped off by scumbags unfit to empty his chamberpot, finally gets a nod from *Time* and finds himself at age sixty-three belatedly reaping the bucks, the audience, and the critical notice that would have made his thirties, forties, and fifties less a sentence of unending, unappreciated labor.

Jim Schmitz dropped dead the other day, having wasted a noticeable talent in this crackerbox genre, deluding himself that he was writing and rewriting the same story for his two-bit *Astounding* readership because he was privileged and happy to be communicating with those who adored him. Yeah, adored him to death.

And a month or so ago I sat in a dining room at the Waldorf-Astoria and watched the best of us all, Fritz Leiber, dear old Fritz Leiber, on whom – as far as I'm concerned – the sun rises and sets, talented and tenacious Fritz Leiber, walk slowly to the speaker's table to accept a chunk of Lucite with a rock embedded in it. Now that may not seem tragic to you, and I swear to God I'm not trying to diminish an iota of Fritz's pleasure at receiving it, or SFWA's honor in presenting it, but I damn near cried (and the woman to my

left at the table *did* cry) because that man should have been getting a Nobel for literature, as far as I'm concerned, not some chunk of unhockable plastic from a company of killers whose predecessors and offspring had kept him gulled and trapped in a marketing category insalubriously tagged "sci-fi". The Surgeon-General has determined that prolonged association with the nonsense syllables *sci* and *fi* will cause irreparable damage to one's standing in the world of literature.

And Fritz Leiber, who could go twenty rounds with Poe or Machen or Dahl or any other fantasist logged forever in the big books of special words taught in every university, Fritz Leiber does not receive a properly respectful interviewer from *The Paris Review*; nor does Knopf or Viking issue *The Essential Leiber* as its Christmas special; nor does the National Historical Society put up a plaque at any of the tiny apartments in which he has spent his days and nights in San Francisco.

No one can convince me that the mind that conceived *Our Lady of Darkness* and *Conjure Wife* has not dreamed of posterity.

I saw tragedy that night.

But my resolve grew stronger. The reach will continue to exceed the grasp. No matter how much fun is made of "the non-science-fiction writer, Harlan Ellison". It was a cruel and distasteful Nebula Awards banquet. Sitting there hearing in the low-energy ridicule the echoes of Red Bank nights and the admonition "don't get above your station, boy".

The inmates of the Gulag despise those among their number who dream of flying.

I dream of posterity and hope I've got another thirty years to get good enough to sit in Fritz Leiber's shadow. The peachfuzz kid in the cowboy suit, who wants me face-down in the dust, lusts after the big gundown. To take on Ellison as insecure old Hem wanted to take on Tolstoy. Reminds me of an anecdote.

Once upon a time I attended a science-fiction convention at which a "surprise" had been planned for me. It was to be a nasty surprise.

A group of fans and professionals who thought I was above my station enlisted the services of a young woman famed far and wide as a great wit and conversational assassin. They pumped her full of myth and mystery about my alleged razor tongue and my legendary rottenness. They set her up for a big gundown in a public place.

When I emerged from the elevator into the jammed penthouse ballroom

I found the crowd parting to form an aisle. I walked down that aisle with trepidation, knowing something was wrong but unaware of how I'd been set up (as I was set up at the recent Nebula banquet).

At the end of the aisle stood the young woman, waiting for me; buttressed by the fans and professionals who had hired her for the gundown.

I stopped in front of her, having no idea whom she might be. "I hear you're supposed to have a rapier wit," she said to me. No hello, no amenities, simply right to work.

And before I could reply, she hit me with twenty-six smartass one-liners. I stared at her without speaking. She stared back expectantly, gathering her reserves for ripostes, no matter what I might say. The crowd also waited and watched, glistening with malicious pleasure. I said nothing.

So she got off another twenty-six fast shots, crueller and sharper than the first. I shrugged, smiled, turned, and walked away.

The interchange that followed I did not hear. It was reported to me later.

"I thought he was supposed to be such a hotshot with an insult," she said, bewildered. "Why didn't he say anything?"

"Because," Bill Rotsler is reported to have said, "when you're the fastest gun in town ... you don't pull against plowboys."

The kid in the cowboy suit is named John Shirley. He is the author of three books already published: *Three-Ring Psychus* (Zebra, 1980), *City Come A-Walkin'* (Dell, 1980), and *The Brigade* (Avon, 1981).

He was a student of mine at the Clarion workshop, 1972 or 1973, I can't remember which. I made the grievous error of praising him all out of proportion to his ability to handle such approbation before he had even sold his first story. It chanced that he thereafter submitted work to *The Last Dangerous Visions*; stories I rejected. A number of times.

The opposite of love is not hate; it is indifference.

John Shirley writes me hateful letters. He also has taken every opportunity over the past few years to assault me and my work in any forum to which he has gained momentary access.

Apparently, I am not the only writer currently working for whom John Shirley has displayed an unprovoked animosity. Like the banjo player who had a big breakfast, he has been blowing off in many directions. When he lived in Oregon no one really cared; he was out of the way and the most that was wished for him was that he might outgrow his emotional problems and begin to write the sort of work many of us thought he had in him.

But now he is in New York, and he is threatening people. He talks of death quite a lot. It is as if he hungers for it; for himself. But he threatens other people with it. “I’ve been close enough to Death to dance cheek to cheek with her four times,” he has written to me. And he goes on to say, “I’ve trained for years, and wondered why – I scarcely have had to use it. Perhaps this is what I’ve trained for. Come ahead, man. Jump me at a party or something. Attack me, take a punch. If you do it, I’ll tear your arm off your shoulder and stuff it up your ass. I’m telling you that cold sober. You are the imitation. I am the real thing.”

If I were grading his letter as I would a short story, I’d have to charge some points off because of the redundancy: from where else *but* off the shoulder could one rip an arm?

Yet what a splendid litmus test John Shirley becomes for me. I, who dream of posterity, and wonder if the moment has arrived to order the Schmid and the Hudson pewter catalogues.

John Shirley, from whose outfit I can tell is a cowboy, wants to pull against me. He is a born rocker, imbued with Dada sanity. He has said so. I am taller than Alan Ladd as Shane, but shorter than Gary Cooper as Sheriff Will Kane. The naked eye can see it’s so. In the background can be heard the strains of Dmitri Tiomkin; do not forsake me, oh my darling....

So perhaps the moment has come.

Let us both demonstrate bravery. Not the sorry *machismo* of arms torn out and inserted ... I admit I am just *terrified* of John Shirley’s warnings of his martial-arts abilities. I would turn and run from danger, as I have so often in the past.

But a punk is not a pistolero, so I will give John Shirley his heart’s desire. I will step out into the dusty street with him at high noon, and I will pull against him.

He can choose the time and the place. I will choose the weapons.

And here is the form of it. We will do what each of us says he can do better than the other. We will write.

No singing, no rock ‘n’ rolling, no banjo breakfast blowoffs of hot-air threats. We will use the weapons we know best. Let John Shirley pick the vernacular of the story, the idiom, the genre, the length (something handy, I pray you; neither of us has the time to waste doing a novel merely to show the other up). Let him pick the time allowed to get it written. And let the editor of *The Patchin Review* select a panel of judges whose credentials are

unassailable – even if they’re friends of the kid in the cowboy suit – and when we’ve both done the best we can ... let them pick the faster gun. Let them say if John Shirley is correct, that a fairly decent secondclass writer with a couple of highly functional metaphors ought to close the cover on the machine and turn the battle over to one who is the real thing.

There is no backing away from this. I want to know. I’ve always wanted to know. And now maybe I’ll find out. At least in a way that is valid to the moment I write the last line of the story. (Of course, five minutes later I’ll begin wondering again. But at least I’ll have five minutes of peace of mind.)

And in exchange for risking John Shirley’s attenuated sense of worthiness, his trembling sense of self-esteem, I will confer on him the scintillant notoriety, the attention he seems to want more than respect or earned honors. Here is the form of the shootout, simple and direct. I won’t even contest the judges. Not necessary ... two from my camp and two from his, with an impartial fifth to break ties.

I am prepared to risk all, pompous ass that I must be, to learn what I need to know. John Shirley has ridden into town and called me out. Not once, but many times. I am, at last, ready to go against him. The old, toothless dog against the real thing.

I stand here in the dusty street waiting for the born rocker in the cowboy suit to tear my arm off my shoulder and to stuff it up my ass. Or to wipe the egg off his typewriter.

And all that leads me to believe I might have a chance is my conviction that a punk is not, and never has been, a pistolero.

Check.

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Editor’s note: John Shirley will reply at length next issue.

Moments of Truth

Once in a while an author will unintentionally reveal his or her true self. It can be in a careless phrase which exposes the author’s prejudices, or a paragraph which perfectly captures bad habits of style. An example of each kind of “moment of truth” is given below.

If you find a quote that seems to fit, send us a photocopy of it.

We'll pay \$5 for each one used.

The Yellow Peril in Space!

“One must point out that there are social characteristics of many basically militant Oriental cultures that would make their people optimum space settlers, characteristics such as the ability to live in high-density quarters with little or no privacy, subjugation of the individual to the group ... and unquestioning willingness – to follow the directives of authority figures. The military in these cultures now lies barely beneath the surface of the culture, hidden from recent conquerors in some cases.” – G. Harry Stine in “Defending the Third Industrial Revolution”, *Destinies* vol.1 no.3.

The Art of Dramatic Repetition;

Or, How to Write Very, Very Long Books

“She looked upon him. Never before in her life had she seen such a male. He made even Gunther seem a lesser man. Her imagination had not even dreamed that such a man could exist. The men she had known earlier, even Gunther, had been no intimation that there might be males such as these. Such men, she thought, could not exist in her time. In her time there was no place; there could be no place, for such men as these.” – John Norman, in *Time Slave*.

For years young science-fiction writers have had no one to turn to for guidance and solace. Now relief is at hand, in the form of Cousin Clara. Are you a new writer in distress? Cousin Clara awaits your plea for help. Strict confidentiality is assured.

Advice to the Alienated from Cousin Clara

Dear “Troubled Misanthrope”, Texas:

So you are considering attending a science fiction writing workshop, and you want to know what to expect. My dear, as always I am *more* than willing to advise you.

Was it James Blish or Lester del Rey who described the “new wave” in science fiction as pseudo-intellectual masturbation, back in the 1960s? I

ought to be able to remember, because one of these men is now dead and the other isn't – at least, not quite. But anyway: to visualize a writing workshop, merely extend the masturbatory metaphor and think of the event as a group of introverted exhibitionists in dirty raincoats, exposing themselves to each other and commenting “objectively” on technique and genital development.

No doubt you are wondering, poor Troubled Misanthrope, whether this is a Good Thing. Perhaps you doubt that it will be worthwhile to have your work ruthlessly condemned by colleagues who may be even less literate than you are. Silly boy! The results speak for themselves: every year large numbers of talented young authors leave science fiction writing workshops so disoriented and disillusioned that they give up writing altogether and become bank clerks or computer programmers. At a time when there are already too many writers competing in the limited science fiction market we must applaud any effort to discourage the upstarts and divert them into occupations of more tangible value to society.

What, you may ask, are the potent methods used by writing workshops to produce such remarkable results? Two main techniques are involved: the Nitpicking Offensive and the Plausibility Challenge.

The Nitpicking Offensive focuses strictly on the component parts of a story – individual sentences or, if possible, individual words. Grammar, syntax, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, pertinence metaphors, dialect, qualifiers, modifiers, participial phrasing capitalization, hyphenation, margin width, and page numbering are just a few targets of the offensive. For example, the man who organized a conference which I attended condemned my phrase “the slender fingers of her hands” as being *redundant*; because, after all, where else do you find fingers but attached to hands? The nitpicking offensive may seem trivial at first, but its effects are cumulative, piling detail upon detail until it seems that every line in the story has been examined and found defective.

The Plausibility Challenge ignores the way the work is written. Instead, it concentrates on factual accuracy. For example, as another member pointed out, the alien culture I had invented, dwelling on a light-gravity planet, could not possess a high level of technology ... because theories of planetary evolution hold that such a world would be short of metal ore deposits. These and other details in my story were *factually incorrect*. They could not exist in reality. And therefore, regardless of my story's intentions, it was invalid.

Harsh criticism indeed! Is there no mercy? Well, sometimes kindness is

used in dealing with older members who are too lovable or too feeble to be subjected to the full treatment. And of course comments may be modified according to friendships, animosity, romantic liaisons, and levels of intoxication within the group.

Have writing workshops made an impact on the science fiction field, since Damon Knight started holding them at Milford in the 1960s? One need only count the hordes of internationally famous authors who have emerged from such events, or examine the standards of literary excellence that have prevailed in science fiction during the last fifteen years, for the answer to become self-evident.



*Cousin Clara experiences her first
Milford conference*

Hyperdrives, force-fields, time travel – we tolerate these impossibilities when they're used to good storytelling effect. Should we be so tolerant of

pseudoscience and the carelessness it implies?

Post STS-1 Fiction

John Smith

John Young, having landed within 3,000 feet of perfection, got out of STS-1 Columbia and, as soon as he was given a microphone, announced that we, the human race, are on our way to the stars. Are you ready? Our fiction isn't. So-called science fiction, in the last decade, has deteriorated right along with our national will and our technological self-confidence, while science and technology and the conceptual sophistication underlying their advances have progressed exponentially.

Science is no longer dependably static. Scientific literacy no longer depends on a rote memorization of facts declared to be true, but on the ability to overview, while remaining uncommitted to, an ever-increasing number of rival theories claiming special relevance and demonstrable connectedness with the observable phenomena of the physical world.

Science has returned to the old ethic, or rediscovered it:

Question; innovate; evaluate: this is the order of the day. Sociobiology and genetics swallow sociology, psychology, and multitudinous other ologies; systems sciences and catastrophe mathematics invade a multitude of disciplines; everywhere, synthesis abounds and factual data yesterday considered unimpeachable are either reevaluated or discarded altogether.

Science fiction has not kept pace with this shift of emphasis from a classical mentality to a theoretical mentality. Science fiction's primary value should be that of turning the mind outward toward currently unrealizable concepts by exposing the imagination to important theoretical premises which as yet cannot be substantiated by experimentation. Making the impossible possible is science's job, yet the fiction which should accompany the technology is locked in its own relativistic prison of frozen passage, where only yesterday's truths apply and tomorrow must bend to suit the empirical determinations of a fast-receding past. Ursula Le Guin, in a recent issue of *The Writer*, quoted Samuel Delany's Law that maintains (so she says) that science fiction must not contradict anything that is true. This amazing statement assumes that truth is fixed in space, impervious to time, and that science is a compendium of absolute statements that are canonized into inviolability by the mere fact that some group at some time can manage

to get its work generally accepted as being the best description to date of some facet of the natural order – for this last is all that science purports to be. Science is continually metamorphosing.

Science fiction, on the other hand, is ossifying, caught between those hardware fanatics who demand that what they learned in highschool still holds true, and those who look with alarm at the human condition and say, “Technology is a traitor; here is how it shall be proven that we have been betrayed.”

Nothing I have read in the last ten years has avoided both of these pitfalls. Interaction with the science fiction community has introduced me not to the forward looking, speculative thinkers I had expected to find, but to the most closed-minded of folk, sure that there is no room in any spacetime manifold for precognition or telepathy, equally certain that tachyons, the evidence for which is overwhelmingly negative, are just fine for whatever you’d like to do with them, despite the likelihood that the conditions necessary to allow them to exist preclude their existence here and now – that is, in the good old timelike reality which we mortals inhabit, where everything is free to travel in three dimensions in space but where time is a one way street. The tachyon proliferation in science fiction (the only place for them in our native spacetime) is a good example of the reduction of imaginative use of concepts to numbing, mumbling mimicry of science fiction writers by other science fiction writers.... In the beginning, tachyons looked interesting, even promising. So did Feynman’s experimental proof that a positron is just a time-reversed electron with a coupled γ ray.... We are more likely to find tachyons, it seems, than we are to find writers of speculative fiction who can both write fiction and preserve the unbiased experimental attitude that once was science fiction’s most valuable attribute. I call for a return to experimental concepts and their implementation in the reintroduction of science into science fiction, and an end to the internal conservatism in our field which rivals that of Galileo’s sanctimonious inquisitors.

It is said that the line between science fiction and fantasy is becoming irremediably blurred. I for one would rather read good, imaginative fantasy with well-realized characters than bad, stale science fiction purveying ideas that were old when science fiction was young, written by people whose sole exposure to and familiarity with the scientific method and its modern permutations has been provided by other science fiction writers. Let us

follow the leaders, not the followers – admit that many laws which once seemed certain no longer seem so certain: entropy is reversed in evolving systems: we can proceed only forward into areas of increasingly greater organizational complexity. Let us agree that the permutations of real spacetimes are manifold, indeterminate, and that all the wonders a mind can imagine are doubtless contained within the universes we are just beginning to explore. And do let us explore them.

Locus magazine, the “newspaper of the science fiction field”, clearly considers some science-fiction gossip unfit to print. Too bad; a vigorous field should thrive on rumor and innuendo. So herewith I introduce Miss Gabby Snitch, maiden of mystery, eager to reveal all.

Tales to Astonish by Gabby Snitch

Greetings, dears, and welcome to my very own little gossip column, filling you in on the mysterious doings of those lovable extraterrestrials, the weird but wonderful folk who write and edit your fave fiction!

By now you’ve probably heard about cherubic NORM SPINRAD’s inebriated performance at the Nebula Awards banquet in New York this April. “Not only the most boring, but also the most offensive awards dinner I ever attended,” was how one usually mild-mannered editress described it to me. “Even Greg Benford’s 73-year-old mother would have had to go out and smoke dope during that,” opined Timescape Books’ veteran conventioneer DAVE HARTWELL.

After a \$35-a-plate dinner of recycled roast beef and second-hand vegetables, Norm, in his “green armchair” velvet suit, lugubriously introduced “futurologist” BARBARA HUBBARD, who started her 45-minute speech by comparing the Nebula fest to a Star Trek convention, then claimed the moral majority have an intuitive grasp of the future which we cannot afford to ignore. Led by FREDERIK POHL and GEORGE SCITHERS, more than forty of the audience walked out in boredom and disgust! Subsequent speakers MARVIN MINSKY and MARC CHARTRAND did little to lighten the mood, and then Norman went into his old mudslinging routine with HARLAN ELLISON, who prefaced *his* speech by insulting the audience (“I cannot tell you with what loathing I stand here

... many of you ought to go into bricklaying”) and claimed he had only been invited by Spinrad as a joke at the expense of the SFWA membership.

When I asked Spinrad afterward how he reacted to complaints that the speeches had gone on too long, he responded, “Half way through the ceremony I realized I had to take a piss. Outside of that I thought the timing was perfect.” Wonderful, Norm!

Later I encountered GREGORY BENFORD and asked him how it felt to win the Nebula Award for his novel *Timescape*. “I was the most humble person in the room,” he told me. “And I’m proud of the fact.” – Whatever *that* means!

On a more positive note, congratulations were in order for lovely JOAN VINGE, now expecting a Vingelet with husband JIM FRENKEL, late of Dell. Did Joan object to having her news broadcast over the banquet PA system? She told me she thought it was “a bit tacky”, but she holds no grudge.

I circulated at the usual post-banquet party, and met BOB SHECKLEY, who laughed when I asked him for gossip and commented “I’m more in a position to be gossiped *about*”, no doubt referring to rumors of his recent liaison with author JOHN SHIRLEY’s ex JAY ROTHBELL, whose first story recently sold to *Twilight Zone* magazine.

Moving right along, I encountered adorable ADELLE LEONE, one-time Jove Books editor turned literary agent. Was she having fun? “It’s all so exciting I can hardly control myself,” she said, rolling her eyes. “And if you print that I will sue you!” When I pressed her for hot news she shyly revealed that she’d just gotten NICK YERMAKOV a contract to write two *Battlestar Galactica* novels. Congrats, Adelle!

Also at the party was BEN BOVA, with his wife BARBARA trying unsuccessfully to smooth over harsh words between Ben and HARLAN ELLISON, who I hear refused to appear on the same New York radio show as Ben a day or two earlier. Some people are wondering if Harlan’s success as a media personality has gone to his head! (All three TV networks, plus *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*, reported his bookstore window appearance at B. Dalton on Fifth Avenue a few days before the Nebula event.)

By midnight many guests were behaving offensively, among them FRED POHL, HARRY HARRISON, and TED COGSWELL loudly singing “Deutschland Uber Alles” (to the confusion of a visiting German literary

agent); and my own editor, CHARLES PLATT, who embarrassed acquaintances at the Berkley banquet table when he threw a serving of mousse at his companion, vivacious *Omni* assistant LESLIE EPSTEIN. Platt's behavior was restrained, however, compared to that of two well-known authors (married and old enough to know better!) who kept trying to unzip the zippers of charismatic JANET MORRIS's svelte silver jump suit. I was shocked!

Of the few sober and respectable guests, *Ghost Story* author PETER STRAUB told me he's currently working on *Floating Dragon*, a new novel set in his home town of Westport. And New York's most eligible sci-fi personality, millionaire literary agent KIRBY McCAULEY, revealed to me that BOB SILVERBERG has a follow-up to *Lord Valentine's Castle* in the works: titled *The Majipoor Chronicles*, it'll be about 100,000 words, to be published by Arbor House. Just what the world needs!

Turning from the New York scene to Denver, I hear that unknown author JEFF DUNTEMANN has stirred up angry discontent by getting not one but *two* of his short stories nominated for a Hugo (forcing Denver's own EDWARD BRYANT off the ballot in the process). It just goes to show that it doesn't matter how many readers you have – what counts is how many paid-up *friends* you have. The Worldcon committee aren't happy about the situation, but what can they do? And speaking of Awards Scandals – can it really be true that pugnacious JERRY POURNELLE plans to include a DONALD KINGSBURY novella in the Nebula Awards anthology, even though Kingsbury wasn't even nominated for anything?

Looking overseas to England, my sources report hard times all around, with *Embedding* author IAN WATSON on welfare, and former accountant CHRISTOPHER PRIEST marrying authoress LISA TUTTLE for tax reasons. Isn't it amazing what people will do when they're desperate enough!

That's all this time, dears – but remember, I pay a flat fee of \$5 per gossip item, so if you hear a titillating tidbit, do send it to me *c/o The Patchin Review*. Oh – for those of you who'd like to keep things *dark*, I have a further offer: for \$10 I promise to *suppress* any news item that's too embarrassing! Loose lips sink spaceships!

Love, Gabby

John Shirley suffers from a dangerous mixture of ambition and idealism. Ambition leads him to write books and sing in his own band (recently signed

to a French record label). Idealism prompts him to write articles such as this.

A Refuge for the Indolent John Shirley

The science fiction field is in dire need of higher, tougher standards. The overall quality of the prose has declined since the mid-1970s, while laziness and self-indulgence on the part of many authors has been rewarded: Barry Longyear won three awards in 1980 while Thomas Disch, a brilliantly inventive, witty, and stylistically lucid writer, received only one (and a minor one, at that, for his novel *On Wings of Song*). Longyear is a sloppy one-draft writer whose ideas are far from fresh (the notion for his award-winning short story “Enemy Mine” was ripped from “Hell in the Pacific”, I understand). In *Empire*, “The Magazine for the Science Fiction Writer”, Longyear has boasted about the ease of selling dreck, and sagely advised against writing more than one draft. He has also advocated the most basic sort of formula writing – the same system-built storytelling which is now strangling literature everywhere.

Orson Scott Card, whose prose is as shoddy as the internal logic of his stories, has basked in similarly ill-deserved praise. Heinlein has walked off with \$500,000 for a book which the editors knew perfectly well to be silly, unoriginal, and badly written, with insipid characterization. Meanwhile, no one seems to notice (to take just one example) Bruce Sterling’s splendidly crafted visionary adventure, *The Artificial Kid*.

In Larry Niven’s *Children of the State* our hero emerges emotionally unscathed from a series of unlikely and traumatic ordeals. This is typical of an increasing number of science fiction and fantasy novels (especially by writers like Longyear, Harry Harrison, Alan Dean Foster, and name your favorite sword and sorcery author) in which challenges faced by the protagonist resemble armchair puzzle problems. It’s a struggle to win, yes; but bring to bear cunning or might or both and all is well, hurrah, The End, you get the dough and you get laid. Any suffering along the way is comparable to the suffering experienced by a jogger upping his daily discomfort quotient from one mile to two. Healthy hardship. All together, now – row! Because it’s water off the back of a real hero.

In real life, when we defeat our enemies there are complications; there are moral questions and there is always a price to be paid. It is an insult to the

reader's intelligence to pretend otherwise. Readers have been conditioned, however, to expect fiction that is bowdlerized of life's intricacies, texture, and tapestry of dark scents and gut sensations.

The lack of depth associated with this type of writing is symptomatic of the contempt for the reader which currently pervades publishing. Partly this contempt results from the withering effects of corporate mass-marketing mentality. Large corporations have purchased most of the book publishers and are indifferent to anything which they believe won't sell well. They have learned, in marketing deodorant tampons, Hostess cupcakes and designer jeans, that the TV audience is easily mesmerized into buying these basically unnecessary items; therefore, people are stupid and easily manipulable, and why should an average book reader be any different? Hence, the theory goes, the books which will be easy to sell must be books which do not challenge the mind, are not too "heavy", and are diverting much as TV is diverting. Like breath freshening mints, the publishing product should leave no unpleasant aftertaste.

I object to this reasoning, not just as a matter of principle but because I think science fiction readers are more aware than the average broadcasting opiate addict. I think they buy what they are offered only because they haven't been offered anything better. And unless the field once again starts to include writing with real depth, the readership will quickly grow bored with this jerk-off.

At the same time, I witness the fact that editors are encouraging writers to stick to the old formulas, shallow "sympathetic" characters, and simple-minded solutions to problems and conflicts. These editors prefer the technofetishistic imagery of *Ringworld Engineers* to the pursuit of ideas touching on real social and political problems. This is true, too, outside of science fiction: the editors of *Oui* (to whom I have sold in the past) told me that an article I proposed was "a great idea, even fascinating, but simply too serious ... we aren't allowed to use that kind of material any more." Similarly, the editors of *Heavy Metal* turned down another proposal, which had ominous political implications, because they didn't want "anything too heavy". Their exact words! Maybe they should change the magazine's name to *Light Alloy* or *Balsa Wood*.

I am not demanding that science fiction become turgid with deep meaning, self consciously literary, and no longer an entertainment medium. I like my reading to be both entertaining and meaningful. If science fiction

tends to return to adventure, in one manifestation or another, to provide a skeletal substructure, all fine and good; but why should this adventure have to be rendered vapidly? Why can't it also partake of that which is visionary? Why can't it include a sense of background verisimilitude, and characters of real subtlety? Writers who insist that this is impossible, and that entertaining writing must be simpleminded, are cynics and deadbeats, too indolent to do the work properly, and too ignorant to draw from authors such as Dickens, Poe, Victor Hugo, or Evelyn Waugh, who proved long ago that a popular novel can be meaningful as well as diverting. The lazy exponents of modern science fiction adventure find it easier to perpetuate a system of reassuring banalities in which suffering doesn't really exist for the virtuous (right, Poul?) or for the hardworking and clever (right, Pournelle?). Such writers are betraying their readers, cheating them of empathy, insight, political and social awareness. Some of these writers, particularly those who disguise their selfishness and materialism under the smug decal of "Libertarianism", are also guilty of propagating simplistic ideas which, if anything, tend to exacerbate social problems and worsen the state of the world. They trivialize the side-effects of industrial and technological growth whose impact is felt most by lower economic classes. They legitimize greed and deprivation with half-baked theories of economics and sociobiology. And they trivialize the possibility of nuclear war, suggesting that a "limited conflict" in which four or eight million people are roasted is an acceptable, survivable possibility. This is dangerous and stupid thinking, bad for society as a whole and bad for the quality of society's cultural self expression.

Socially (and existentially) meaningful writing does not have to be preachy. In fact a good visionary adventure should use metaphors that are understated, and convey its social commentary, if any, through depiction rather than oration. The message should seep through to the reader osmotically and, if the writing is good, deliciously.

So what sort of standards are we groping toward? I would like to see editors ask questions such as: Will the reader be motivated to think about this story after it has been put aside? Did the writer deal with the true consequences of a hero's actions, and with the textures of suffering and misgiving that are part of the backdrop of life everywhere? And did the writer explore the various sides of the protagonist, the facets which should come together as a complex personality?

To attempt anything less is to succumb to cynicism. Shallow writers

who take this route are cheating the reader not only of relevance but of a special kind of fun and joy: the fun of mental stimulation and the joy of self-discovery.

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Naturally it was no problem to commission angry authors to write damning diatribes against science-fiction publishing. Getting an editor to state an opposing viewpoint was much tougher. But editors do have legitimate complaints, as the following opinion piece demonstrates.

Have you Hugged Your Editor Today? Jane Doe

Evidently, the survival spirit of the 1980s (“Keep your wealth while all those around you are losing theirs”) is infecting even the most generous-spirited and easygoing citizens among us. Even science fiction authors ... such as Robert Heinlein, reportedly miffed that his appropriately titled *The Number of the Beast* sold for a mere \$500,000 instead of the million he’d hoped for. While the SFWA plans its Royalties Offensive, bearing down on publishers whose payments arrive more than three months late. (Some SFWA members are more than three *years* late in delivering manuscripts they have been partially paid for; but that of course is not considered relevant.) No need for assertiveness training, here: there is a superfluity, indeed, of enlightened self interest. But why mince words? What we’re talking about is greed.

Of course, lesser-known authors are often underpaid and lack the clout to alter book contracts devised by corporation lawyers to whom the “gentlemanly spirit of publishing” seems not merely an abstraction but a quaint piece of comedy. Of course, certain sleazoid organizations (I am not referring to Belmont Tower) may occasionally forget to pay royalties altogether.

But the fact remains that at gatherings of SFWA members one notices a conspicuous lack of the sound of writers counting what blessings they may have. And they may have many. Consider the following:

In what other field is it possible, or has it ever been possible, for unconventional or experimental prose to be published in a mass-market edition? (You’ll never see *Dhalgren* near Dodge City, nor *Golem*¹⁰⁰ invading Watership Down.) Science fiction writers must bow to certain commercial

constraints, but they enjoy more creative freedom than is conceivable in any other genre.

And: in what other field is it common – has it ever occurred – for editors to attend gatherings where avid readers can cross-examine them informally and at length on their choice of books? I don't recall ex Avon editor-in-chief Peter Mayer ever explaining himself to readers of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, or Eleanor Friede of Delacorte publicly discussing her purchase of *Love Story*; but anyone who wants to complain to David Hartwell about *The Book of the Dun Cow* can do so at the very next science fiction convention (which, actually, might not be a bad idea). Likewise, anti-militarists can confront James Baen; lovers of modern fiction can lodge complaints in person against the Del Reys; and so forth. Science fiction editors are uniquely accountable to the readers they serve.

And where else is the solitary, isolated writer offered such a calendar of social events – i.e., big raucous parties in luxury hotel rooms paid for by those very same publishers the writer has recently abused in the columns of amateur publications which are, of course, distributed free of charge? The Mystery Writers of America offer some camaraderie, I guess – one convention a year, and a newsletter. The Hollywood screen writers go on strike together, and members of the PEN club occasionally mingle to discuss translations of Eastern European poetry while standing self-consciously sipping cheap wine, fingering their pearls and/or watch chains. But none of these writers' organizations is remotely comparable to the loose-knit family that has grown up in the world of science fiction – a uniquely forgiving and supportive community.

Lastly: what other field is as easy to break into? We all know the condition of short story markets outside of science fiction. There are women's romances and men's magazines, each with crippling restrictive requirements. There are a couple of mystery magazines, tottering into senility. And that's it. Whereas in the world of science fiction, we not only have numerous magazines (some of them newly launched) publishing several shades of SF. We also have paperback collections of original stories. The diversity of these markets allows an unknown writer to get published more easily than in any other field, receiving payments and encouragement while learning how to develop from short stories to novels.

At times, in fact, science fiction publishing seems more like a charity than a business – a resemblance enhanced by the wretchedly nonprofit status

of some of the companies involved. The writers reap the rewards: They write what pleases them, when it pleases them. They receive large lumps of money (often in advance of doing any real work) and, in addition, generous fringe benefits.

Privately, the more fair-minded and honest writers will admit all these facts. They understand all too well that any Utopia which they might invent, no matter how comfortable, will be inferior indeed to the science fictional Utopia that they already work within.

Next Issue

Algis Budrys makes a definitive statement about modern science fiction in OBSTACLES AND IRONIES IN SCIENCE-FICTION CRITICISM ... *Alfred Bester* mocks Hollywood and “Sci-Fi” in THE SHAME OF SKIFFY ... *Thomas M. Disch* roasts his critics in SCIENCE FICTION VERSUS LITERATURE ... plus NONE SO BLIND, an indictment of John Varley ... DREAMDRECK, all about modern fantasy ... THE HORROR, THE HORROR of the Dark Forces anthology ... and much more.

Send \$2.50 for one issue or \$12 for the next six issues. *The Patchin Review*, 9 Patchin Place, New York, NY 10011.

In the list of science-fiction horrors, what could be worse than that of I Married a Monster from Outer Space? Jane Doe knows something worse: I Married a Man who Writes Books with Titles like I Married a Monster from Outer Space. It's not a pretty story.

I Was a Sci-Fi Bride Jane Doe

Never mind which one I was married to. It would have been the same with any of them: the letdown, I mean. I had such hopes for life as a science-fiction wife. Quarks for breakfast. Cyborgs to do the washing-up. Time trips on which I would play tennis against my younger self, and win. A strange blue light in the bedroom. An asteroid to call my own.

I should have known better. We met at a science-fiction publishing party; do I have to say more? But I thought he was different. I thought: If I can just get him away from the others, everything will be O.K.. They never really leave the others, do they? Once – the shame of it – once, just when I thought he was finally all mine, he brought home a bunch of fans. “You hate fans,” I said. “All of you hate fans.” “Would you mind going out to get us some ginger ale?” he said.

And that’s another thing. I could write a novel about their revolting drinking habits. Ginger ale and vodka (a “retro rocket”) is by no means the foulest decoction I saw during my life as a science-fiction wife. I know of no other class, including the freshmen, who so consistently vomit in bars. Little wonder.

I could go on and on. The unmatched socks. The old Marvel Comics in the linen closet. The way they claim to be unconventional, then spend all their time at conventions. You want to talk about the Middle East; they want to discuss Harlan Ellison. You think they’ll teach you how to play four-dimensional chess, but you’re lucky if they can find their way home. Or maybe you’re not lucky.

Our marriage wasn’t a total loss. Sex was out of this world – unless there was an SFWA meeting to think about. And we do have a nice child who can walk through walls – though I think that talent comes from my side of the family.

These short reviews are not intended as definitive guidance to the worth of individual books. No book of any merit can be summed up in thirty words. Instead, the intention here is to provide a general overview of science-fiction and fantasy, itemizing the various kinds of books being marketed by each publishing house.

This issue’s survey is incomplete, since review copies were not received from some publishers. These omissions should be rectified by the time of the next issue.

Publishers are listed in alphabetical order. Books are coded as follows: HC – hardcover. PB – mass-market paperback. TP – trade paperback (oversized, aimed primarily at the bookselling trade as opposed to newsstands).

The Patchin Review Survey

Ace

White Light by Rudy Rucker

One madly deadpan mathematician's romp through layers of transmogrification, transubstantiation, transfiguration, and other transformations of mind and flesh. Capably told via deceptively economical, hallucinatory prose. 277 pp. PB. \$2.25

Proteus ed. by Richard McEnroe

"This is a good book," asserts editor McEnroe in his defensive intro explaining that these stories are overspill from *Destinies*. In truth the illustrations are offensively wretched; the fiction is comparable to *Asimov's* magazine. 274 pp. PB. \$2.50

Empire by H. Beam Piper

Interrelated stories by the deceased, with laudatory introductions by John F. Carr. The usual military power fantasies on a galactic scale. 242 pp. PB. \$2.50.

Tactics of Mistake by Gordon R. Dickson

1970 *Analog* serial, umpteenth in the Dorsai series. Cletus Grahame plays a complex game of strategy and death; but nerve, guts, and judiciously applied atrocities ensure that triumph is inevitable. 222 pp. PB. \$2.50

The Shape Changer by Keith Laumer

Sent to a medieval-era parallel-world by the Inter-dimensional Monitor Service, Lafayette O'Leary, gentleman of means and leisure, runs into trouble from his dastardly double (an interdimensional duplicate?). Cheerful frolic without any affectations. 230 pp. PB. \$2.25

Arbor House

The Arbor House Treasury of Great Science Fiction Short Novels Robert Silverberg and Martin H. Greenberg, eds.

Novellas whose length normally precludes anthologization. Mostly 1950s selections, some 1960s, a couple 1970s. Heinlein, Clarke, Asimov, Silverberg etc plus Varley, Delany, Tiptree. Fifteen stories. 768 pp. TP. \$9.95

The Arbor House Treasury of Modern Science Fiction Robert Silverberg and Martin H. Greenberg, eds.

Adventures in Time and Space brought up to date (the editors hope) with 39 stories mostly from the 1950s onward. Varley, Vonnegut and Russ

alongside Pohl, Bester, and Heinlein. Mostly conservative choices. 754 pp. TP. \$8.95

Avon

The Crystal World by J.G. Ballard

Reissue of Ballard's most visually devastating novel, enigmatic and spiritual, redolent with power, authority, integrity. 157 pp. PB. \$2.25.

The Path of Exoterra by Gordon McBain

It's probably unfair to dismiss a first novel just because it's about a hero named Truestar guarding a magic stone on a planet called Verdana. But this really is a very silly book. 175 pp. PB. \$1.95.

First Voyages ed. by Damon Knight, Martin H. Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander

A fair selection of first-published stories by 20 well-known authors, including a dutifully disproportionate quota of women. Short, pedestrian introductions by the authors. 373 pp. PB. \$2.95

Bantam

The Humanoid Touch by Jack Williamson

New sequel to *The Humanoids*: effective, tactile prose, strong adventure, but the Humanoids (renegade robots) are a Sorcerer's Apprentice-type nightmare image, never quite plausible in this purely science-fiction novel. 210 pp. PB. \$2.25.

Under the City of Angels by Jerry Earl Brown

Potentially effective juxtaposition of powerful elements – alien menace and a near-future flooded LA plundered by scavengers – suffers at the hands of grandiose style, improbable adjectives. 291 pp. PB. \$1.95.

The Steel of Raithskar by Randall Garrett & Vicki Ann Heydron

Blatantly reminiscent of E.R. Burroughs and van Vogt, our hero wakes up on a desert world as a master swordsman after his Earthly body is hit by an (unexplained) fireball. Telepathically linked with his steed, a "giant war cat", he fights for freedom.... Garrett can do better than this; evidently his wife cannot. First of a trilogy. 180 pp. PB. \$2.25

Berkley

Dream Dancer by Janet Morris

Somewhat self-important scientifically legitimized fantasy saga of regal ambitions of Terran waif in high-tech alien culture. Evocative adventure with underlying serious intent. Conscientiously done. First of a trilogy. 289 pp. HC. \$12.95

Peregrine: Secundus by Avram Davidson

One wearies of fake Olde English prose, complete with quaint dialect, all the more so when it conveys heavy-handed humor – a sitcom of the Dark Ages. 166 pp. PB. \$2.25

The Northern Girl by Elizabeth A. Lynn

Third of the Chronicles of Tornor, overlong and robbed of authoritative drama by Lynn's chatty, Pollyanna-like style. Still, it's well above formula level, sincerely told. 415 pp. PB. \$2.50

The Magic Labyrinth by Philip José Farmer

This penultimate volume in Farmer's quintology is fun for lovers of myth, detail, and caricature. Idiosyncratic, delightful, and much too long. 400 pp. PB. \$2.75

The Book of Frank Herbert by Frank Herbert

Berkley reissue of DAW collection of 10 stories from the 1950s – plus a 1973 article from *Harper's* indicating Herbert really believes his fiction about human potential and rugged individualism in the face of Big Government. 218 pp. PB. \$2.25

The 1981 Annual World's Best SF ed. by Donald A. Wollheim

Wollheim notes that 8 of his 10 choices are soberly preoccupied with near-future problems. It's a varied and broadminded selection, though, by mostly young authors. Howard Waldrop's Nebula-winner "The Ugly Chickens" is included. 251 pp. PB. \$2.50

Doomtime by Doris Piserchia

Intriguingly bizarre struggle of mankind to free itself from involuntary symbiosis with two alien invading trees that take over the planet. Naive, weird, but powerful. 173 pp. PB. \$2.25

Second Game by Charles V. deVet & Katherine MacLean

Good old-fashioned adventure storytelling, of a Terran master-spy whose cosmic game-playing against implacable aliens will decide the fate of mankind's galactic empire. 158 pp. PB. \$2.25

None But Man by Gordon R. Dickson

Reissue of classic 1969 Dickson space-war saga: one ruthless, righteous warrior pits himself against marauding aliens and his own cowardly countrymen. 240 pp. PB. \$2.25

Sunfall by C.J. Cherryh

Lingering look at last life in dead cities after mankind has mostly gone to the stars. Cherryh's Hallmark-card landscapes are sticky with bogus lyricism. 158 pp. PB. \$2.25

Del Rey

The Wounded Land by Stephen R. Donaldson

First book of a second trilogy following from *Lord Foul's Bane*, *The Illearth War*, and *The Power that Preserves*. Inevitably, Thomas Covenant finds the wretched Lord Foul returning from the grave. Authentic, literate, predictable. 497 pp. PB. \$2.95.

The Sheep Look Up by John Brunner

Simplistic 1972 liberal vision of ecologically-concerned masses battling polluters and Big Government; outdated by gains of the New Right. But Brunner's writing is terse and effective, his heart, as always, in the right place. 457 pp. PB. \$2.95.

The Martian Time-Slip by Philip K. Dick

Dick's recurring vision of Mars was just as vividly memorable as Bradbury's, and is now enhanced by nostalgia. Reissue of one of his most coherent novels, compassionate, visionary, and realistic. His talent is all the more remarkable for its lack of affectations. 220 pp. PB. \$2.25

Dragonslayer by Wayland Drew

Novelization of the movie, with 8 pp. of color stills. Galen, young sorcerer's apprentice, plays St. George against Vermithrax, last of the dragons. Character names such as these and "Xenophobius" (sic) make one wonder how cynically this tale was contrived. But it works well enough. 218 pp. PB. \$2.75

Major Operation by James White

Reissue; five loosely linked novelettes. White's formula (problems of various alien creatures requiring special hospital treatment) is repetitious, but who else writes authentic medical science fiction? 183 pp. PB. \$2.25

The Fallible Fiend by L. Sprague de Camp

Despite silly stylistic affectations de Camp's fix-up of Demon Dzim stories moves fast with aptly chosen detail. Infinitely more readable than most modern fantasy: it doesn't take itself too seriously. 152 pp. PB. \$1.95

Cycle of Fire by Hal Clement

Reissue of typical Clement problem-solving story (c. 1957) with can-do stranded spaceman and inscrutable alien ally. 185 pp. PB. \$2.25

Space Doctor by Lee Correy

The inevitably capable engineer, this time in MD clothes, runs a space hospital for on-site builders of solar-power satellite. Correy (familiar to *Analog* readers) is better with machines than people. But this is conscientiously correct science fiction. 245 pp. PB. \$2.50

Dell

The Snow Queen by Joan Vinge

Within the context of fantasy, Vinge tackles human and political issues with care and subtlety. Faint, residual affectations of Noble Prose mar an otherwise plainly eloquent style. 526 pp. PB. \$3.25

Kinsman by Ben Bova

Will Chet Kinsman save plans for the Moon colony from unscrupulous government hatchet men? Will he sacrifice even his girlfriend for the High Frontier? Once again Bova optimistically aims youthful adventure at the adult mass market. 280 pp. PB. \$2.95.

An Infinite Summer by Christopher Priest

In selecting the authors from whom he steals his ideas and voicing, Priest shows sound judgment. In overlaying empty affect with a spurious air of Significance, few can match him. Priest raises the art of being a no-talent poseur to a formidable level. 219 pp. PB. \$2.75.

Doubleday

Mahogany Trinrose by Jacqueline Lichtenberg

Lichtenberg's future society is further complicated in this fifth book sharing the scenario. Ercy Farris, heir to the House of Zeor, has found a way to quell conflict between Simes and Gens by extracting kerduvon from the mahogany trinrose. Subsequently she develops psychic powers. Hmmm! 214 pp. HC. \$10.95.

Koren by Tim Lukeman

Introspective parable of a young fisherman's search for meaning and purpose in a fantasyland of noblemen and sorcerers. Sincere but lacking life and color. 184 pp. HC. \$9.95

Mindreader by C. Terry Cline, Jr.

Shy telepath comes out of the closet to intervene in global crises. A sincere but shallow non-genre visualization of political, social, and psychological implications of real-life mind trading. 325 pp. HC. \$13.95

Everest House

Danse Macabre by Stephen King

"...talent is a dreadfully cheap commodity, cheaper than table salt.... If you write for an hour and a half a day for ten years, you're gonna turn into a good writer." These and other conversational musings on the writing and implications of horror fiction. King isn't analytical enough to be profound, but does give insight into his own intuitive, powerful talent. 400 pp. HC. \$13.95.

Gollancz

Molly Zero by Keith Roberts

Obscure 1980 British hardcover unavailable in any other edition, nevertheless deserves to be read as a graphic, evocative view of a totalitarian future through the eyes of a young girl. Fine writing, though Roberts perversely tells it in the second person throughout. 224 pp. HC. £6.95

Houghton Mifflin

Notes to a Science Fiction Writer by Ben Bova

Basic, basic advice to the totally naive. Ample guidance on plot and plausibility, but not much on nuance. Bova's methodical, mechanistic approach may help hopefuls achieve the illusion of competence. 193 pp. TP. \$5.95

Leisure

Hydrabyss Red (Book Two of the *Timequest* series) by William Tedford

Juvenile-oriented action-quest with bogus science but competently terse prose. Alien menace, girl in trouble, shiny gadgets – a familiar formula, but very capably handled. 232 pp. PB. \$2.25

Star Drifter by Dale Aycock

Large print; small story. Trader Corbett, rugged-individualist space cowboy, narrates in first person: “Women! I’ll never understand them!” Glib prose smacks of cynicism. 216 pp. PB. \$1.95

The Amazons of Somelon by Raymond Kaminski

Fantasy flavored with primitivism, mildly sleazy sex, morbid mutilations. Do dominant women retain a secret yen for pair-bonding? Of course they do. 191 pp. PB. \$1.75

Macmillan

Space Apprentice by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky

Exploring territory long abandoned by U.S. authors (Martian deserts, rings of Saturn, interplanetary spaceships) the Strugatskys retell the 1930s with human sensitivity and feeling. 231 pp. HC. \$11.95

Aelita by Alexei N. Tolstoy

Revival of obscure 1922 Russian scientific romance chronicling the lone scientist with a rocketship, his adventurous passenger, and Aelita, princess of Mars. A curio of slight historical interest. 167 pp. HC. \$11.95

Small World by Tabitha King

Stephen King’s wife writes of a middle-aged woman’s mad vengeance, miniaturizing her enemies via a stolen super-science gadget and imprisoning them in a doll’s house. The ideas are powerful, the prose is not quite fluent. 229 pp. HC. \$10.95

Misfit Press

A History of the Hugo, Nebula, and International Fantasy Awards by Donald Franson and Howard DeVore

Historical compilation of all award winners and nominees, with short explanatory introduction. 141 pp. TP. \$5.00 (from Howard DeVore, 4705 Weddel Street, Dearborn, Mich. 48125, post-paid)

Playboy Press

War Games by Karl Hansen

Staccato saga of biologically modified killer-corpsmen (and corpswomen) sparring, rutting, and slicing each other up in various nasty ways in an extraterrestrial guerrilla war. This sexed-up bastard offspring of

Starship Troopers lacks Heinlein's ideology as an excuse for the brutality. 288 pp. PB. \$2.50

Horror House by J.N. Williamson

Labored tale of Edison's allegedly real-life attempt to detect electronic emanations from the souls of the dead. Well enough researched but told without flair. 299 pp. PB. \$2.95

The Beasts of Hades by Graham Diamond

Stacy, glamorous human of Haven, joins her endearingly talkative animal pals in battle against Demons of Hades menacing Stacy's pastoral retreat. Delightfully overwritten. 255 pp. PB. \$2.25

Timescape/Pocket

Windhaven by George R.R. Martin & Lisa Tuttle

Light-gravity world and relics of a galactic Empire provide minimal science-fiction rationale for neo-Icarus fantasy with sea monsters and rebellious teenagers. Inoffensive, innocuous adventure. 348 pp. HC. \$13.95

Masks of the Illuminati by Robert Anton Wilson

Relentlessly detailed account of an Edwardian Gentleman's step-by-step induction into cabalistic lore of the Illuminati. Plus imaginary debates between Einstein and Joyce regarding literature, relativity, and a plausible explanation for Edwardian Gentleman's Visions of Horror. Cumbersome but admirably ambitious. 294 pp. PB. \$2.95

Schrodinger's Cat II: The Trick Top Hat by Robert Anton Wilson

The usual obsessions – Illuminati, drugs, cults, historical figures, plus space colonization, politics, and black comedy, all reeking mildly of erotica – in a scrambled episodic narrative of intermittent wit and high energy. Literate and challenging. 254pp. PB. \$2.50

New Dimensions 12 ed. by Marta Randall & Robert Silverberg

New gropings for some coherent voice or direction identifiably of the 1980s; more literate and sophisticated than most, but ultimately rudderless. 223 pp. PB. \$2.50.

The Entropy Effect A Star Trek Novel by Vonda N. McIntyre

Vonda N. tackles a dumb time-travel plot as if she'd been writing this kind of thing all her life. 224 pp. PB. \$2.50.

The Pastel City by M. John Harrison

Reissue of postcataclysmic science-oriented fantasy with brooding ambivalent hero, evocative terminal landscapes, mysteries of lost technology. Harrison's love of gloom gets tiresome but the fine writing makes him memorable. 175 pp. PB. \$2.25.

Margaret and I by Kate Wilhelm

Potentially expansive adventure into ESP and Time is relentlessly mired in provincial trivia and civilized niceties. Even in a novel of the unconscious, Wilhelm keeps chaos and passion neatly tidied away. 214 pp. PB. \$2.50

Imram by William Barnwell

Lugubrious, introspective sequel to *The Blessing Papers* chronicles further adventures of the reluctant savior of yet another Other World of the Mind. Competently told. 261 pp. PB. \$2.75

The Children of Shiny Mountain by David Dvorkin

Far-future extraterrestrial anthropologist discovers endearingly primitive remnants of human culture; allies himself with the peasants. Sincere but slow first-person narrative expresses humble Utopian/pacifist longings. 279 pp. PB. \$2.50

Profundis by Richard Cowper

Unserious chronicle of a voyage through Earth-future polluted waters in a technological warship ruled by computer. Cowper's humor strays close to pratfalls but he's nevertheless clever and erudite. His lack of obsessions make this ultimately lightweight; but high-grade fun. 207 pp. PB. \$2.25

An Island Called Moreau by Brian W. Aldiss

Exhumed from premature burial in Britain's Bodleian Library, this novel may seem a minor work to Aldiss but it succeeds by its very lack of grand ambitions. A nicely told parable of return to Wells' *Island of Dr. Moreau*, up-to-date. 173 pp. HC. \$10.95

The Claw of the Conciliator by Gene Wolfe

Wolfe's mannered, oblique style is as tiresomely uninformative as peripheral vision. Lots of texture; a severe shortage of simple declarative sentences. Volume two of *The Book of the New Sun*. 394 pp. HC. \$12.95

Tower

Scanners by Leon Whiteson

Tying in with gratuitously morbid, fetishistic movie of same name, this gonzo novelization with fuzzy B&W pics must have been quicker to write than it is to read. 204 pp. PB. \$2.25

Viking

Worlds by Joe Haldeman

A weary theme – political machinations between space colonists and Earth government – expressed in oddly plain, explanatory segments. At some level Haldeman seems to have rejected the usual techniques of storytelling; his substitute is dangerously close to lectures on How It's Going To Be. 262 pp. HC. \$12.95.

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The Patchin Review 2

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Editorial

Three weeks before this year's world science-fiction convention, I find myself thinking about Hugo awards ... and one simple thing that the organizers of next year's convention could do to make the awards more sensible and appropriate. They could eliminate the non-fiction Hugo.

Perhaps it's perverse for me to condemn this award, since I don't know, at this point, whether I might have won it myself (for my book *Dream Makers*). And I'll be eligible for it again when *Dream Makers 2* is published next year.

I readily admit I would love one of those chrome-plated spaceships on my mantelshelf. But the point is that, self-interest aside, I can't help seeing the non-fiction category as a piece of foolishness.

For any award to be meaningful there must be sufficient eligible entrants, and in the non-fiction category this is simply not the case. Each year we see one or two genuinely appropriate nominees plus an absurd grab-bag of art books and other trivia thrown in out of necessity to fill the ballot. Because of this, and because the nonfiction category attracts fewer votes anyway, it is easier to get your work nominated in this category than in any other. We've seen this year that Jeff Duntemann, a relatively unknown author, managed to get onto the short-story ballot *twice*, apparently by means of adroit self-publicity. The same thing could happen much more easily in the non-fiction category. (I don't think it has, yet; but it could.)

In addition to being excessively vulnerable to politicking, and embracing too small a minority of books to be meaningful, the nonfiction Hugo encourages work which is not necessarily very important. I am naturally proud of my own book, and I believe that, if there is to be a nonfiction category, *Dream Makers* was worthy of nomination. But surely we would all prefer to see more science fiction than more nonfiction about science fiction. And surely awards should reflect this.

Those of us who produce lit. crit. and commentary should remember that we are a service industry, sustained by the producers of science fiction itself. Should workers in a service industry, no matter how useful or eloquent they may be, win Hugos?

Regarding this magazine: I've been surprised and pleased to receive a lot of good articles for publication, and have increased the number of pages from 36 to 56 accordingly. There'll be no change in cover price, but

subscribers should read the notice on the inside of the back cover. I would still like more contributions from people other than full-time writers, and I'd like more letters of comment. I thank all of you who were brave enough to send \$12 subscriptions; I trust that, if you are dissatisfied, you will write and make your feelings known.

– Charles Platt

I'm proud to publish this very challenging piece of ultimately even-handed criticism from one of the finest writers inside or outside of science fiction.

The Issue of 1789 by Brian Aldiss

The true character of a man emerges when he is about to be shot. Then even those who normally display bravado, who make extravagant gestures, fall down weeping to kiss the boots of their destroyers. The guilty beg for mercy from the merciless, the innocent scream their guilt. Those who sweat too much burst forth with exudations, or foul their garments. I have seen callous murderers cry like children when faced with the muzzles of a firing squad.

Well, I once found myself in that situation. Even then, my gestures were not excessive. I pulled off my hat so that my head should be naked at the last to the blazing sun, and bade them shoot.

In the silence, a phone rang. There was a hitch. The execution was called off until another day. Then by luck the bombers came over; I escaped in the devastation and lived on.

Thought of that time of honour fortifies me against the tawdriness of the first issue of *The Patchin Review*. Far from being “unique and controversial”, it is a part of the decadence it pretends to attack. Chit-chat about marriages, scandal, self-advertisement, whining about lack of status from writers who are little better than gangsters, braggart challenges to preposterous writing duels, boasting, pleading, sniping, complaints about money – complaints, indeed, about editors, publishers, agents, about anything but the essential inadequacy of the writer himself – this is the muck that fills your pages.

You date your review 1981. I took it for an issue of 1789, just before the French Revolution, just before the mob rose and killed off the philanderers and parasites who had battered on their incapacities. Barry Malzberg is the

only man of vision to speak from your pages. He understands much when he talks of self-censorship; he knows that small minds welcome self-censorship; no wonder he often despairs. He too has faced the firing squad.

When science fiction was a secret movement, it commanded some of the dignity which poverty imposes on the visionary. Now that the teat of big money has swollen, look at the big fat mouths, vocal in your pages, which rise to suck! How do bad editors and publishers flourish, how does the public taste become even more corrupt, if not because authors will write any crap for money?

Roughneck lords, snow queens, and telepathic dragons are not the least of it. On the other hand, prattle about “the ethics of science” is just as misleading. Science has been turned into one more tool of power, and, in Winston Churchill’s memorable phrase, “The Stone Age will return on the gleaming wings of science”.

After years of exile, slaving for my living on Earth, I recently journeyed back to my home planet. How restricted it seemed, in comparison with your bursting world. We have no great cities. Our towns are crowded with our poor. Yet people meet you trustingly on the streets, often with a smile. Does that happen in your cities? Your world syrupts in fecundity, yet you waste and destroy, preferring to sell arms to apricots. We tend lovingly what little ground can be cultivated.

I saw that our planet would never become prosperous, as once was hoped. I was among the many who believed that we lived on a second Earth. It is not so; we shall never attain your standard of living. Yet we have many blessings – not the least our perception of those blessings.

Science fiction is strictly forbidden on my planet. It is called LD, the Literature of Desperation. Those who write it, as I do, write it under sentence of death; the penalty for setting the word “Utopia” on paper is a bullet through the heart. As a result, we SF authors – and nothing will discourage us – have a belief in what we do. We are the dedicated. We have a kind of purity you could not comprehend. We have noble Despair, where you can only chase your desperations.

My house is a poor one, in a poor town. Yet the town has no filthy slums, no billboards, no graffiti, no murders, no flagrant abuses of justice. Its public buildings are well built, with good detail, and are not pretentious; they do not overpower the human being. My house has a little inner courtyard where green things grow, where birds sing. Inside, the details are good. The

house was lovingly built of wood and stone by my great-grandfather, with a hand-carved stairway. My wife is kind and loving, our children are affectionate because we work for their love.

Yet I confess I am not content. Just to have been on Earth has roused in my breast devils of envy I never knew before. I am ashamed. I find I wish to assassinate my fellow writers. I long to challenge other fools to scribbling duels, I long to be semi-literate.

I understand that to be a successful SF writer one must never have travelled or inquired about the world: rather, one must have stayed blind to all but one's own petty lusts and fancies. One must not even have looked into one's own soul, where the sins of the world are to be found – or how else could one make that false dichotomy (so dear to SF hearts) of portraying aliens as symbols of evil and Earthmen of good? If you knew how stupid your fantasies look from another planet.... Never mind, I desire your greedy blindnesses for myself.

I have even, god forgive me, wished I had written the latest Heinlein rubbish, in order that his royalties, his praises, yes, even his execrations, might be heaped upon me. Then I have broken down and wept, and begged my wife to absolve my covetousness. Your planet, your ways, your hatred of literature and civilization, have inevitably coarsened me.

All too soon, I must return to Earth. I can only work on my novel at home, but money for the family must be earned on Earth. I see from the hysterical voices in your Review that I must expect to confront a darkened scene. The filth rises from the gutters, the truth decays in a million offices, lust blows down the mean streets, pretense draws its high salaries; overhead, powerful engines drone toward destruction.

I pray that when I next face one of your firing squads, no phone rings its procrastination. Why cling to twilight when darkness is about to fall?

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Algis Budrys, author of Michaelmas, Who?, and Rogue Moon, also one of our finest critics, originally agreed to write a short denunciation of recent work by Heinlein and other authors of that generation. Quickly, however, the piece grew into a deep and important study of the whole subject of criticism. When an author's status guarantees his popularity, can criticism serve any effective purpose?

Obstacles and Ironies in Science-Fiction Criticism Algis Budrys

There follows a brief science-fiction critical essay done in unacceptable style:

In 1980, the science fiction community saw the publication of *The Number of the Beast* by Robert A. Heinlein and *Golem 100* by Alfred Bester. Both books are in flagrant violation of universal storytelling standards as promulgated and tested over at least several centuries. Those standards, refined to suit the particular needs of science fiction, were directly responsible for the overwhelming popularity of their two chief refiners: Robert A. Heinlein for what has been called “modern” science fiction (1939-1950) and Alfred Bester for post-modern science fiction (1950-1960).

My major complaint is that each of these books begins as a plain tale plainly told – allowing that “plain” for Bester is not what it is for Heinlein – but each then dissolves into a cloud of pyrotechnics. The pyrotechnics are clearly recognizable as the sort of smoke-blowing done by experienced professionals when the bank account is empty but no logical, organic ending has yet been thought of for the half-completed manuscript that might rescue their finances.

Without question, Heinlein and Bester are performing an exercise known as “reader-cheating”. That is a specific technical term which, along with others such as “idiot plot” and “funny-hat characterization”, is as directly descriptive to a wordsmith as “cold joint” is to a solderer or “up-cut” is to a television director.

The Heinlein, near its very end, contains a nearly direct address to the reader. In it, the events of the opening chapters, which were written in the manner traditional to setting the hook and then reeling the reader in, are dismissed as an irrelevant jape.

This is a terrible thing to do. And it is done in the context of *Beast’s* climactic party; a celebratory ball to which Heinlein invites a number of other science-fiction writers and a broad variety of his own characters from over the years – and at which he is the Guest

of Honor, in his persona as all four of *Beast's* protagonists. The reader is there, too – having been dragged in by the same opening events that Heinlein now dismisses as mere piffle – even the harrowing scene in which the surgically-altered alien is painstakingly dissected in a hot garage by Heinlein dressed in the nude as his mother-in-law. Heinlein now in effect says the reader is there for two reasons: to play the ass and to continue picking up the tab.

The Bester, in its sloppily dispensed jumble of an ending, proceeds without foreshadowing or precipitating events to pervert the carefully established heroic character of the female protagonist, and swats the male offstage as casually as any god ever did on descending in a car. What Bester has done, no question about it, is surrender the one thing that, when all is said and done, makes Bester: the ability to reveal to the reader, brilliantly and at the last possible moment, the ironclad logic underlying the apparent frivolities.

These are appalling performances: Heinlein as boor (!), Bester as wimp (!).

And those are only the two outstanding examples of recent defective work from writers who were once the leading promulgators of outstandingly well written science fiction. In some cases, the appurtenances of craftsmanship appear to have been invoked for the deliberate purpose of toying with the reader. *The Fountains of Paradise* is not a bad book by any means, but it clearly has missing transitional scenes and expository passages. *Jem* is an ambitious book with noble intentions plain within it, but with every sign of first draft upon it. *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon* raises the possibility that *Gateway* was a fluke – for all that the sequel, considered as a separate work, is in many ways an entertaining and well-resolved construction. I could go on, but my point is made and I would like to stop before I have offended almost every prominent contemporary science-fiction author on similar grounds.

– A.J.B.

The question is, what point have I made? And in what way was it offensive to do so? Suddenly, things don't seem so clearcut. For example, is it relevant

that Heinlein and Bester today are not writing to standards prevalent in science fiction of the 1940s and 1950s? Isn't it possible to commend them for having progressed beyond an earlier and hence more primitive mode?

Is the reader blameless in a situation such that he expects one thing and gets another? How can a critic be sure what a reader expected? What is the effective difference between a frantic, desperate expedient for completing a manuscript – no matter how skewed from what it might have been – and an identically worded, preplanned tour de force that was in the writer's mind all along and therefore represents no skewing?

The reader was once held inviolable; a presence whom one labored to entertain dexterously and with manifest respect. Perhaps readers are bored with all that now; perhaps they are not only prepared but eager to admire a writer's wit in teasing them.

Clearly, the sales figures prove that immense numbers of readers certainly do not perceive these works to be displaying any significant flaw. If Heinlein and Bester have no clothes, they simultaneously have bulletproof clothes; there is nothing I can say that will affect them except personally and, considering their status as compared to mine, fleetingly and with a gracious risibility toward the upstart.

And if what I have said here, or in earlier references to *Beast* and *Golem* in my columns for *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*, ever does anything to modify the professional development of younger writers who are taking these elder statesmen for their models, I will be very much surprised. Because the kind of criticism in which I have expressed myself to this point is no longer being done, perhaps because it goes to matters which are no longer important, or held important. The science-fiction criticism prevalent today takes its traditions from the long history of general literature criticism. Its modes are quite different from the one employed in my "brief essay". That was a counterfeit of the mode employed by the individuals who, thirty years ago, first acquainted the major part of the science-fiction community with the very idea that criticism was possible, desirable, and effective. The title of my piece here, you will recall, contains the term "ironies".

Thirty years ago, Damon Knight first demonstrated the idea that science fiction could effectively criticise itself. At that time, "science fiction" was a native American term just twenty years old, intended to be descriptive of magazine-born commercial fiction featuring speculative technology. Or at

least so the term was tacitly understood in all the places where it counted, despite some obfuscations which operated effectively then but are yielding to hindsight.

There were at that time no journals analogous to *The Patchin Review* or any other sort of specifically science-fiction-oriented medium for criticism. J.O. Bailey's thesis *Pilgrims Through Space and Time* (1947) was extant, and there were other book projects – mostly semiprofessional or amateur – in preparation. Some of them obviously still in preparation after they had been published. Some amateur publications discussed science fiction sporadically either as a genre or as part of some larger literary concept. But there was no communication of developing criticism addressed to the science-fiction community as a whole. Bailey's book, which had resulted from an academic's beginning to discuss general speculative literature and then discovering the pulp magazines, offered some sort of foundation for an eventual melding of literary standards and commercial standards. But in terms of doing anything to create immediate change either in literature's perception of science fiction, or in science fiction's perception of literature, it did not constitute effective criticism.

Effective criticism creates a change in the perception of the object. To my mind, the critic's goal can be paraphrased from something once said about science by Sidney Coleman, theoretical physicist and occasional science fiction reviewer, thus:

The two purposes of any criticism are to explain what has happened and to change what might be done.

To change what might be done, the explanation for what has happened need not be perfect. Many specific hypotheses have produced fruitful work despite their consequent supersession. The same sort of procession surely takes place in literature vis-a-vis criticism; as many of us cross the river by skipping from floe to floe as take the causeway.

We proceed of course on the assumption that things are perfectible. Or perhaps we proceed on the assumption that if a change is even plausible, it ought to be given exploration if only for the sake of introducing fresh possibilities. In that admittedly more ennobling latter view of the critic's ego, the critical function is to broaden art, may it then go where it will.

Did Knight's criticisms broaden the science-fiction art? In what sense? Or did they simply do the thing I've ascribed to them – demonstrate the *idea* that science fiction could effectively criticise itself? Does an examination of

what Knight actually did yield some clue to a present situation involving Robert A. Heinlein, Alfred Bester, and others?

The narrow definition of science fiction in the earliest 1950s is borne out by an observable fact: the science fiction magazines did not devote significant space to criticism of any mode of speculative fiction until there began to be books reprinting magazine science fiction.* The science-fiction magazines, in other words, did not acknowledge themselves publicly to be part of a larger speculative literature. It's a curious feature of this time that no chance generalist browsing in from the asserted mainstream could have found convincing evidence that the science-fiction community was even aware of him, much less had any intelligent interest in him.

* "Science fiction" is a marketing category term invented by magazine publishers. "Fantasy" of course is not, but there was a tacit parallel constriction that applied, and applies, to periodical fantasy published in magazines sister to the science-fiction magazines. If "fantasy" had not already existed as a term borrowable from general literature, one would have been invented.

In the amateur media circulating to small subgroups within the active fan community, in private correspondence, and face-to-face, many partisans of what could fairly be called "the genre" were passionately desirous of gaining acceptance by "the mainstream". But none of that was surfacing often enough or significantly enough to be noticed by the general run of science-fiction magazine readers. An obvious route – systematic appraisal and discussion of works in that mainstream – was being forthrightly ignored, and the work of Knight was inherently unable to extend any communication across that gap.

Knight's earliest professional "book reviews" appeared in *Worlds Beyond*, a short-lived ambitious periodical of which he was the founding and only editor. When it had completed its run of only three issues, Knight's reviews began appearing in *Dynamic Science Fiction*. This was a frequently execrable pulp edited by fellow-Futurian Robert A.W. Lowndes, whose reputation rivals that of fellow-Futurian Donald A. Wollheim for coping with mean-spirited publishers and evanescent budgets. With that for a beginning, Knight moved from magazine to magazine, ending as book editor for *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* and terminating his career in 1960, almost exactly eleven years after it began.

Knight, as a matter of fact, left *F&SF* with some heat after it assertedly attempted to censor one of his reviews. He could undoubtedly have shifted

yet again into one of the other magazines. But apparently something was going out of it for him, and he retired from that form of expression.

This event will come up again. Let us accept his side of the story re *F&SF*, which was and is the most literate of the science-fiction periodicals, and the one that might be expected to grant him the most freedom.

Meanwhile:

Knight had made an institution of himself, and thus of intramural criticism; he proceeded, it would seem, because success succeeds.

But what was this thing that had succeeded? We have already talked about its limits, and will return to them. But fortuity was also operating, in that the major “mainstream” publishers had developed an interest in science fiction, and quickly bankrupted the specialty publishers who had emerged after World War II. The mainline book marketers were now establishing a genre book market for science fiction by producing a great deal of product, on schedules guaranteed to mass booksellers.

The earliest magazine response to the phenomenon of science fiction in books was to institute book-review features that unhesitatingly endorsed every available title. The end result of this boosterism was columns such as the one conducted in *Fantastic Universe*, whose reviewer simply quoted the enthusiastic flap copy from the dust jackets and then signed his name to it. Alternatively, there was P. Schuyler Miller’s column in *Astounding Science Fiction*. Its genesis was ASF’s comradely feeling for such houses as Prime Press, Gnome Press, Fantasy Press, and FFF, owned by friends of the establishment and reprinting work by authors who were favored by ASF. Miller’s “Analytical Laboratory” column carried over this provincial flavor even after Doubleday and Simon & Schuster had pounded their competitors into the ground. His monthly space frequently devoted a great deal of attention to community events – science-fiction conventions, for example – before going on to reasonably accurate summaries of book plots and honest but circumspect evaluations. Knight cut through this fog like a laser; he gave off a lively sense that a book ought to be viewed with acute suspicion until further notice.

Events had conjoined to create a demand for book reviews. What Knight brought to this circumstance was the appearance of pitilessness, something that readers quickly showed they had been crying for.

He had already established a sensational underground reputation with an amateur magazine essay demolishing A.E. van Vogt, at that time a giant in

the field. Once established as a professional reviewer, he began to speak less and less of what the books were about and more and more of how their authors set about accomplishing their intentions. He became manifestly a critic. His ability to expose flaws in internal logic and to scarify lazy craftsmen became famous, in part because his articulation was plausible, in part because it could be howlingly funny, and in part because it seemed clearly useful; i.e. was effective.

It took effect in several ways. One was book publication of his selected amateur and professional criticism as *In Search of Wonder*, promptly given a Hugo award. Another was his consequent ability to create the Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference, an ad-hoc professional workshop in a poorly accessible rural community a hundred miles from New York City. This was accomplished by last-minute informal invitation issued to writers attending the New York world convention that saw Knight win his award. Joining Knight in that invitation were fellow Milford, PA residents Judith Merrill and James Blish (whose avatars included "William Atheling, Jr.", noted science-fiction media critic in the amateur press). But, without detracting from the participation of anthologist Merrill or of Blish, the project was essentially Knight's.

The elan and aggressiveness that now mark the professional science-fiction community date from Milford and no earlier. The formation of the Science Fiction Writers of America, and all their consequent guild activity, traces back to Milford and its dawning realization that the publishers needed us as much as we needed them. It was a realization made everlastingly effective by being a community realization that could be felt developing over the week of the conference. No one, especially not Knight, harangued us. Rather, in the workshop sessions, an atmosphere was created such that we came to feel we knew what we were doing as writers. This had a great many ramifications, including a parallel feeling that we could do better than we had been, that "better" in some cases meant "different", and that even so there was no necessary correlation between the worth of a piece of work and how much money it had earned. But what all that boils down to is a generalized feeling of self-respect; of measurements made outside the frame of reference of how well we suited an editor.

In the constant late-night gossiping, conversations, and occasional instances of earnest good cheer, a sense of group identity emerged. And in a session to which editors were invited, the very fact that editors came at all,

and sat still for a certain amount of bullying, created a euphoria that might be equated with the stab of incredulous realization coming over the hijacker when the plane does turn its nose toward Cuba. That sort of stuff can become addictive.

And it was Knight who focused that. We were about ready to have it happen; the Liberation of the Writers, an event fit for heroic statuary depicting Cyril Kornbluth with his foot in Horace Gold's face at the top of a pyramid of wrestling, stretch-necked figures, was actually an instance of economic determinism in action, better depicted as a file of salesmen's road reports. But Knight's genius as a bellwether in the science-fiction community has always been to underscore the moment and provide it with a proscenium. And his nuts-and-bolts approaches were the best possible means of conducting the right atmosphere.

Thus criticism was institutionalized in science fiction probably for all time. The community now tacitly assumes that the existence of criticism is an integral feature of the science-fiction milieu.

What we are closing in on here, however, is whether any significant attention is now paid to science-fiction criticism in places where it might effect actual change, and first of all whether it is even possible for such attention to be paid.

There are a number of amateur and professional or semiprofessional media for the institution that science-fiction criticism has become. On examination they differentiate very quickly into media which are for the most part irrelevant to literature, media which are incompetent, and media which succeed only occasionally and almost unintentionally.

To get rid of some of these quickly, the first group is of all the media that function for the benefit of booksellers – including the *Kirkus* review, the Bowker publications, and the American Library Association guides. *Bestsellers*, a source now and then quoted on book jackets by publisher promotion writers, is for instance a periodical flyer addressed to the people who arrange softcover books on the racks in supermarkets, and is exactly the same sort of merchandising tipsheet as the one informing grocers on the advent of International Pickle Week.

The incompetent media include most of the semiprofessional publications and amateur magazines, whose copy is supplied in large part by apprentices. Their vocabularies in science fiction are knowledgable as far as events within their own lifetimes have shaped them, and no further. Their

experience is thin. A stigma of incompetence also overlies most newspaper reviews, including mine, because of the universal requirement to mention as many titles as possible within no more than 1,000 words, or 750 in my case, or 250 or less, and to write in a way that can be further edited from the bottom up by subscribers to the newspaper book review syndicated service.

Straddled between that category and the next are the review columns in the science-fiction periodicals. This is a topic which I choose not to address further on this occasion, since a great deal of analytical verbiage in that metier is already taken to reflect a large measure of revanchism or the coddling of cronies, even when the observation is mistaken – as for instance when made in connection with my scrupulously honest column in *F&SF*.

Into the third category fall the journals among which *The Patchin Review* might be numbered by a sweeping glance. This is the category of earnest work by persons with credentials auguring some knowledge of the field, some acquaintance with literature in general, some ability to analyze and synthesize, and space enough to lead through a series of observations to a supported conclusion. In these media, whether they be separate journals of criticism or instances of such work in more generalized publications, rests the present hope for effective science-fiction criticism.

The major noteworthy feature of Damon Knight's pioneering critical work as contrasted to contemporary criticism is that it did not proceed from a base of literary theory. From the present perspective, it would be strange if it had done so. Knight was not interested in proposing universal principles for improving the literary capability of science fiction, or for creating new kinds from a theoretical base. He was interested in cleaning up the old kind, presumably in the hope that if he knocked it about sufficiently new shapes might emerge from making old shapes more felicitous. But, failing that – and obviously one would fall short of that potential most of the time – the hope was to succeed in weeding out those who were incompetent by known standards.

To do this, Knight had to take as given the principle that a writer's intention can be deduced, and that a writer has a duty to his intention – for neglect of which community opinion can hold him up to scorn. Knight also assumed that he knew enough about how the writer ought to have done it.

Look at this:

What Knight licensed himself to criticize was craftsmanship; logical execution of all the elements in a rational scenario. He presumed there was a

best way to execute a story. As a subsidiary concern, he was often pointedly articulate on such aspects of technique as proper attribution of dialogue, exact grammar, and the switching of viewpoint. For lapses in these areas he would indict his chosen target, with often hilarious and instructive results.

That this was and is a necessary, useful, and commendable exercise does not disturb the present point. It is an editorial exercise; the voice of the specialist trained to induce clarity in the text, following on a prior and really separate decision on the content of the text.

And that much – and no more – is what Knight’s peers in the science-fiction community were willing to accept and profit from.

Consider the situation. Until 1950 science fiction was a separate literature. There was no place for a practitioner of science fiction to go except the science-fiction magazines and the sister magazines publishing similarly based (and therefore redefined) fantasy. Science-fiction writers were variously willing but totally compelled captives of their editors.

Damon Knight was a minor writer, twenty-eight years old, who had begun as an amateur publisher, come to New York as an illustrator, and was only now – with stories such as “Not With a Bang” and “To Serve Man” – establishing a reputation as an able producer of the short-short story. That is a skill held in great respect by professional writers, but it is a skill so disconnected from what most writers do that its practitioners are credited with a “knack” and no special ability to teach it or, by extension until further notice, teach much of anything else. Knight had only one thing that conferred a teaching credential: he had been an editor, first for Popular Publications and then with *Worlds Beyond*.

So Knight had not actually licensed himself. He had placed himself in a position to cloak himself in the license granted to editors by writers. His criticism could go as far as editing goes, but no further.

The editor who ultimately fired Knight – very well, who was involved in the process that led to Knight’s cloture – was Robert P. Mills, a gentlemanly person of considerable experience in popular literature, and one who was directly responsible for such landmark science-fiction events as the first magazine publication of Brian Aldiss’s *Hothouse* series, the serialization of a cluster of Heinlein novels including some juveniles, and the floreat of *Venture Science Fiction* magazine. But for all of Mills’s considerable powers, he was so new in the field, and as yet so unsophisticated in its essences, that he was able to make a major miscalculation.

An editor is hired to guard and increase his publisher's purse. Whatever else he does is less relevant. There is one thing worse than a bad editor, and that is any editor, no matter how acute his literary qualities, who reaches wrong decisions affecting his publisher's prosperity. It had been correct of Lowndes to run Knight reviews. *Dynamic* was one of those magazines whose economics are predicated on the fact that a certain number of people will buy anything. The only readers Lowndes was actually editing for were that small additional number who purchased *Dynamic* with a more or less informed appreciation that Lowndes occasionally made a reliable brick without straw. Implicit in that relationship was an ab-initio awareness in those readers of the low quality of most of *Dynamic's* content, and thus also an agreement that science fiction could and did produce bad work as a general case. Thus, Knight's criticisms were a genuine attraction, and publishing them made excellent commercial sense; any negative effects were negligible because as far as anyone has ever been able to see, *nothing* can prevent the reflex science-fiction buyer from buying something labelled "science fiction".

But Mills was not in Lowndes' position. His initial 1958 move in offering Knight the review column made sense because the bulk of *F&SF's* readership could be assumed to operate on a more sophisticated plane. His move vis-a-vis Knight's offending review made no such sense, but to him it undoubtedly seemed to. Mills is not a man given to unconsidered action.

What Knight had reviewed was a piece of work by someone who had very much needed editing throughout an idiosyncratic career as a writer. But that career had been supported by the writer's very well managed, upward-mobile movement as a personage in the world of science-fiction letters. This was the first instance in which the technique of the general belles-lettres culture had been applied to our community. It is a technique not of doing very much, but of doing it in the right places in ways that convey a sense of superior taste; the conferring of authority upon oneself by means of what one appears to be.

Mills felt, or was brought to feel, that publishing an adverse criticism of this person's work could do more harm to *F&SF* than Knight's presence could do good.

The point here is not whether Justice Was Served, though I doubt very much if it was, almost no matter what the actual details were. The point is that up to that moment in science fiction's history, criticism was presumed to be directed at the work. From that moment on, we were in a condition in

which it was presumed to be directed at the person.

If it hadn't happened right there in that way, it would undoubtedly have happened elsewhere in some highly similar way very soon. (And it did.) There was no help for it. When we moved out of the magazines toward the Mainstream, we were simply recapitulating history, which says, for example, that when Britons decide to become Romans, the first thing Roman they pick up is the vices.

As soon as the criticism involves itself in people – as soon as people rise into positions where they are supported not necessarily by accomplishment but always by mercantibility – some modes become inoperative: performable, but ineffective.

What this boils down to for me is that the enshrinement of criticism within the science-fiction parish now bears no relation to the severer critical mode which created this effect, and that we now rarely pursue that mode. In what way could any such criticism affect Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert A. Heinlein author of *The Number of the Beast*, Alfred Bester author of *Golem 100*, Frank Herbert, Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, Frederik Pohl, or – – I have now picked up an alphabetical index to help me systematize this surfeit – Brian Aldiss, Poul Anderson, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Hal Clement, L. Sprague de Camp, Philip K. Dick, Gordon R. Dickson, Harlan Ellison, Philip José Farmer, Ursula K. Le Guin, Fritz Leiber, Anne McCaffrey, Barry Malzberg, Richard Matheson, Michael Moorcock, Joanna Russ, Robert Sheckley, Robert Silverberg, Clifford Simak, Norman Spinrad, Theodore Sturgeon, Jack Vance, A.E. van Vogt, Kate Wilhelm, Jack Williamson, Roger Zelazny, or Damon Knight?

This list is condensed from the index to the five-volume *Survey of Science Fiction Literature*, a \$200 (\$200!) reference set. It was derived by dropping out the dead, the retired, and those not participating in English, and finally by culling out those few – those very few – who have not yet reached Snug Harbor. Snug Harbor is reached either by commanding large amounts of money or by being consistently idiosyncratic enough to have developed a significant personal audience within the larger generalized pool of readers. Come to think of it, I somehow left off Piers Anthony and R.A. Lafferty, to name one of my favorite writers.

These are the bulletproof people. Some are probably venal, although in truth I know not one such among them and I do know most of them. Some are noble. Some are my friends and some are not, though that is irrelevant

here. None, as far as I know, ever wrote solely for the purpose of attaining to such a list. But can anyone doubt that we can make such a list – a disproportionately large list – of science-fiction practitioners who are simply not affectable by criticism, and that it looks quite a bit like this one? Except longer?

Now consider its effect on young writers. At some point they must begin to believe that criticism is a decorative exercise with no bearing. To whom do they then go for opinions on the effectiveness of their work; where do they get that feedback which informs them whether they are communicating or are merely selling? Is that the reason why they band together with their equally chartless peers? And at what point do they form a community around the tenet that membership in the community automatically makes their work outstanding ... or at least good enough?

And at what point do they rise together to silence the person who remarks that their particular species of arrogance is counterproductive? Or if they do not often go quite so far, then at what point do they agree to ignore that voice which particularly cuts the sharpest? What then does the effective critic do, on finding effectiveness so stultifyingly measured?

One size no longer fits all. Once we were all peers, or nearly so. Once, even if Knight was wrong or partially wrong in a particular case, he was nevertheless advocating a desirable general case. Paradoxically, just because there is no general case any more, I think we might be doing the best possible thing if we commit ourselves to exploring every possible mode of criticism, and to expanding the definition of the possible.

This is, of course, what many of us are already doing, and why there is a *Patchin Review*, among other things. But it might be wise for us to be aware that sometimes the effects of effective criticism can be the damndest things, including a shutdown of effectiveness, and therefore we must be particularly wise. And on the other hand, while only the ineffective will escape repeated frustration, there's no point in any of this if you don't take risks. Why take them? Well, it's like shopping for a yacht – if you have to ask what it costs, you shouldn't have one.

Economic pressures are increasingly with us these days, striking at marginal writers and their marginal editors as well. Thus, “effective criticism” is currently being written by Adam Smith. But we shouldn't pin our legitimacy to diminutions of the field, should we?

It also seems unlikely that there is, somewhere, an ideal science fiction,

which cannot help but be uncovered someday even if there are spells in which the ceaseless chipping encounters a particularly indurate overburden. So even time is not on our side. But we are.

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Edward Bryant has long been a lone voice of sanity and moderation in a field known for its hot-heads. High time, then, that Edward was allowed a regular forum for his views.

Good News & Sensible Suggestions Edward Bryant

These days, it seems to me, entirely too much fantasy and science-fiction criticism is negative. Too many critics are out for the easy ego-points of trashing. These critics have only an eye for the bad. Spider Robinson and Theodore Sturgeon are inadequate, between themselves, to carry the burden of defending all that is affirmative and good.

I feel that I must take up the slack. In this occasional column I wish to report on and even instigate the good news.

The fantasy field already has the World Fantasy Award, the British Fantasy Award, and the coveted Balrog. A new one, for science fantasy, has been suggested to me: the Luke.

The Luke will be awarded for achievement in uneasy design of soaring fantasy. The Luke is named for Luke Skywalker, of course. Skywalker connects with the skywalk, and the resonances of the late unpleasantness at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Kansas City.

There never was a World Science Fiction Convention or a World Fantasy Convention held at the Kansas City Hyatt. But there could have been. The hotel had that look about it. Had circumstances only been different, there might have been 111 science-fiction fans and writers dead. With the luck of the field, those 111 would have included the intelligible fans and the literate writers. So it seems appropriate that the Hyatt Regency should function as a symbol for our endeavors in the 1980s.

The design of the Luke is simple: a twenty-pound chunk of broken concrete, skewered on a length of rebar and set on a base of hamburger.

I feel this award possesses an air of considerably more gravity than the

previously proposed Silver Bullet award. (The advocates of the Silver Bullet propose putting the eponymous slug through the brain of the winner. The intent is not only recognition of a lifetime's achievement in fantasy, but also to see that the writer never then slides into an embarrassing decline from a career pinnacle.)

Reader reaction and further suggestions are enthusiastically solicited.



It has been a source of delight for me to mark the proliferation of horror fiction these past few years. I've always enjoyed reading a creepy story of terror; recently I've tried writing them. Unfortunately (for me, that is) numbers of editors have not enjoyed my horror and supernatural fantasy stories as much as I.

Since I'm obviously doing something wrong, I thought it might be instructive to other would-be horror writers to reprint excerpts from some of my recent rejections in the hope that they may serve as negative examples to my colleagues. In other words, do *not* as I did and perhaps you will succeed

where I failed.

I sent a story of horror and dark sexual perversity to *Playboy*. Alice K. Turner, the fiction editor there, thanked me for sending the story but said, “It’s a little too peculiar for me, I’m afraid.”

So watch your index of peculiarity when submitting to *Playboy*.

Another story went off to Ted Klein at *Twilight Zone*. It came back with a complimentary rejection letter – and Klein’s notation: “But (and I think this is mainly a personal thing) I just couldn’t relate at all to your no-nonsense psychically gifted female narrator, and having to see the story through her eyes rather distanced me from it. I’m sorry; I enjoyed the tale, but I just don’t see it in TZ.” This was, by the way, the same protagonist who appeared in my story in Kirby McCauley’s *Dark Forces* anthology. Alas, a lesson in what sort of protagonist not to use for *Twilight Zone*.

Then there was the fantasy that went to Susan M. Shwartz, new editor and compiler of the upcoming DAW original anthology, *Hecate’s Cauldron*. Susan wrote in her rejection: “How I wish I hadn’t already bought a story which combined magic and rock music already! When I read yours, which came to me a little after *Lunacon*, I groaned because of that. So, unfortunately, I have to return it.”

What is the lesson of the paragraph immediately previous? Don’t send Susan Shwartz a story which combines magic and rock music. Trouble is, my story had no rock music in it – not a bar, a note, a scene, a line, a metaphor. No character hummed, whistled, tapped a foot, or even listened to the radio.

What is the lesson?

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The following article was originally presented as a preface to a panel discussion organized by Tri-Quarterly magazine in Evanston, Illinois on November 22 1980. Appearing with Thomas M. Disch were Algis Budrys, Gene Wolfe, Jonathan Brent, Phyllis Eisenstein, and James Park Sloan.

Science Fiction vs. Literature

Thomas M. Disch: The Prosecution’s Case

On November 15 1980 NBC premiered *Saturday Night Live* in its revamped format. The new show was painfully bad, a tombstone to the high hilarity of a decade that started with Watergate and witnessed the flowering of Woody

Allen, Monty Python, Mary Hartman, and the late deceased. Having become accustomed to that weekly revenge against the whips and scorns of time, it is hard, especially now, as we enter the catastrophic Reagan years, to relinquish the possibility of sharing good jokes with the world at large, to surrender the conviction that an enclave of intelligence survives among the boobs and ninnies, an enclave large enough to command the expenditure of prime-time dollars. Well, that's over now, and stupidity and dullness are back in charge, and there's no surprise in that. I only mention it because after my first reaction, pain, I felt a quick illuminating flash of anger, and the message it delivered spilled over beyond the death of *Saturday Night Live* to the subject that had been proposed for this panel, "Science Fiction vs. Literature". I realized that instead of continuing the approach to that subject already begun – some six pages of careful avoidance of the issue, with footnotes – that I would do better to express my feelings on the matter directly and candidly. My feelings are anger, slight, and resentment.

These are not uncommon feelings among science-fiction writers when this subject is broached, but usually they are expressed toward the second element in that pairing, Literature, which is viewed as a club or class that has unjustly denied Science Fiction the right of membership. Much of my earlier draft was devoted to documenting that old antagonism. I can't resist quoting the most recent of these anti-literary pronouncements, which appeared in *Destinies*, where Spider Robinson, the most prolific of the genre's present critics, was saluting Robert Heinlein as his Messiah.

"If you want to thank Robert Heinlein," Spider wrote, "do what you can to see to it that the country he loves, the culture he loves, the magnificent ideal he loves, is not destroyed. If you have the wit to see that this old man was a genuine handle on the way the world wags, kindly stop complaining that his literary virtues are not classical and go back to doing what you used to do when sf was a ghetto-literature scorned by all the world: force copies of Heinlein on all your friends." When first presented at a large sf convention, that speech drew a standing ovation. Most fans, it would seem, feel a kindred loyalty to God, country, and Heinlein and an antagonism toward what he dismisses as "classical literary virtues". If we reserve God and country for another discussion, I must confess that my loyalties are the reverse of Spider's. My first allegiance is to Literature – that is, to whatever demonstrates conspicuous excellence in the art of imaginative writing – and to science fiction only when it approaches the condition of Literature, which

it usually does not. Stated so broadly, I can't imagine many people would disagree, at least in the matter of giving lip service to excellence. However, I *can* imagine large areas of legitimate contention as to what is to be allowed within the pale of Literature and what disallowed. Leslie Fiedler has argued that certain kinds of brightly colored trash possess a vigor and authenticity that entitles them to literary consideration in spite of all aesthetics.

"Pornography, comics, science fiction, poetry, westerns, mysteries, and the serious novel *all* can and must be examined seriously by the serious critic," Fiedler wrote – and, as well: "I hope science fiction does not lose its slapdash quality, its sloppiness or its vulgarity." Samuel Delany has expressed my own sense of the matter when he replied to this that "slapdash writing, sloppiness, and vulgarity are, no matter how you catch them, fat diseased lice." Hear, hear. I also take umbrage somewhat to Fiedler's use of that saving equivocation, "serious". A serious critic must seriously examine the serious novel *and* other forms of writing, presumably not serious (though poetry is probably to be understood as sharing in seriousness with the serious novel; most serious critics seem to make such an assumption). I would contend that a good science fiction novel is as serious as any other kind, and that to contrast science fiction or other genre writing and *serious* literature is to allow science fiction out of the ghetto only on condition that it prominently display a yellow armband. At the same time I'll admit that it's often hard to avoid an honorific use of "serious". The implied antitheses are trivial, sentimental, escapist. Many quite enjoyable books are, in varying degrees, trivial, sentimental, and escapist, but it is a mistake (which serious critics often make) to suppose that seriousness (i.e. a commitment to telling home truths about the human condition) and enjoyment are incompatible. Indeed, a serious novel that is not enjoyable is merely self-important and dull. Readers wisely refrain from reading them. As Gore Vidal observed in a recent issue of the *New York Review of Books*:

"Predictably, despite the reflexive support of old-fashioned editors and book reviewers, the Serious Novel is of no actual interest to anyone, including the sort of people who write them: they are apt to read Agatha Christie, if they read at all.... Nevertheless, in a sort of void, Serious Novels continue to be published and praised, but they are not much read.... But ... if a Serious Novel is not going to be read; it can always be taught – if it is so made as to be more teacherly than readerly."

Vidal goes on to suggest that a writer who wishes to escape “the dead end of the Serious Novel” should consider the possibility of “infiltrating the genre forms”.

As one who came to similar conclusions on my own some while ago, I would like to describe some of my experiences as an infiltrator – chiefly, the bad ones. The subject proposed, after all, is “Science Fiction *Versus* Literature” – not, more comfortably, *and*.

When my first novel, *The Genocides*, appeared in 1965, it received some good reviews in science-fiction magazines, but it is in the nature of good reviews that they don’t come as a surprise. One is thankful for them, of course, as one is thankful for Christmas presents from one’s family, but one also takes them for granted. It’s the hickory switch and lumps of coal in the stocking that have the power to astonish, and my first stockingfull of those provisions appeared in the pages of *Galaxy* magazine, of late memory. Algis Budrys’s review in that magazine was quoted extensively in the introduction to the Gregg Press reprint of the novel, and I would like to quote it again now, not only for old time’s sake but because I think it pertinent to our theme.

Budrys first expressed his extensive dissatisfaction with J.G. Ballard’s first two novels. Ballard wasn’t under review, but my book was presumed to be derivative of his. This was galling, as I hadn’t at that time read the books I was supposed to be imitating, but any complaint on that score can be shrugged away with a reference to the *Zeitgeist*. Having proven that Ballard was a vile pessimist, Budrys then turned to *The Genocides*:

“You have surely heard by now that this is a very good and an important book. The verbal formula I get from various respectable acquaintances of mine is that you would never have thought Disch could have produced anything this good.” (Thanks a lot, all you respectable acquaintances.) “The verbal formula I get from other respectable friends of mine wedded to the school of science fiction which takes hope in science and Man, is that the book is unrelieved trash, ineptly written, pretentious, inconsistent, and sophomoric. I personally feel that it reflects a deep and dedicated study of the trappings of a book everybody says is good.” (Meaning Ballard’s.)

After further paragraphs on my derivativeness, Budrys reviews Roger Zelazny’s *This Immortal*, and concludes with a prediction which I would like to see cast in bronze and hung above A.J.’s lintel:

“Oversimplifying, you might say that *The Genocides* is based on

intricately worked out, deliberate self-limitation, while *This Immortal* is based on thoroughly understood, inexhaustible engagements with one's own grasp. The two writers involved seem to be just about equally talented within their own chosen horizons, but Zelazny I think is going to be the important and in fact the enduring one of the two ... because his horizon is goddamn much bigger."

It is generally accounted unwise to argue with one's bad reviews, and in any case I was offered the opportunity to do so recently in Charles Platt's *Dream Makers*, where I enlarged upon my opinion that charging a writer with pessimism and nihilism doesn't really amount to criticism in any literary sense. It's usually shorthand for saying "Non-member", which that review did, most effectively.

I don't mean to quote all my bad reviews, if only because the most effective were those never written. After *The Genocides* my next science-fiction novels weren't reviewed in most science-fiction magazines; in the case of *334*, which may be the best of them, there wasn't a review in any professional science-fiction magazine in this country, and by very few outside the field, nor has it subsequently received critical attention from those academic journals concerned with science fiction.

The next science-fiction novel after *334*, *On Wings of Song*, was turned down on its completion by the publisher who'd contracted for it, Knopf, who had published two earlier non-science-fiction books by me. The list of its subsequent rejection is both long and distinguished: Scribner's, Holt Rinehart, Simon & Schuster, Viking, Putnam, Little-Brown, Farrar Strauss, and Harper & Row. Despite its eventual publication and a fair helping of good reviews, I don't find it unimaginable that it might never have been placed with a publisher in this country. This time it was *The New York Times* that gave me my lumps of coal. There Gerald Jonas made a classic statement concerning the essential incompatibility of science fiction and literature:

...(Disch) "tells the story of Daniel Weinreb as it might be told by one of Daniel's contemporaries – an author writing for readers who live in the world that had shaped Daniel's character. Indeed, Mr. Disch's primary interest is in delineating character. In a science-fiction context this is at first startling, but as a narrative strategy it is finally self-defeating.

“The reason, I think, is that except for an occasional *tour de force*, there is no room in science fiction and fantasy for the traditional novel of character. A science-fiction author may create characters to demonstrate how a change in technology or social organization alters the human condition; or he may invent entire exotic worlds to show how certain human traits – such as passion or greed – take different forms under different circumstances. But the focus is typically on the forces that shape character, rather than on the character development itself. When Daniel sits down to dinner with his family or the family of his fiancée, we learn a great deal about the fragile bonds that tie these people together. Mr. Disch handles these interactions very well. But the emphasis is misplaced, as if a scene from one of O’Neill’s family dramas had been inserted into a play by Brecht. I came to resent such scenes as interruptions, excessive in length and inexcusably dull. The more *On Wings of Song* resembles a contemporary novel, the less successful it is as science fiction.”

None of my reviewers has ever so forcefully expressed the double bind implicit in the antithesis between science fiction and literature. The more I succeed, the more I fail. Back to the gutters of the ghetto. Stick to your own kind.

Such advice has practical consequences. To the degree that my work has been identified with “serious literature” it has been at a disadvantage among critics, editors, and (especially) publishers, who are consciously and forthrightly antagonistic to, in Spider Robinson’s phrase, “classical literary virtues” cohabiting with science fiction. At the same time the literary establishment continues to be squeamish about science fiction. Editors in the field who like to appear intellectually well-dressed will often deplore the predominance of dreck, but none last long who refuse to make an accommodation to it. Most, I believe, take a personal satisfaction in seeing their own cynical expectations fulfilled. Bizet’s comment, vis-a-vis the “Toreador Song”, might well be their motto: “If *merde* is what they want, I’ll give them *merde*.”

Such prophecies are self-fulfilling. A bad book, lavishly produced and expensively ballyhooed, is likely to sell more copies than a shabbily produced and unpromoted good book whose shelf life is exhausted before the reviews, if any, are in print – an all too common occurrence. Further, while a

ponderable proportion of science fiction *is* written with an adult audience in mind, almost all science fiction is packaged, *like* Cheerios, to appeal to the youth market. Just as most Cheerios are bought by people who like Cheerios, most science fiction is bought by people who like stories about dragons and their favorite Star Trek characters. When a publisher's packaging tricks them into buying frozen broccoli instead of Cheerios, they are legitimately miffed, and if raw liver comes out of the box, miff escalates to outrage. (Thus I refute my bad reviews!)

The problem is not simply that the industry caters to undeveloped tastes but that it so often actively corrupts and depraves. (A blatant example, the Gor novels of John Norman.) Escapist formulas are intended to addict, as certainly as cigarettes. The intrusion of art, even in small time-released dosages, into the daydream is usually unwelcome, since it introduces lumps of thoughtfulness into the flow of wish-fulfilling fantasy. Who wants to eat broccoli and Cheerios *together*?

We live in a pluralist culture and a free-enterprise economy. I do not object to the production or consumption of Cheerios, cigarettes, or hack writing. I somewhat object to advertising claims for the nutritional value of Cheerios and object rather more strongly to the hypocrisy of the tobacco industry in their efforts to dismiss cancer warnings as unproven. Similarly, I resent those critics and editors within the science-fiction field who make inflated claims for formula hackwork. Even so, I appreciate that their motives are sometimes not unworthy of sympathy. In such cases the alternative to self-deception is self-contempt, a serious affliction since it is the commonest cause of that most dreaded of hack writers' occupational hazards, writer's block.

What I consider most reprehensible, because most gratuitous, is the readiness of so many academic critics to take science fiction at its own valuation. Academics should act as guards at the borders of Literature, establishing the canon of what is and what is not to be accounted worthy of serious (i.e., not escapist, not trivializing) attention. Yet how often the reverse is true. How often this tribunal merely echoes the uninstructed and unstructured tastes of fandom, accepting and endorsing the inflated reputations of writers once applauded for having achieved mediocrity when complete incompetence prevailed. The presumption exists that science fiction is a holiday resort where academics can put aside their gowns and bask in the judgment-free sunlight of Pop Culture, where Fiedler's unholy trinity of

slapdash writing, sloppiness, and vulgarity rule O.K..

The motive for this dereliction of duty is usually plain laziness. Received opinions are the easiest to express and not apt to be challenged. As with other kinds of cop-outs there is also a moral laziness at work, a complacency often to be found among those who write highbrow criticism of lowbrow culture. The phenomenon is not new. In *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* John Gross describes the avatar of this type in the person of Andrew Lang, a critic of the late Victorian era:

“There was one type of book – which could be guaranteed to revive Lang’s waning powers of enthusiasm: the straightforward tuppence-colored adventure story. No one did more than this fastidious scholar to promote the turn-of-the-century vogue for Romance, for long-lost kingdoms, imitation D’Artagnans, chronicles of Ruritania and the Spanish Main. His favorite contemporary novelist was Stevenson ... even though he could detect in” (Stevenson’s novels) “the occasional unwholesome streak of subtlety which led him to make his once-notorious demand (it might have been his motto) for ‘more claymores, less psychology’.

“...Stevenson, Zenda, antiquarianism – it all sounds harmless enough. There was another side to the coin, however. If Lang had one consistent policy as a reviewer, it was to ridicule or disparage practically every truly important novel which came his way. He sniped impartially at Russians and Frenchmen, at naturalists and symbolists, at Thomas Hardy and Henry James. Tolstoi and Dostoievsky, he thought, deserved ‘the punishment which Dante assigned to those who deliberately seek sadness.’ ... One of the distinguishing characteristics of the modern element in literature is that it disturbs. The more he recognized this, the more Lang clutched at the primitive certainties of the penny dreadful. And if novelists insisted on threatening his peace of mind, he was always in a position to retaliate. He knew how to wound: his treatment of Tess, for instance, drew bitter protest from Hardy.”

The prosecution rests.

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*Janet Morris's fine Dream Dancer trilogy has been well received thus far.
Her next project promises to make a much more explosive impact.*

Confessions of a Guerrilla

Janet E. Morris

I never wanted to become a science-fiction guerrilla. When the war chief of a rag-tag band of freedom fighters calling itself the Science Fiction Liberation Front contacted me, I laughed it off. In one hand he brandished the manifesto, in the other hand an Uzi SMG with its doubled magazines fully loaded: fifty rounds of 9mm parabellum destruction. The submachine gun was the lesser of the two lethalties.

The manifesto advocated your average “Foco-theory” revolution, best carried out under cover of a smoking gun barrel: mobile strike forces must act to spread terror to Trekkies and conventioners everywhere; revolution makes revolution; hostages shall further the cause....

It was all explained most intellectually, quoting operational war treatises in *International Security* (than which nothing is thanwhicher) and Heinlein in the old days when he could still think.... I handed it back to this guy, whose T-shirt said “Peace Through Superior Firepower” but had first two words stroked out (with red magic marker – I hoped), and sort of mumbled like I do when somebody comes up to me and says “I’ve read all your books, your mother gave them to me...” Which is to say I looked around for the nearest exit and thanked him for his time....

He insisted I keep the charter and the two-year plan, which called for such drastic steps as the amputation of Ellison’s mouth and the shortening of Disch by four inches and the occupation of *Omni*’s offices (Bova not to be surrendered at any cost; all others offered for ransom, with the exception of someone called Datlow, who was *not* to be taken at any cost, these orders to be disobeyed on pain of being terminated with extreme prejudice....)

Like I said, I laughed it off, departing his proximity quickly, thinking I’d just waited him out, that I hadn’t really listened to any of this talk about how those culprits who were causing science to disappear from science fiction should be made to disappear in their appointed turn.

“*Tachyons!*” he hollered after me, his parting shot: “If you don’t believe me, watch out for the tachyons! They’re back! Benford brought ’em back ... even though he *knows better!*”

I found I had stopped, turned, muttered something about causal loops being, well, if not okay, then, excusable ... surely ... if not rigorous in the logical sense, then sort of like Goedel's timelike roundtrips, or maybe Feinberg's ... no? Then Dobbs' phase time? No? Then I remembered that I, too, cared about science, and that, as Whitrow so neatly noted, the proper time of tachyons would be another mode or dimension of time related to ordinary proper time by the square-root of -1, "the two kinds of proper time being like the axes in the Argand diagram. Consequently, the nonexistence of tachyons may be considered as corroborative evidence for the hypothesis that there is only one dimension of time and that, irrespective of time dilation and time horizons, there is a universal time order for all pairs of events that can be causally related ... that so far no transluminal particles, or tachyons, have been detected is evidence in favour of a unique scale of universal time, modified where necessary by the demands of relativity." (G.J. Whitrow, *Natural Philosophy of Time*, Oxford, 1980). Much more simply, logic suggests that in the real world of proper time, effects do not predate causes. "But Benford's at least conversant," I mumbled. "And he's such a nice guy. And everybody loved that book...." I trailed off. The revolutionary was grinning nastily.

Running as inconspicuously as possible down the crowded science-fiction-convention corridor, I chanced a look back over my shoulder. He was pointing me out to Leslie Epstein. When I reached the safety of my room, I found I still had the manifesto and the two-year plan....

Well, that's how it started. I didn't think they'd gotten to me with their *fedayeen* agitprop. I was safe. Violence belongs in fiction, not on the streets. Caveat emptor, and all that. Later that night, I met a reviewer who "loved my book", and couldn't he please have one of those neat-o patches he'd seen around? From the review you couldn't tell he loved the book, but I gave him a patch. Then I asked him something about the last chapter, and did he think that x worked, and found out he hadn't read that far. Press of deadlines, and such.... My middle finger twitched. (I learned early on that in impromptu shooting, laying your index finger along the barrel gives an aiming advantage – so has the secret service, to judge from the Reagan assassination-attempt film.)

Three days later I was home collecting my mail. I got the first *Patchin Review* and read poor bemused (sic) John Smith's article. Then I opened a package from William Morrow and pulled out A.A. Attanasio's *Radix* with

the damnedest cover letter I've ever read enclosed, on Morrow's stationery. It was "bone-tender", most humbly idealistic, and I remember when I felt like that.... I began to get angry. These people have got to be protected,

Speculative science comes and goes in science fiction. It came in the Wells days (he got paid by the word) and in the Gernsback days (he *paid* by the word) and in the Heinlein/Clarke/Asimov heyday, when the science they learned in school was still relevant. It came again, sort of, in the humanistic/new wave days of Zelazny and Delany (classically and anatomically, at least). It flitted in for a visit with Lem. Scientific speculation will come back, when a new generation matures or the old one goes back for refresher courses. All this I told myself, but I didn't really believe it any more. I recalled various editorial comments, given me in confidence and "bone-tender" seriousness: "Fuck the science," was one. "What matters is if the boy kisses the girl," was another. "I don't *want* to do a book whose first printing is a million two," was another. I could feel my pulse-rate surge.

I still had the manifesto, and the two-year plan. It was under my daddy's S&W .38 police special, under my silk undies, in the top drawer, that I had stashed them. I got out the Plan, looking for a likely target.... I was surprised to see how many had made it to their hitlist. I wasn't on it, I was relieved to note (either because they didn't really know who I was, or because they *did* really know who I was).

Like I said, I looked it over, and then I called the number written in invisible ink between the two bottom lines (after subtracting the year from each numeral, of course) and set up a meet. I know the rest of the game. I get a cryptonym, a nom de guerre, and a cover name. (The only problem there is to find out whether there are any deceased Pournelles in this country born female in forty-six, or forty-five, or forty-four, whose birth certificate I can appropriate for my passport.) They're going to send me to France. Too bad, I really liked Spinrad a lot, but duty calls....

Don't phone me, guys. I'm in enough trouble for letting you know about all this. As a matter of fact, I may have made it to the new, about-to-be-distributed list of targets. But just remember the dogs and the laser-perimeter and the FALs. We buy ammo by the caseload, up here....

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Gabby Snitch resents having her work compared to The National Enquirer. "What do they know about satire?" she says. But then, some critics

seemed unaware that Gabby was writing satire in the first place.

Tales to Astonish by Gabby Snitch

Who should I run into last month – at a computer fair, of all places – but my old mentor ISAAC ASIMOV. It seems he’s doing promo for home computers these days, when he’s not writing his new novel for Doubleday. The way Ike tells it, fiction takes five times as long as nonfiction, and the novel wasn’t his idea in the first place!

Speaking of Asimov – I hear that “Bohemian BOB” SHECKLEY is to be the roving movie reviewer for *Isaac Asimov’s SF Magazine*. “Roving,” because he’s relocating in Florida, of all places....

BARRY “Mr. Misery” MALZBERG claims he’s retired again – this time, not just from science fiction but from all kinds of fiction. Barry’s started working nine-to-five at the Scott Meredith Literary Agency, advising would-be authors how not to make the mistakes he made.

HARLAN ELLISON threatened to get an injunction against publication of the first *Patchin Review* when he heard that JOHN SHIRLEY wanted to add a three-line afterword to Ellison’s article saying that Shirley felt his personal letters had been “misinterpreted”. Let Shirley wait till the second issue, insisted “Zorro” ... or else!

Moved from Ace: Garrulous RICHARD McENROE. He’s gone freelance – here’s hoping he’ll find work despite the grim job market created by a certain U.S. president whom Richard helped to elect....

Billionaire bachelor bon-vivant KIRBY McCAULEY and his sultry sister KAY hosted a regal reception for one of Kirby’s classy clients, FRANK HERBERT, this July. Guests mingled among mismatched antiques and tapestries in a posh downtown mansion hired for the event. Among unexpected notables I met JOHN SCHOENHERR, the one-time *Analog* artist who first painted *Dune*. He told me he’s given up illustrating science fiction since he started selling wild-life paintings for \$10,000 apiece – pictures of birds and tigers, mostly.... Also at the party: FRANK BELKNAP LONG, NORMAN SPINRAD (planning his new career as a rock composer, and boasting that his recent junket to Japan proved that it takes a nation like the Japanese to really appreciate an author of his standing), and ALFIE BESTER, complaining he can’t get started on a script he’s supposed to be writing for

Roger Corman. Too bad – that’s one movie we’d *all* like to see.

Meanwhile I found Timescape Books assistant editor JOHN DOUGLAS eyeing *Heavy Metal* editor BRAD BALFOUR and muttering to himself, “I can remember when Brad was a twelve-year-old kid sending me his fanzine from Iowa, and now here he is escorting fashion models to McCauley’s cocktail party.” Did John mind my quoting him? Not at all, he said – always glad to get into print.

Speaking of Brad Balfour – SOME of us were lucky enough to be invited by him to the premiere of the *Heavy Metal* movie, while OTHERS had to settle for a screening one week later, followed by a disco party where middle-aged guests stumbled around under flashing colored spotlights and shouted in each others’ ears above pounding music from the movie soundtrack. Inappropriate, to say the least!

As I’m sure you’ve all heard by now, BOB SHECKLEY’s one-time assistant ELLEN DATLOW has taken over as “acting” fiction ed. at *Omni* magazine. Will it change her life? “I expect to have a lot more hangers-on,” she quipped. “Although being unknown in the field is a help – at conventions I won’t be chased unless I wear my name tag!” Just a minute – was that CHASED or CHASTE, I asked. “Either one,” she giggled merrily. But: “I’m delighted and thrilled and I intend to uphold the high standards of *Omni*,” she added on a strictly serious note.

Some of you know the ridiculous excuses an author will dream up when he has to explain why he’s late delivering a manuscript. “There was a fire at the Xerox copy center,” and so on and so forth! Well last week I heard the best excuse ever. “I sent the story by Emery Air Freight,” this author claimed, “but I’ve discovered there’s a guy working there who’s a fan of mine, he saw my return address, and *stole the manuscript!*”

Wish I could tell you the author’s name, but I’m sworn to secrecy.

PHILIP K. DICK tells me his *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* should be released as a movie (“Blade Runner”) by May 1982. Phil resisted pressure to do a “book of the film”; the original book will be republished instead, to the disgust of greedy Hollywood execs.

By now you probably still haven’t heard of *Venom*, a mag of nothing but nasty book reviews, which reliable sources tell me is edited by Marta Randall and her Bay Area pals ... and secretly financed (some say!) by fun-loving DAVE HARTWELL (any comments on this, Dave?). Seems no one wants to buy it, so they’re having to give it away. (They sent me TWO copies!!) If

you're bored enough to want your own sample just send a 52-cent-stamped self-addressed envelope (9 x 12) to *Venom*, P.O. Box 11626, San Francisco, CA 94101. Incidentally, *Venom* imposes a cute initiation rite on would-be contributors: you have to write a review panning your own work. Some people complain BOB "Big Bucks" SILVERBERG didn't quite get into the spirit of the thing in his piece; while VONDA McINTYRE's is so boring it's hard to tell whether it's really a hatchet job or not. Look for my scathingly witty put-down of our very own *Patchin Review* in the next *Venom*, those of you who can stay awake through this amount of inverted in-group narcissism....

Lastly, some questions for you all. Which fave fantasist faces a fight with his publisher over his second trilogy? What infamous movie/TV producer has lent his name to an upcoming movie, merely to lure fans? And which writer/editor is wondering whether to write a book series featuring one of our best-loved science-fiction characters? – Wish *I* knew!!

Remember, I pay \$5 for gossip items – so long as they can be printed! Some of the items you people have sent in are too scandalous (and unverifiable) even for ME to mess with. Behave yourselves!

Loose lips sink spaceships!

Love, Gabby

I asked Alfred Bester if he'd write an opinion piece, as outspokenly as he wished. Ever charming, ever diplomatic, he obliged with an admonishment as gentle as it is apt.

The Shame of Skiffy* **Alfred Bester**

Unless you're interested in the clash between admirers of Pablo Picasso and fans of Norman Rockwell you won't be interested in the conflict between me and Hollywood over science fiction and I'll shut up so you can watch *Lost in Space*.

* Editor's note: *Skiffy*: Phonetic pronunciation of *Sci-Fi*, implying contempt on the part of the speaker.

Rockwell was a magnificent artist. His *Post* covers were glorious compressions of what today takes thirteen weeks to unfold on a daytime TV

series.

There's nothing I can say about Picasso, the originator, that hasn't already been said. He was the artist who, at a blow of the eye, could kick your mind into thinking what it had never thought before, but I can sum it up with a story about him that few people know.

Jerry Wald, the late fine film producer (he started Marilyn Monroe on her road to stardom) was tremendously excited when I was interviewing him out on the coast. He'd just met Picasso and confessed that he'd behaved like a small boy meeting his sports idol.

It seems that Wald had bought a fine Picasso long-distance through a Paris art dealer. When at last he made his first trip to Paris, Wald visited the dealer to thank him and ask if a meeting with Picasso could be arranged. It was, and Wald was taken to the *maitre's* studio. Now I report it in Jerry's words:

“After the polite courtesies – I was flustered but he was very nice to me – and some talk about California and *cinematographique*, he was very much interested in that, I said to him, ‘And what are you doing now, Mr. Picasso?’”

(I love that Hollywood touch, *Mister Picasso*.)

Jerry continues: “And Mr. Picasso said, ‘I'm looking for a new style.’ Now how about that? Seventy-seven years old, an established box office star, a fixture, and still trying to do something new!”

And here, I argue, lies the difference between Pablo Picasso and Norman Rockwell, and between genuine science fiction and the Hollywood film versions of it. It's a case of new styles and new ideas as opposed to magnificent productions of the familiar.

“And what,” I hope you'll ask, “is the familiar in science fiction films to which you're objecting?”

Why, it's good-guy-bad-guy stories, mysterious menace stories, taking-over-the-world stories, Godzilla vs. Big Foot stories, etc. etc. etc.

You know, back in the late twenties when science fiction unexpectedly exploded into popularity with us kids (we had to tear the cover off the magazine to prevent the grownups from discovering what we were devouring) there was an urgent need for stories and the only writers available at pulp magazine rates, half-a-cent a word, were the Western hacks. They simply translated the familiar Lazy X ranch, cattle rustlers, sincere fighting foreman, and the rancher's daughter into the Super X spaceship, space pirates, sincere fighting space pilot, and the professor's daughter. Those

skiffy stories are still with us today in different disguises.

And now I hope you'll say, "But if you're objecting to good-guy-bad-guy stories –"

And sinister menace stories.

"Yes. Then you're –"

Or hero-fighting-overwhelming-odds stories.

"Please don't interrupt. Then you're objecting to three-quarters of *all* films and TV, not just science fiction films, aren't you?"

Yes.

"But it's all entertainment, isn't it? Why should science fiction receive special treatment?"

I'm glad that question finally managed to get itself asked. Worn-out clichés have nothing to do with science fiction because the crux, the quintessence of science fiction is the unexpected; new styles, fresh ideas, the Picasso kick in the head. Science fiction (and this should be read in italics) is the last stronghold of wildcat originality in a soap-opera-oriented culture, and Hollywood is merely turning soap opera into space opera.

Channel 1: MOVIE – Drama "STAR FIEND" (1975). An adventuring space pilot matches wits with a villainous scientist over Tobor IV, a mysterious robot from outer space which plans to conquer the world. Rick: Tab Hunter. Prof. Dnim: Jose Ferrer. Tobor IV: Raquel Welch. 90 min.

Ladies and gentlemen, this isn't science fiction, it's skiffy. And for me the hell of it is that some of my colleagues cannot seem to understand that science fiction can be far more than skiffy entertainment. In essence it's an open invitation to ultra-modern *vers libre* poetry, and an exciting challenge.

Now skiffy *drek* is not the fault of Hollywood; there are as many creative, original talents on the coast as anywhere else. It's the fault of a public which has never learned, or else forgotten, that entertainment is a challenging, stimulating collaboration between audience and artist. We're all partners who can make the whole greater than the sum of its parts, and I must add that the only partners I've ever found who can meet that challenge are the bright young science fiction readers.

Alas, today the civilian public craves plastic entertainment laid in its lap without any necessity to participate, think, respond, contribute like the intelligent science fiction reader. That civilian public wants its pleasure

plastered on it, rather like a dumb cake waiting to be spread with icing. And Hollywood, being in the profit-and-loss business, must spread the icing or go bust. The icing, of course, is the fabulous, breathtaking production and special effects you find in *Star Wars* for example, or *2001*, but it's spread on the same old dumb skiffy story.

Don't think that I'm in deadly earnest about "serious" science fiction. I can enjoy *Star Trek* as much as *Upstairs, Downstairs*, and the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* happens to be a damned fine film despite its tacky title and theme. I adore the absurdities of *Wonder Woman*, which I usually watch M.O.S.,* and wait eagerly for re-runs of *Teenagers from Outer Space*, probably the most delicious example of unconscious humor in Hollywood history.

* Studio shorthand. Based on a German director who used to say, "Ve vill shoodt dis footage mitout sound."

But I wish that the studios could occasionally do justice to really great science fiction stories without smarming them down into skiffy for an apathetic public. Anyone who's seen *The Thing from Outer Space*, a despicable travesty of John Campbell's extraordinary "Who Goes There?" will understand and sympathize with my frustration. And need I add giant ants, spiders, grasshoppers, crabs, termites, and praying mantises, or haven't they got to them yet? *Godzilla vs. The Praying Mantis*. I think I'll like it. M.O.S. of course.

Actually we're threatened by something more dangerous than bugs. I call it, "The Invasion of Skiffy Producers from Outer Space." Network producer I know called me one morning with, "Alf, you got to get down here right away. I just come up with the greatest idea for a Sci-Fi series in broadcasting, and you're the only one who can write it."

So I got down to his office right away. "Yes?" I asked.

"It's the greatest, baby! It's guaranteed three years solid, plus foreign re-runs, plus a high-budget full-length feature!"

"Uh-huh?"

"And I'm handing it to you on a silver platter."

"Thanks. What is it?"

He beamed. "A *different* 'Invisible Man'. Now all you got to do is write it."

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Agency by Andrew Joron

Heat-sensitive
In semi-darkness
& lacking nothing of the living
Meat's precision
Her prosthetic hand reaches for a cigarette
Whining softly, tiny motors
Press & release: tip to tip
On each glass fingernail glows a read-out
Its motion in series – a miniature chase scene

A design for future assassinations

Copyright © 1981 by Andrew Joron

One of the pleasures of editing this magazine is that I receive articles from people I've never met, stating persuasive viewpoints that I don't necessarily agree with.

Lit'rary Snobs of SF Joel Rosenberg

In genre fiction there is an agreement of expectation between the writer and reader which, if violated, leaves the reader feeling cheated. Genre fiction is a contract. The nature of the agreement varies from genre to genre. In a murder mystery, for instance, there must be a murder, and some question about either whodunnit or how the murderer will be caught. In a gothic romance, there must be a naive young thing, a manse with a Dark Secret, and, usually, an evil older woman wearing an unbecoming green dress. In the Gor genre, there must be a whipping, a branding ... but I digress.

Nowhere is it graven in stone that genre fiction must be bad writing, although much of it is. Evan Hunter's *87th Precinct* stories, which are in the detective subgenre called Police Procedurals (meaning that, in addition to the usual agreements of the genre, the writer must have the action occur as it

could were the problem to be laid before an actual police department), are examples of some fine writing, with memorable characters necessary and sufficient for the action, and unity of plot and theme. His writing, while obeying the stringent limits of the subgenre, manages to transcend those limits, satisfying another set of criteria in addition.

But science fiction is not a genre. Consider: you are blindfolded in front of the science-fiction section of your local bookstore, and asked to select a book at random. As you doff your blindfold and open the book, what specific expectations can you legitimately have?

Zero. Zip. None.

Were I to tell you a bit more about the book in your hand before you took off the blindfold, you might *then* find it was genre fiction – that you had an identifiable set of expectations which you could legitimately bring to your reading of it. For example: “It’s a Space Opera,” I say.

Images of Doc Smith’s *Lensman* series flash through your head, and you have some expectation that the story will contain interstellar travel, battles between civilizations, fairly flat protagonists, and so on.

Or: “It’s a New Wave novel,” I say.

After you reflexively (and somewhat reasonably) reject the notion of there really being a New Wave, you prepare to take off the blindfold expecting that the novel will have much emphasis on character over plot, will quite probably be depressing in theme, will have been written during the sixties and seventies by one of a number of writers....

Or: “It’s Military Science Fiction.”

Be a bit careful here. Statistically, the book is liable to glorify the military – *Starship Troopers*, *The Mercenary*, et al. – but you could be holding Dickson’s *Naked to the Stars*.

But how about: “It’s Lit’rary Science Fiction.”

Now, take the blindfold off, and leave it off. You’re holding a book that conforms to a set of expectations just as rigid and unbending as any of the rest. Specifically, what you’ve got in your hand is a particle of the Lit’rary genre, a product of the influence of the thirties and forties mainstream darlings and their increasingly self-indulgent descendants. The book will demonstrate to you that the universe really is a rotten place to be, that there is no hope and no exit, that life is a cheat.

And now we understand Thomas Disch as a reviewer. When he refers to Silverberg’s *Lord Valentine’s Castle* as “a bit shameful”, he isn’t

complaining that it's bad writing; Silverberg's command of the tools of his trade hasn't declined since *Dying Inside*. What ticks Disch off is that Silverberg, at least temporarily, has left the Lit'rary genre. My word, the book has a *happy ending*!

It would be easy to continue to roast Disch. But the Lit'rary science fiction elitist disease isn't confined to him. There are others who have determined that this genre is the real science fiction, the stuff that we're *supposed* to enjoy, the Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape to the rest of our Ripple.

Science fiction isn't a genre. There are no legitimate expectations that one can bring to a randomly selected science-fiction work. Within the genres that make up the patchwork quilt we call science fiction (and have a great deal of trouble defining, for reasons that are now obvious) there are many possible experiences, many sets of expectations, many surprises.

What is unfortunate is that the devotees of one particular genre – writers, readers, and particularly critics – have decided that their genre, Lit'rary science fiction, is the clear quill, the proper subject of attention.

What is tragic is that the rest of us have let them get away with it.

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I hope to include as many different perspectives in The Patchin Review as possible. Here's how things look from a book dealer's viewpoint.

A Fair Deal for Dealers? John Smith

While we all enjoyed our short-lived prosperity, big business quietly took over our ghetto. In these times of falling sales and cutbacks, the winds of change blow. This genre will never be the same again.

Just try obtaining new books to sell. Almost every horror tale you've ever heard about a small dealer trying to work directly with publishers is true; and things are getting worse. Small specialty dealers such as ourselves may soon disappear. Costs are climbing faster than demand; we're holding unsold stock or credit with publishers who have little or nothing to offer us this Fall.

To expand sales we tried to add new hardcover titles to our out-of-print specialty stock. We got almost nowhere. We phoned or wrote directly to ten major publishers for terms and catalogs. Only three responded promptly. Toll-free numbers either don't exist or won't reach the person who handles

small accounts. Of course, you can send an order in by mail and pray the books arrive instead of another credit slip on “unavailable” titles. But you have to dial direct to confirm an order, and from our location every five minutes on the line to New York at day rates equals the profit on one hardcover.

Simon and Schuster likes to put you on hold. The fifth person you repeat your request to says this is standard procedure, and then you get erroneous details on minimums and discounts. St. Martins Press promised a catalog in April that arrived in June. Four calls and a letter to Berkley/Putnam finally got us three of their *paperback* lists a month later. Doubleday took its own sweet time. Del Rey never responded. Harper & Row didn’t understand why we wanted only first printings, but were fairly prompt. Viking and Houghton-Mifflin were both courteous and quick: my requests for terms and an order arrived in one week.

Writers and agents might first look into this nightmare of distribution and variant discounts before asking for their cut of the publisher’s sales receipts. We suggest that SFWA order books under a dealer’s name sometime, and report on the results. Even the larger dealers can no longer get good service; ask them. With problems like these buying books wholesale, how can anyone expect retail sales to be good?

Admittedly, we’re just one small operation selling books on a small scale. A chain like Walden’s can move thousands of units. But we don’t believe that we both serve the same readers, or sell the same books. Eventually, statistics on what sells fastest may well determine which books publishers choose to print. The current sales slump, deteriorating distribution, and a trend toward corporate ownership all the way down from publisher to book-peddler, are going to affect science fiction’s future.

Consider who owns fantasy/science-fiction publishing. Most publishers have been swallowed by media conglomerates. Gulf & Western owns Simon & Schuster, Pocket/Timescape, and also Paramount Pictures. Gulf & Western packages entertainment like *Star Trek*. Check the copyright on Timescape’s *The Entropy Effect* by Vonda McIntyre. It’s chilling. Simon & Schuster also has the worst discount policy among the publishers we contacted.

MCA, besides owning record companies, controls Berkley/Putnam, Coward-McCann-Geoghegan, and Universal Studios. Gregg Press is a subsidiary of ITT! Major book outlets or distributors like B. Dalton, Walden’s, and Baker & Taylor are owned by larger holding companies to

which literary merit means nothing against income. Since current inventory tax laws discourage the practice of holding “excess stock”, books with slow sales are remaindered or destroyed when their “shelf life” has expired.

Most publishers want money up front from the small bookseller. Consequently, booksellers now help to bankroll publishing. Reports of recent limited-edition scandals missed this money angle: when Everest House took 15,000 orders for 250 copies of the special edition of Stephen King’s *Danse Macabre*, that was over half-a-million dollars! If only half of the dealers sent checks with their orders, that’s still \$250,000. Publishers have free use of our money as cash-flow and may earn interest on it for months, just as they do with delayed royalties due to authors. And when dealers return books they generally get back a credit slip (not a refund) good only for future purchases at the company store.

Our order for the special edition of *Danse Macabre* took weeks to be processed. What finally arrived? Copies of the second printing, trade edition. We lost customers. After we made several threatening phone calls, a refund check arrived – *and* copies of the special edition.

Everest House might be excused on the grounds of inexperience. But what about Putnam? Over 5,000 orders were taken on a 750-copy limited edition of *God Emperor of Dune*. Why weren’t orders turned away after the first 750 were taken? Putnam will do it all over again this Fall with 500 copies of a limited Philip José Farmer, *The Unreasoning Mask*. Watch how many orders they take.

Writers should think twice before allowing publishers to oversell limited editions in their names. Publishers are faceless; authors are not. After the fiasco, Everest House passed the buck by saying that King didn’t want any dealer to receive more than ten copies of the limited edition. No one had told us when they took our money. And ten copies per dealer means only 25 dealers can receive books. Which ones get preference?

And do note that while prices on these special limited editions from Everest House and others have been extremely high, quality has been abysmally low. With very few exceptions, these special editions from the major publishers have been utterly undistinguished and could not possibly compare to the relatively low-priced collectors’ editions produced by someone like Donald Grant. First they accept your money and hold it for three to six months, and then when (and if) they do deliver, the book is embarrassingly shabby for the price you have to charge your customers.

Small dealers who specialize in out-of-print titles are suffering, too. Prices are soaring and stock is harder to come by. Mainstream dealers who once eschewed science-fiction books altogether now sell out-of-print genre first editions on their own. A fine first edition of *The Green Odyssey* by Farmer has brought over \$700 on several occasions. Walker's printing of Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* has gone for \$200 to \$400. Comic-book dealers and others of their ilk are taking over the less-expensive paperback collectibles since a paperback price guide raised prices outrageously and unrealistically. Another price guide on hardcover editions by L.W. Currey was announced earlier this year. One result of the growing competition and rising prices in this field may well be that a few high-rolling dealers will monopolize the market in future, simply by out-bidding small booksellers for stock.

Either way, gone are the days of the gentle bookseller.

Moments of Truth

Sharon Webb of Blairsville, Georgia collects \$5 from *The Patchin Review* for sending in this unusual biological description from John Varley's "Beatnik Bayou":

"Physically he was just my age, which was almost thirteen: a short, slightly chubby kid with curly blond hair and an androgenous face, just starting to grow a little fuzz around his balls."

Next time you find a memorable sentence or paragraph, send us a photocopy of it. We pay \$5 for every published entry.

Next Issue

Some fine and provocative items will appear in the November *Patchin Review*. We'll have Gregory Benford examining the emergence of fantasy as a publishing category of importance equal to science fiction; Arthur Byron Cover conducting a comprehensive survey and assessment of science-fiction cover art; and Spider Robinson

denouncing *Engines of the Night*, Barry Malzberg's important new book about science fiction. Also: Have female editors changed the face of the field? ... Cousin Clara offers more advice for the alienated ... and we'll include the John Varley article which was squeezed out of this issue. You really ought to subscribe. See the notice on the inside back cover.

NOTE: Letters relating to The Patchin Review are considered publishable, including writer's name and location, unless the writer states otherwise. Letters may be abridged. We will not interfere with correspondents' grammar or spelling.

Letters

From ROBERT SILVERBERG, Oakland, California

I don't want to get mixed up in the struggle to make s-f into literature any more. I'm covered with honorable scars from my last go-round at that.... I got broken up enough in it to give up writing for nearly five years, me who used to write novels the way other people wrote postcards, with joyous frabjous ease. Somehow I managed to make myself learn to work again, and now I *am* working, but if my current writing seems cautious, it's the caution of a basically conservative man who got much of his head blown off the last time he stuck his neck out.

Look, s-f is mass-market commercial entertainment, consumed largely by unhappy adolescents, many of whom are dummies looking for easy escape.... A bunch of us ... marched out there boldly circa 1966 and did what we could. Most of those books are now out of print, and the ones that survive survive because a few of us are good at the fancy dancing necessary to stay in print. But it was folly to go out there and be Prousts and Joyces and Manns and Kafkas in that particular arena. As Joyce said in a similar context, throwing in the towel after having been mauled once too often by publishers, "I am no literary Jesus Christ." I'm not even a Joyce. ... S-f is just a goddamn business; we are all entrepreneurs peddling our wares; fight the next revolution without me, okay?

From JOHN BETANCOURT, Delran, New Jersey

I have only read one of John Shirley's books, and I hated it ... from his

article and Ellison's, I deduce he is an egocentric moron with a limited overview of the science fiction field.

His opening statement: "The science fiction field is in dire need of higher, tougher standards." This is unreasonable; I think standards today throughout the entire sf field – from readership to writing to publishing – is constantly upgrading its standards.....we have *Timescape*, *Lucifer's Hammer*, and *The Mote in God's Eye*, which are a product of current standards of quality.

I agree wholeheartedly about his opinion of Longyear's work, however. Longyear is a shoddy writer. But he is the *exception*, which is what Shirley fails to realize.

From ANONYMOUS, postmarked Minneapolis, Minnesota

I think *The Patchin Review* is mistaking idealism for necrophilia. Science fiction has had it. This is not a slow period or a transition. It's dead. So there's no reason to compromise. Go for the throat. Use the Dadaist's "Trojan Horse" method, which designs to "infiltrate behind the enemy lines and destroy its most cherished conventions under the guise of those same conventions." Be clever. Be cunning. Euthanasia is an accepted practice in modern society. What are you waiting for?

I'm not signing my name because I want there to be no doubt that my aim is true.

«If Anonymous of Minneapolis would like to expand upon this theme, I'd be happy to print it as an article. Meanwhile I must make it clear that although *The Patchin Review*, in the form of Ms. Gabby Snitch, may infiltrate a few conventions from time to time, this is hardly for subversive purposes.»

From "BUCKY", Doylestown, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Patchin, thank you for your review which I liked v. much. I showed it to my friends in Jumpin' Joe's Saloon and they liked it v. much. A specially the sexy and drinking parts which they liked v. much. Also the fighting B cause we always thought writers who did writeing was all fairies.

Tiger Leekhowe says why can't you also show pictures of naked girls like they do in the other to (2) \$ magazines. A specially the kind that shows all the front. We would like that v. much.

V. trully yrs....

«I thank Bucky for his suggestions and will bear them in mind. It is a matter of principle, here at *The Patchin Review*, to take any reader's comments seriously, no matter how stupid they may seem.»

From MALCOLM EDWARDS, London N.4, England

What in heaven's name does Harlan think he's doing? I never thought he was losing his grip, but having read that article I'm not so sure. I have an idea for the challenge, though: each contestant must, by the end of the year, endeavour to produce a complete typescript for *The Last Dangerous Visions*.

From ANONYMOUS, postmarked Los Angeles, California

Ellison's "writing challenge" is totally bogus. In effect, he's attacking someone whom he knows is too weak to fight back, which is chickenshit behavior. Worse still, the attack itself is rambling, inconsistent, and badly written.

Ellison opens with his aw-shucks, humble country boy routine, implying that, big as he is, he can still see his funny side and his own fallibility. The comic "gunfighter" self-image followed by the pretense of sober self-examination ("Am I past it? Have I become a senile literary zombie?") are pieces of fake humility, to ingratiate himself to the reader. This is dishonesty posing as honesty.

Having established his credentials as someone who has "owned up" to his sins, Ellison then feels entitled to go into his dignified/pretentious phase, explaining how Hemingway liked to match his talent against other writers – a habit Ellison calls "tragic". Fair enough, but is Ellison saying he suffers from the same syndrome, and is therefore also a tragic figure? In which case, why is he pursuing his "writing challenge"? Or is he saying that because he has more self-knowledge he won't fall into the same ego trap? We never find out, probably because Ellison himself doesn't know. He has written this article the way he writes his fiction: in first draft, throwing ideas onto paper as they come to him, hoping somehow it will pull together at the end. He can get away with that in a short story, but nonfiction (or a novel, for that matter!) shows him up as a sloppy thinker who's too arrogant about his own talent to put in the thought and work needed to build a tightly-argued statement. As a reader, I am insulted by an author who is so arrogant as to serve me undigested material that doesn't make good sense.

He next digresses into anecdotes about his humble origins and

precocious ambitions (“they laughed at me in New Jersey, but I showed ’em, didn’t I?”). Then he lists Heinlein, Bester, Farmer, and Schmitz as if these people have something in common: Heinlein (he says) is making money out of crap, Bester is writing crap (a “spavined novel”) but *not* making money out of it, Farmer is finally getting overdue recognition, Schmitz never wised up to being underrated in sf. Actually it’s clear that these writers have nothing in common, but Ellison jumps to his foregone conclusion: that categorization as an sf writer is instant death. Which reminds him of the 1981 Nebula Banquet where his old pal Leiber received an award which was supposedly overdue and insignificant compared to the pearls of talent Leiber had cast before the sci-fi swine. To cap this rambling series of nonsequiturs Ellison comes up with one of those “highly functional” metaphors that Shirley refers to: “The inmates of the Gulag despise those among their number who dream of flying”. Nice – even though it’s melodramatic and simplistic and has not been supported by any previous argument.

Ellison then digresses into a piece of pure ego: the anecdote about his walking away from an insulting woman because she wasn’t in his class. Meaning that he should walk away from Shirley likewise? But he’s doing just the opposite. This is just another fragment which might sound good when read aloud but, on paper, doesn’t add up to anything.

He finishes by printing more of Shirley’s personal correspondence – another chickenshit thing to do – and having set up Shirley by quoting him out of context he knocks down the straw man. Lastly, the challenge – which excludes the writing of novels, probably because Ellison knows that’s one thing he can’t handle, Shirley having written and sold four or five in the time Ellison has spent trying unsuccessfully to expand *A Boy and His Dog* to novel-length.

In all of this Ellison demeans himself more than he can possibly demean Shirley. No matter how he tries to disarm us with ironic humor, fake humility, and important-sounding references to Hemingway, the fact is that he is picking on a guy who wrote some letters while he was in some kind of emotional state, and instead of being big enough to rise above that kind of crank mail Ellison has to jump right down there into the gutter and “prove himself” by fighting a cripple. This is a pathetic middle-aged ego out of control. If Ellison wants to be taken seriously, he should stop writing silly diatribes and finish some of his well-known outstanding commitments, like *Blood’s a Rover* and *The Last Dangerous Visions* and whatever movie script

it is he currently owes. Let him complete *just one* of all those years-overdue projects. Till then, tell the tired old fart he's exactly what he pretends to fear he is: a washed-up literary zombie, rambling on about the Old Days.

I'll ask you to leave my name off this letter. I don't want to be the next one he attacks in print – or, for that matter, in public.

From ALGIS BUDRYS, Evanston, Illinois

I'm resisting the impulse to be clever with Aunt Clara's clever little piece on writing workshops. All workshops can only teach what is already known. Supposing that occasionally a novice will turn up who is already into unknown but solid ground, the workshop instructors should become collaborators ... but how often does such a novice actually turn up? And how can he or she be recognized, since one of the common symptoms of deficient talent is a towering ego? Aunt Clara displays the right attitude for the writer of genius. But Aunt Clara, like many beginning writers, has probably also already decided what to say to Johnny Carson, and drafted her Nobel acceptance speech. None of that has any necessary relationship to her potential ability to do anything useful for any reader.

A workshop should lay out for the students the things that are known about what readers will recognize as communication; the basic organizational principles that once had to be acquired by time-consuming trial and error. But this of course is the plonky stuff that Aunt Clara also rejects. In fact, it sounds very much as if Aunt Clara would only be happy with a workshop that was essentially an exercise in her ego, leaving the other students and the instructors drawn up about her in an admiring circle.

«Aunt Clara writes: “I'm resisting the impulse to be dull with Mr. Budrys's dull little letter. Much as I admire Mr. Budrys's fiction, he sounds quite tiresome as an instructor. And unhappy about the idea of the students drawn up ‘in an admiring circle’ about someone other than himself. Hmm? I mean, if we're going to talk about *egos*.... Still, I'm glad someone is teaching ‘basic organizational principles’ of ‘communication’. That would be an ideal preparation for students who are destined to be so disillusioned by workshops such as Mr. Budrys's that they turn instead to careers in accountancy and business management.”»

From JEFF MARIOTTE, San Jose, California

As a paperback buyer for a large general bookstore with a well-

developed science fiction clientele, I take issue with the sf editors mentioned in your editorial who blame their defeatist attitudes on booksellers. We sell what we're offered. On those increasingly rare occasions when a totally new author is published in paperback, sales representatives come to us with the same sales materials they bring to sell us *New York Times* bestsellers: covers. An unknown name on a cover doesn't tell us much.... If publishers sincerely want to sell good books by new writers, let them provide a little more information. Who is this person? Have I read stories by him/her in a magazine and forgotten the name? Hell, a photocopied page of the manuscript will tell me more than a cover blurb will.

Once a book is in the stores, if it's good, it'll sell. Even if there's no publicity done, there's a word of mouth network that operates very effectively. The good books move. Innovative, original books can move, even when they're written by unknowns. ... I think those editors who refuse to handle the innovative stuff on the grounds that it doesn't sell are copping out.

«It's heartening to hear from a bookstore employee who cares about his work and actually reads the books he stocks. Not all do – a factor which encourages the cynicism of publishers and laziness all around.»

From MARTIN LAST, The Science Fiction Shop, New York City

I am sure that you will be happy to know that we are not carrying *The Patchin Review*..... but, that choice is OURS.

«I'm told that Martin doesn't like this magazine because he thinks it's too bitchy. He also refuses to stock *Science Fiction Review*, citing its editor's alleged sexism. New Yorkers looking for a less sanctimonious selection of science fiction will find it at Forbidden Planet, the fine new store on the corner of 12th Street and Broadway.»

From JERRY POURNELLE, Studio City, California

John Shirley accuses Larry Niven, Poul Anderson, and me of “betraying” our readers.... ...having never read any of his works (other than a few letters to fanzines) I'm unfamiliar with Mr. Shirley's political and social theories. I infer that they owe more to Marx than to Hayek or von Mises; certainly he does not care for *my* position. But why must he? Certainly I deny

his charge that I “trivialize” (what a ghastly neologism) the side-effects of industrial and technological growth. I suspect that Larry and Poul have considerably more education in economic history than does Mr. Shirley; I know I do.... He accuses us also of indolence. Yet I work rather hard (as hard, I suspect, as Mr. Shirley); and I know that Poul and Larry do also....

Is there to be no place at all for story-tellers? I for one have never claimed to be anything else; as I wrote in my *Britannica* article, I see my role as a contemporary version of the bards of old: a teller of tales who wanders from campfire to campfire; and if Mr. Shirley’s exhortation was intended to reform me and make me a genuine literary figure, I thank him for his flattery, but decline his offer. I’m sure I will never write as well as he.

Last issue Harlan Ellison challenged John Shirley to a “writing duel” and made various allegations. Here is John’s reply.

Reply John Shirley

Harlan, don’t be silly. Are you kidding, or what? A writing “show-down”? Grow up.

In using this public forum to execute a private vendetta you abuse the trust of your readers. You are trying to use them to attack me. That is shabby. The disagreement between us was entirely private.

You entirely forgot, in quoting my letter out of context, to mention that it was written to you (this, the recent, angry letter, which came after several very friendly letters – letters not at all “hateful”) in response to your having called up several of my good friends in NY in order to ask them to convey to me your threat; you said that if I didn’t stop putting you down behind your back, you would use your influence to destroy my career. And you further implied that you would do physical violence to me if all else failed. At least, this is how it was reported to me. So I reacted. I wrote a personal letter and said, essentially: Fuck off, I didn’t put you down behind your back, I hate that sort of cheap knifing, but if you want to believe that I did it (and you are notorious for believing that people are doing that to you, when really they’re not at all) then go ahead, do your worst, try to destroy my career. And when that doesn’t work you’ll probably try to physically attack me. Go ahead, try that too, blusterer, I said, (thinking of pathetic Norman Mailer imploring

other men to give him a whack in the stomach at parties so he can demonstrate his undiminished muscle tone) and I'll give back thrice what is given. In other words, I responded just as any angry, proud man would.

I NEVER SAID YOU WERE WASHED UP AND I NEVER SAID I WAS A BETTER WRITER AND I NEVER SAID YOU IMITATED ME. I'LL LEAVE IT TO POSTERITY TO JUDGE WHO IS THE BETTER WRITER, IF SUCH JUDGMENTS MUST BE MADE. So now your entire piece is irrelevant!

All I said was that you are over-rated, and not important enough for me to cozen up to (which is what you suggested I was doing in writing you friendly letters). I said that you are a "sorrowful old codger" and "tired old Harlan Ellison" in reference to your midlife crisis, your frayed nerves, your paranoia, your emotional problems. I don't think you're washed up. I think you are a pathetic poseur, but at times a good writer. It's just that you're not nearly as good as the sf bunch has been intimidated into believing.

But no one is going to listen to me because you have this monumental media momentum built up. Your personality carries a weight that seems to lend power to what you say, no matter how specious your remarks. The science-fiction audience, critics, writers, can't be objective about you – e.g., the appearance of *All the Lies that Are My Life* on the Hugo Ballot, where it does not belong. The story is in no way, shape or form science fiction. But your momentum carried it onto the ballot. Just goes to show how you've got the charisma-starved science-fiction community cowed.

Another thing – when I said "You're the imitation. I'm the real thing" I was referring to your image. You once claimed to have joined a youth gang (to report on it, you an impostor in their midst) and you claimed, wrongly, to have insight into them, to understand them. I grew up in a youth gang. I'm not particularly proud of it, but my point is that my street roots are authentic, validating the background of much of my fiction, while yours are assumed and phony. I was also responding to an old accusation made by certain unimaginative fans who said I was imitating your style of comportment.

I was not referring to your literary output. You don't imitate me, I don't imitate you. I'm influenced more by Delmore Schwartz, Lou Reed, J.G. Ballard, Charles Baudelaire, John Fowles, Joseph Conrad, and John Le Carre. You took my remarks out of context, to say the least.

I don't write sf or fantasy anymore (except for my totally facetious Quill Tripstickler stories) so I can't take up your challenge, and I'm in the middle

of my new novel now, and anyway the whole notion is sappy and puerile. And furthermore such judgements don't work aesthetically; taste is too relative for that. The fact that you can even seriously suggest a "writing show-down" evokes grave doubts as to the scope of your literary acumen.

I have NOT written 3 novels, as you have it; I have written 10 and published 6 of those (two were destroyed in odd circumstances, one is up for sale, one awaits revision). I have written nearly 100 short stories and I've placed most of those.

However, I don't kid myself: I haven't learned to write as well as I'd like; I'm still learning. My next book is my first serious one.

What do you mean, "what each of us says he can do better than the other"? I never said I could write better than you. It's all too relative for me to make any such claim. My stuff is very different from yours. *I* like it better, but I'm biased.

But hey – we both perform, right? I sing in a rock band and I read my poetry and prose from the stage. I'll take you on that way, man. You put out a record, and I mean a new one, and we'll let an objective panel of judges decide between your record and my forthcoming single on the Dorian label.

Seriously now... You say I'm after attention. But you were quoting PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE! WHICH IS ILLEGAL, WITHOUT MY PERMISSION, AND YOU DIDN'T ASK! I am not the one making a public performance of this thing. You were the bigshot who put this petty imbroglio on display (I picture sensible people like Ursula Le Guin reading this whole thing now and retching with disgust at the both of us...)

You're the one with the misgivings. Otherwise why react so defensively, and publicly? Reacting to something I didn't really say! Re-read the letter. And forget it. I'm 28 and you're 47 – it's high time we both grew up.

Competition & Opinion Poll

What do you, a science-fiction or fantasy book-buyer, really want? Are you satisfied with the fare that publishers are offering you? If not, why not?

So far as I know, there has never been any market research to discover the answers to these questions. Editors can only guess what

science-fiction and fantasy readers expect, prefer, and object to.

Do publishers underestimate your taste? Are you being disappointed in other ways? If so, here's your chance to tell them how you feel, in the Patchin Review competition and opinion poll.

Here's what you do. Select whichever topic you feel most strongly about and set out your opinion in no more than 500 words (typed, please). Choose any topic you like, so long as it relates to the kinds of science fiction and fantasy being published today.

Send your short essay to *The Patchin Review*, Dept P, 9 Patchin Place, New York, NY 10011 before December 1 1981. Enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope if you want your entry returned to you. We'll tabulate and correlate all the opinions received, and publish a survey and analysis. In addition, to add a small incentive, the most interesting entry will be chosen by judges Susan Allison (editor at Ace Books) and Norman Spinrad (president of SFWA). This winning entry will be printed in full, and the author will receive \$25 and a 5-year subscription to *The Patchin Review*.

News of this competition/poll is being widely distributed, so we'll get as large a sample of responses as possible. The results of the poll will be circulated to all science-fiction and fantasy editors so that your opinions, as readers, will receive some attention from the people who determine the direction of science-fiction and fantasy publishing.

The Patchin Review Survey

Ace

Brian Aldiss *The Malacia Tapestry*

Perhaps Aldiss's most appealing, accomplished novel. A young rake journeys through a technology-starved parallel world, finds himself and the key to saving society from stasis. Ignore the bodice-ripping Tyrannosaurus on the cover. 402 pp. PB. \$2.75

Jessica Amanda Salmonson *Tomoe Gozen*

First of trilogy in an alternate-world Japan of female samurai plus real-life magic and demons (derived from Japanese myths). Readable albeit portentous. 257 pp. PB. \$2.50

Dean Ing *Systemic Shock*

Xenophobic, militaristic tale of post-atomic-war mercenary playing a double game. Unpleasantly graphic. 298 pp. PB. \$2.50

Andre Norton *Storm over Warlock*

Shann Lantee, lone survivor of a Terran outpost on the alien world of Warlock, battles the Throgs. Fine excesses of melodrama. 1960 reissue. 200 pp. PB. \$1.99

Gordon R. Dickson (ed.) *Combat Zone*

A fair mix of physical and psychological conflicts, here, by authors ranging from Clarke to Drake to Wolfe. Refreshingly low-key in weapons fetishism. 266 pp. PB. \$2.50

Charles Sheffield *Hidden Variables*

Techno-macho space-cowboy stories for the age of Reagan. Author endearingly admits “inadvertent” Heinlein plagiarism (p.37). Snappy but derivative. 359 pp. PB. \$2.75

Fred Saberhagen *Octagon*

Computer adventure-game predictably spills over into real life. Characters’ daily trivia, included for mass-market appeal, weigh down the mechanical narrative. 272 pp. PB. \$2.75

Harlan Ellison *Blood’s a Rover*

The long-awaited expansion of “A Boy and his Dog” to novel length. Ellison has lost some of the 1960s radical fervor which inspired the social division of the story (radicals facing reality while silent majority hide in luxury caverns), but he still writes with conviction. 976 pp. TP. \$6.95

Avram Davidson *Strange Seas and Shores*

Genial tales of unknown and supernatural, mostly sixties vintage, told as by a midAtlantic uncle. Engaging, moderately witty, ultimately a bit stuffy. 219 pp. PB. \$2.25

Robert E. Howard & L. Sprague de Camp *Conan: The Flame Knife*

50+ pp of fairly-good illustration bulk out this 1955 fix-up to near novel length. 158 pp. PB. \$2.50

Avon

Robert Silverberg *The Second Trip*

Neurotic, obsessed sculptor has personality replaced by new self; but it doesn't take. Conflict, telepathy, and a tormented love affair. Ambitious, somewhat static tale of Identity. 192 pp. PB. \$2.25

Stanislaw Lem *Tales of Pirx the Pilot*

Free-fall pratfalls with rookie astronaut. The tiresome mix of bogus science and ponderous wit in these five stories cannot be blamed on the translator. 206 pp. PB. \$2.95

A. Merritt and Hannes Bok *The Black Wheel*

Stranded on an uncharted island, survivors grapple with horror surrounding wrecked pirate ship. One-third written by Merritt; completed by Bok. Useful new introduction by friend of Merritt. 296 pp. PB. \$2.50

Bantam

Samuel R. Delany *Distant Stars*

Grossly overpriced assemblage of six well-worn stories, an 11-page excerpt from Delany's next novel, and an ingratiatingly humble intro debating what writing's all about. Lots of *Heavy Metal* style pix. 352 pp. TP. \$8.95

James R. Berry *Quas Starbrite*

Capt. Starbrite escorts anthropologist plus lovely daughter across galaxy searching for secret weapon against the KraKon. Totally unimaginative; contrived for kids who deserve better. 214 pp. Pb. \$1.95

Samuel R. Delany (ed.) *Nebula Winners 13*

1978 Nebula winners plus "Air Raid" (Varley), "Particle Theory" (Bryant), "Aztecs" (McIntyre). Muddled but sincere intro grapples with the notion of Information. What is it, exactly? 208 pp. PB. \$2.50

John Crowley *Little, Big*

Homely, quixotic mix of supernatural and family saga, laden with nostalgia and Victorian mannerisms. Well crafted and "charming". 538 pp. TP. \$9.95

Mike McQuay *Hot Time in Old Town*

First of new series starring Chandleresque future-private-eye hero enhanced with Clint Eastwood mannerisms. The window-dressing of future gadgetry can't mask a heavy 1930s flavor. 214 pp. PB. \$2.25

Berkley

Victoria Schochet & John Silbersack (eds.) *The Berkley Showcase, Vol. 4*

Stylistic affectations, unaptnly imposed, mar some stories; and Vonda McIntyre's interview of Elizabeth Lynn is even duller than you'd expect. But Schochet & Silbersack have tried hard to assemble literate stories, and their worthy effort frequently succeeds. 199 pp. PB. \$2.25

Kit Reed *Other Stories and... The Attack of the Giant Baby*

Sometimes a shade too cute, sometimes chatty, but most times clever and fun. 215 pp. PB. \$2.25

George R.R. Martin (ed.) *New Voices IV*

A lumpy mix of mismatched stories and essays: Van Vogt on Campbell, Budrys on Tom Reamy, fiction by Varley, Foster, Darnay, Vinge, and Reamy. 262 pp. PB. \$2.25

Ian MacMillan *Blakely's Ark*

16-year-old boy's coming-of-age odyssey from small town to urban survival enclave, humanity having been decimated by parasitic virus. Good straight post-apocalypse novel, stylized but realistic. 182 pp. PB. \$2.25

Barry B. Longyear *City of Baraboo*

Feebly linked stories of the interstellar circus. Longyear's poverty of inspiration and inability to structure his work would be easier to tolerate were he not so pleased with himself. 214 pp. PB. \$2.25

Bowker

Neil Barron (ed.) *Anatomy of Wonder*

Second edition of the most useful, complete, accurate, and well-balanced guide to all of science fiction. Includes overviews, plot summaries by Clareson, Stableford, De Bolt, Pfeiffer, and Molson of about 2000 books, plus Barron's own guide to non-fiction about science fiction, and more. 724 pp. HC:\$32.95 TP:\$22.95

Marshall B. Tymn (ed.) *Horror Literature*

Identical in format and method to *Anatomy of Wonder*. More academic in orientation, but valuable. 558 pp. HC:\$29.95 TP:\$19.95

Cape

J.G. Ballard *Hello America*

America, abandoned after climatic changes, is “rediscovered” by neo-Columbus party. Sand dunes in New Jersey; jungle in Nevada. Inventive but lacking the passion of *Crash* or even *The Unlimited Dream Company*. 224 pp. HC. 6.50 pounds sterling

Clarkson N. Potter

Martin Gardner *Science Fiction Puzzle Tales*

Gardner’s mathematical stories collected from *Isaac Asimov’s SF Magazine*. Ideal gift for precocious teenagers. 148 pp. TP. \$4.95

DAW

Karl Edward Wagner *The Year’s Best Horror Stories, Series IX*

Wagner does an excellent job of gathering items you may have missed. Ten stories, by King, Campbell, Ellison, others. A strong collection. 223 pp. PB. \$2.50

C.J. Cherryh *Wave Without a Shore*

Tepid existential debates (What Is Reality? etc.) provide feeble distraction from Cherryh’s inevitable whimsicality in this tale of human colonists imposing inner realities on an alien world. 176 pp. PB. \$2.25

Andre Norton *Horn Crown*

Backtracking to chronicle early days of mankind in the Witch World, this new adventure (yet another fantasy, but narrated with conviction) chronicles the quest, the romance, and the ultimate crowning of Elron the Clanless. 255 pp. PB. \$2.95

John Brunner *The Repairmen of Cyclops*

Gus Langenschmidt of the Corps Galactica closes down an organ-transplant racket hiding behind interplanetary-political corruption. Unpretentiously entertaining 1965 reissue. 158 pp. PB. \$2.25

B.R. Stateham *Banners of the Sa’yen*

Marooned spaceman acts as God-figure to primitive warriors, one of whom narrates this “legend” in lugubriously comic quasi-medieval dialect. First of a new series. 207 pp. PB. \$2.25

Alan Burt Akers *Legions of Antares*

25th Dray Prescott novel, its Noble Prose creaking with medieval jargon and funny names. Dray kills the Wizard of Loh, sent by evil Empress of

Hamal to menace Kregen. The Empress, however, survives for another sequel. 192 pp. PB. \$2.25

Del Rey

H. Warner Munn *Merlin's Ring*

Umpteenth reissue of 1974 classic. If every fantasy writer had to put this much research, plot, and detail into a novel, there'd be much finer fantasy novels and very few of them. Ingenious permutations of the Arthurian and historical figures, on a grand scale. 366 pp. PB. \$2.75

Alan Garner *The Owl Service*

Cozy British platitudes build a cottage horror story of reassuring comfiness. Alison (the silly goose!) unlocks an obscure Celtic legend, but you just know she'll muddle through unscratched. Novel's title refers to dinner plates. 176 pp. PB. \$1.95

Judy-Lynn del Rey (ed.) *Stellar #7*

1950s-flavor science fiction stories, plus vogueishly pro-deregulation, anti-bureaucracy satire from "bright new hope" James P. Hogan. An entertaining, albeit regressive, collection. 214 pp. PB. \$2.50

Pohl & Kornbluth *The Space Merchants*

Ironic and depressing indeed that virtually the *only* science-fiction novel of any contemporary relevance and savvy to be published in July/August is this 1952 classic (which still reads well). Evidently the near future is now so threatening that we can no longer tackle it. 216 pp. PB. \$2.50

David Bischoff *Vampires of Nightworld*

Bischoff's concept of lab-built creatures mimicking myth and legend, terrorizing a pleasure world which apes Victorian manners, was weak the first time around. This sequel runs the idea further into the ground, with lots of smug British "wit". 182 pp. PB. \$2.25

James P. Hogan *Giants' Star*

Complexly plotted space adventure uses multiple alien races enmeshed in political conflict to supply Velikovsky-esque explanation for Earth prehistory and origin of the asteroids. Basically, a shaggy god story. Third of a trilogy. 316 pp. PB. \$2.50

L. Neil Smith *Their Majesties' Bucketees*

First-contact-with-alien-race novel, most of its appeal centered in

elaborate description of three-legged pseudo-crustacean aliens and their society. Lots of made-up language and ritual. 182 pp PB. \$2.25

Marion Zimmer Bradley *The House Between the Worlds*

Parapsychology experiments, utilizing a hallucinogenic drug, allow Fenton access to the fairy world of the Alfar. Rooting this story in reality (the Berkeley campus) and justifying its fantasy world via “scientific” experiments, does not mitigate its being fantasy written in the vocabulary of fantasy. 313 pp. PB. \$2.50

John Brunner *The Long Result*

Political machinations to establish lasting peace with friendly aliens despite sabotage from the far right. Brunner’s sixties liberalism (this novel is from 1965) was always a little too easy; but it’s refreshingly humanitarian, and quite complex, compared to current excesses of self-righteous anti-government individualism. 190 pp. PB. \$2.25

Donning/Starblaze

John Myers Myers *The Moon’s Fire-Eating Daughter*

Playful sequel to the *Silverlock* (1940). Stuffy college prof encounters mythic, fictitious, and famous figures in Riverworldish imaginary land. Sedate wit; literate and entertaining. 176 pp. TP. \$4.95

Farrar, Straus

Ted Mooney *Easy Travel to Other Planets*

After a remarkable opening sequence, in which woman is seduced by dolphin she has been teaching to talk, the novel burdens itself with selfconsciously stylized and ultimately self-destructive Relationships inlaid with a vocabulary of SF buzzwords. 278 pp. HC. \$11.95

Harvard U. Press

Mark Rose *Alien Encounters*

The National Endowment for the Humanities funded these academic musings upon the obvious. Hmmm; what *is* science fiction, exactly? 216 pp. HC. \$12.95

Houghton Mifflin

John Willett *The Singer in the Stone*

Rubythroat Singer, spirit of creativity from centuries past, tries to teach

new songs to the Plain People. Possibly intended for kids, this little fable raises cuteness and whimsy to an intolerable level. 86 pp. HC. \$6.95

Knopf

Ray Bradbury *The Haunted Computer and the Android Pope*

“Of what is past, or passing, or to come, / These things I sense and sing, and try to sum.” Bradbury’s aching sincerity tempts one to forgive the schoolyard rhymes and singsong rhythms of these embarrassing poems – almost. 98 pp. HC. \$8.95

Morrow

A.A. Attanasio *Radix*

Vivid post-apocalypse quest of a god-figure across a mutated desert landscape, synthesizing visions of the human spirit into one all-embracing world view. Echoes of Carlos Castaneda; but the vision is totally original. Attanasio’s intellectual self-awareness moderates his tendency toward lyricism, balancing his prose evenly between powerful action and poetically descriptive scenes. An astonishingly capable first novel, of great sensitivity and skill. 467 pp. HC:\$15.95 TP:\$8.95

John Lutz *The Shadow Man*

Blending detective and horror genres, Lutz’s workmanlike prose describes a police manhunt for multi-personality assassin able to project his mind and body. 215 pp. HC. \$10.95

NESFA Press

Tanith Lee *Unsilent Night*

Nicely designed and bound 1000-copy edition includes “Sirriamnis”, a new story; original poems; and “Cyrion in Wax”, originally from *Dragonfields* #3. 84 pp. HC. \$10

Playboy Press

Philip José Farmer *Tarzan Alive*

Editor Sharon Jarvis has done something right: publish in paperback Farmer’s meticulous gathering of all Tarzan data, reconciling every irregularity that Burroughs overlooked and extrapolating a classic family tree. A unique and honorable tribute. (Imagine what he could have done with the movie.) 328 pp. PB. \$2.75

Philip José Farmer *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life*

As *Tarzan*, above; but this one's more valuable in that Doc Savage, less fashionable, might otherwise have languished in obscurity – and is still underrated, despite the strong technological inventiveness of the stories. 270 pp. PB. \$2.50

John Morressy *Graymantle*

A power-struggle between twelve wizards searching for the Iron Mage, and Lord Duarin, usurper of the throne. Standard genre fantasy but better written than most. Second of three books; first was *Ironbrand*. 256 pp. PB. \$2.50

Linda Crockett Gray *Satyr*

An evil looking package, but it doesn't deliver. Descriptions of the goat-creature's sex frolics with Florida women are mechanical and flat. Steps in the pursuit, capture, and final ritualistic execution are unsurprising. 224 pp. PB. \$2.50

Signet

Nicholas Yermakov *Last Communion*

Can violet-eyed, lissom space pilot Shelby Michaels master mind-to-mind contact with the Shades, mysterious natives of uncharted world Boomerang? Not entirely – at least, until the sequel Yermakov seems to have in mind. The realism and graphic potential of his prose are wasted on routine space-adventure. 183 pp. PB. \$2.25

Arthur C. Clarke *Islands in the Sky*

Even allowing for its 1952 vintage, this first-person travelog of a teenager's visit to a space station is clumsy and devoid of any detectable style. Flimsy hints of a story veil reams of schoolteacherly Space Facts. Were it not for his imagination, Clarke would be writing promotional documentaries for oil companies. 157 pp. PB. \$1.95

Summit

Russell Hoban *Riddley Walker*

The setting is familiar enough, and depressingly anti-science: a regressed Britain after armageddon, tribes grubbing in the mud. But the future argot (post-*Clockwork Orange*) is indeed remarkable. Though none of the rave reviews says so, nor the publicity, this is very much a science-fiction

novel. 220 pp. HC. \$12.95

Taplinger

Tim Underwood and Chuck Miller (eds.) *Jack Vance*

A book-long collection critiquing, summarizing, and analyzing the oeuvre of Jack Vance. Reprinted essays from Spinrad, Silverberg. Eight other contributors, mostly non-academic. Plot synopses become tedious, but this book does its definitive job. 252 pp. HC. \$12.95

Asimov, Greenberg, Olander (eds.) *Microcosmic Tales*

100 short-short stories averaging just over three pages each. Most notable writers are represented. A good range of older and recent material. 325 pp. HC. \$12.95

Timescape

Hilbert Schenck *At the Eye of the Ocean*

A 19th century sea story of classic flavor, told via several first-person narratives from different viewpoints. The eye of the storm is used as a supernatural metaphor embracing death, life, and nirvana. Strength of the writing is undermined by tendency toward old-fashioned melodrama, but the characters are drawn with sensitivity. 224 pp. PB. \$2.50

Terry Carr (ed.) *The Best Science Fiction of the Year, #10*

“Never mind the price: you won’t find a better bargain,” Carr promises. His longer-than-usual annual volume contains 12 stories, some Hugo nominees and a Nebula winner included, but no surprises. Our best-known writers are producing few short stories these days. The time of Merril’s annual-best, packed full of wondrous fragments gathered far and wide, is long gone. 434 pp. PB. \$3.50

Keith Laumer *Retief of the CDT*

Reissue of 1978 five-story collection, the heroics tempered by Laumer’s usual flippant sense of fun. 191 pp. PB. \$2.25

Philip K. Dick *The Divine Invasion*

Space colonist Herb Asher finagles his way back to Earth with the woman whose fetus just happens to be the new Son of God. A struggle ensues to end Terran evil and reinstate goodness and serenity. Philip K. Dick is now dealing openly with the religious themes which underlay and covertly energized his earlier science fiction. The results are mixed: much as he tries

to avoid proselytizing and incorporate Biblical figures as uncharismatic everyday characters, reading this book is a little like attending church. Dick remains one of our most capable writers, and has lost none of his talent for humor and irony; but this and *Valis* may yet be seen as transitional books between science fiction and something else as yet undefined. 239 pp. HC. \$12.95

Richard Cowper *A Dream of Kinship*

Sequel to *The Road to Corlay*, following further conflict between free-thinking Kinsmen and Cowper's repressive 30th-century Church. Nicely done but perhaps less inspired than his other novels. 240 pp. PB. \$2.50

A.E. van Vogt *The Voyage of the Space Beagle*

This 30-year-old amalgamation of 40-year-old stories contains some of van Vogt's most memorable aliens – including that one that allegedly inspired *Alien*. Most current space adventure seems flat and derivative by comparison, devoid of the obsessions which gave van Vogt's writing its dreamlike power. 205 pp. PB. \$2.50

Terry Bisson *Wyrlmaker*

The usual funny spellings, warriors and wizards (actually, Wyzyrds) culminating in an unsuccessful attempt to rationalize everything. Would you believe the fantasy worlds – sorry, wyrls – of this book are all contained in one big *starship*? 176 pp. PB. \$2.25

Warner

Richard J. Anobile (ed.) *Outland*

The movie retold in 750 widescreen color stills with dialogue captions and totally lifeless linking description. Photos emphasize the excellent set design and visualization of this movie. A pity its story was so unimaginative. 176 pp. TP. \$10.95

Non-writer, non-editor, and non-science-fiction-fan, Todd Lerner offers a unique perspective on the field.

Todd's Column Todd Lerner

I'm going to review books for this magazine. My name is Todd Lerner. Hi.

I'm new at this game but I've been practising real hard. Lately I've been standing in front of my mirror at home repeating things like "this book is very Kafkaesque" and "that author reminds me of something Hemingway is attributed to have said" and "this novel deals with social displacement in a quasi-fascist society."

Now, at last, I think I'm ready!

The Affirmation

by Christopher Priest

(Scribners, 213 pp, \$10.95)

Christopher Priest's new novel is about a character from London named Peter Sinclair. Peter gets dumped on by mean mister life and decides to retreat to the country where he begins writing a manuscript. His manuscript starts out to be a therapeutic autobiography, but soon turns into a fantasyland reality that Peter will "define" himself by. Peter believes that total honesty requires some abstract thinking. Only through elaborate metaphors can he hope to reach absolute truth.

Not only is Peter Sinclair full of shit, he's a nut.

Peter's manuscript-land offers exotic islands, immortality, and a sexy woman. The sexy woman is a counterpart, or definition, of both Peter and his ex-girlfriend in London. Now get this: the fictionalized Peter who is starring in the autobiography is also writing a manuscript about the "real" Peter to define "himself". Everybody is defining everybody in this novel (and "everybody" is either Peter or a figment of his vivid imagination). Left and right, definitions fly – affirmations of the self, hence the title.

All of this craziness is easily excused, and in fact easily appreciated, because the main character in this book is evidently not playing with a full deck of cards. Not only that, he's not-playing with *two* full decks of cards. Soon both decks start to get mixed up, and after a couple of shuffles the cards can't be separated at all. Peter decides to play solitaire, anyway, and makes up his own rules; the reader soon discovers that nothing Peter says or does can be taken for granted as "real" in comparison with our own limitations on reality.

The Affirmation is a hot book. Christopher Priest's portrait of a loonie is beautifully convincing. Peter Sinclair's motives are sympathetic, lovable, and real. Before I knew it, I was doing some dangerously subtle thinking ... and I didn't even want to.

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EXISTING SUBSCRIBERS PLEASE NOTE:

Some of you who responded to an ad. in *Locus* were promised service via first-class mail. However, *The Patchin Review* has grown larger and heavier than expected, making first class unaffordable. This issue is being sent by third class / bulk mail. At the same time, however, we are now using envelopes, instead of sending the copies “naked”; we hope you feel this is a fair compromise. The considerable amount of money saved by using third-class mail will be spent, more usefully, on acquiring articles for the magazine, and on the higher printing costs resulting from the extra pages.

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January 1982

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Schedule

This issue is late, and I apologize to subscribers who must have begun to wonder whether *The Patchin Review* was still in business.

I have discovered, in the tradition of many other little-magazine editor-publishers, that sustaining a bimonthly schedule is not possible in the face of other commitments (such as earning a living). Consequently, my intention now is to publish *The Patchin Review* on a quarterly schedule, mailing copies out at the beginning of January, April, July, and October of each year.

Policy

The Patchin Review exists to promote and publish frank opinions and arguments relating to the writing, editing, and marketing of science fiction and fantasy. Although this magazine is biased in favor of adventurousness and experimentation, space will be provided for all possible viewpoints. There are no taboo topics.

The small, incestuous nature of the science-fiction field often discourages writers from expressing frank opinions. In the interests of encouraging free speech, *The Patchin Review* allows any contributor to use the house pseudonym John Smith or Jane Doe. With the exception of these names and our columnists “Gabby Snitch” and “Cousin Clara”, no pseudonyms are knowingly permitted.

The Patchin Review is published at the beginning of January, April, July, and October. Editor: Charles Platt. Helpful Advice: Leslie Epstein.

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Editorial

Fifteen years ago there was only one important female editor in all of science fiction: Judith Merril, who compiled just one anthology per year on a freelance basis. Today in paperback publishing alone we have Victoria Schochet, Susan Allison, Karen Haas, and Sharon Jarvis, employed full-time at Berkley, Ace, Bantam, and Playboy Press respectively, and between them they select about 200 books per year (if we include reissues). Also there are various female editorial assistants destined to become editors eventually; we have husband-and-wife team Judy-Lynn and Lester Del Rey at Ballantine Books; and in the magazine field we have Shawna McCarthy editing *Science Fiction Digest* and Ellen Datlow editing *Omni*, the highest-paying short-story market of all.

This important change in science-fiction publishing has caused hardly

any comment – probably because it’s unfashionable to say anything suggesting that women might do a different kind of job from men. But I do believe that female editors are working differently from their male counterparts, and the effects have become noticeable.

During the same period in which the women have come to power there has been a slight decline in hardware-oriented science fiction and a notable rise of fantasy as a category in its own right (see Gregory Benford’s article on page 5). Whether or not this is a desirable trend, I have to believe that female editors are partly responsible for it. Perhaps as a result of educational and social pressure, fewer women than men develop a serious interest in the “hard” sciences in our culture at this time. Statistically, therefore, female editors are less likely to be turned on by science-fictional hardware, and are more likely to prefer the human values in soft-science fiction and fantasy. Certainly we have yet to see a female editor who specializes in publishing high-tech or militaristic material such as Jim Baen developed so profitably at Ace. In fact his successor, Susan Allison, has made no secret of her intention to back away from Baen’s policy.

Another distinction is noticeable. Over the years, each of the main male editors has become identified with a subtype of science fiction; the books that they publish tend to stay within this as a consistent policy or philosophy. But the titles selected by female authors reflect no such consistent pattern. Sharon Jarvis, for example, has remarked that people have criticized her for choosing so many different kinds of books that it’s impossible to figure out her tastes. Schochet and Allison, likewise, seem happy to embrace a diversity that eludes categorization.

This is not because female editors are capricious creatures flitting from one new fancy to the next like dumb blondes on a shopping spree. On the contrary, I think the whimsical diversity in the female lists merely reflects a different level of commitment to the field.

David Hartwell of Timescape Books is obviously making a career for himself in science fiction. Though he is at the same time a bibliophile and small magazine publisher, science fiction is the center of his professional life. Likewise Jim Baen; likewise Jim Frenkel, late of Dell; and Donald Wollheim, who has devoted several decades to science fiction. All these men edit as if they have one eye on posterity. Probably each of them would like to be remembered by the field as a latter-day Campbell, leaving some distinctive mark upon it.

Not so the female editors I have mentioned. Most of them started editing science fiction almost by accident and will probably move on to edit other categories. Having no great desire to be empire-builders, they are much freer to select whatever happens to appeal to them (provided it will sell) – including nonconformist books that might never be picked by male editors whose lists are more tightly circumscribed by policy.

In this respect, I enjoy the female influence on the field. After all, my own book *Dream Makers* is a misfit which would not have been bought by any male editor I can think of but which appealed to the more flexible tastes of a female editor.

But self-interest aside, the broader outlook must be ambivalent. There has been some decline in the amount of conscientiously researched, logically deduced, technologically biased science fiction in the last ten years. Perhaps writers just aren't interested in doing all that hard work any more (with the exception of Haldeman, Anderson, Pohl, Benford, Niven, and Pournelle). But could it be that female editors, by showing less interest in this kind of science fiction, have encouraged its decline? And is it not possible that female editors, by demonstrating their receptiveness to fantasy as opposed to higher-tech science fiction, have encouraged demand for it to grow?

This is an incredibly incestuous field. The editor who buys your new novel may also be the writer who sells a story to the collection you edit, which his wife will review in the little magazine she publishes. These tangled professional interests, coupled with that old science-fictional “sense of family”, encourage us to exercise diplomacy and tact.

The Patchin Review is deficient in such areas and has already alienated several people as a result. Specifically, Harlan Ellison, whom I have known for twelve years, has terminated all dealings with yours truly; Barry Malzberg has accused me, at length, of causing him mental pain; Robert Sheckley seems more circumspect, shall we say, than he used to be; and several others have professed to be “shocked” by things I've printed.

With the exception of Philip Dick (who was grudgingly tolerant of my review of *Divine Invasion*) none of my friends has yet been book-reviewed here, mainly because they happen to have published few books recently. But sooner or later their new work will be in print, creating horrible conflicts of interest. Already, Edward Bryant (whom I've known for ten years) has his new story collection out from Timescape Books. And soon there'll be a new novel by Gregory Benford – who was kind enough to invite me and my

ladyfriend to stay at his house recently, and whom we, in turn, have accommodated in New York.... And conflict of interest will also arise if I wish to write or publish negative criticism of the work of people who have been generous enough to grant me interviews for inclusion in *Dream Makers* or *Dream Makers II*.

Little wonder, then, that I have been advised to hire outside reviewers, adopt a more “balanced” policy, and get rid of the gossip column. I suppose that would certainly make life easier; yet I feel reluctant to do it.

I really believe in free, frank expression of opinions. Professional honesty, if widely and equally applied, should make us all think and work more conscientiously and creatively. If we shy away from it and play safe with platitudes, complacent mediocrity must result. Hypocrisy, too: opinions that are tactfully hidden from an author still tend to be aired and joked about behind his back. The article on John Varley in this issue, for instance, puts forward views which I have not seen expressed publicly before but which many of Varley’s contemporaries have expressed to me privately.

Obviously I don’t want to offend friends or hurt people’s feelings. My contributors, likewise, have no personal malice toward their contemporaries (with the possible exception of Harlan Ellison, whose attack on John Shirley in the first *Patchin Review* perhaps contained personal animosity). What we share, here, is a feeling of frustration and discontent when confronted with science fiction which does not do as much as we think it could and should. We want more from our literature, from the people who publish it, and from the people who write it – *including ourselves*.

We also find the book business and its inhabitants hard to take seriously sometimes (again, including ourselves) and that’s why a tongue-in-cheek gossip column appears alongside the serious critical articles.

Gregory Benford continues to pursue separate careers as physicist and science-fiction author (his most recent novel being Timescape). His article here is the first, and probably the most level-headed, of several pieces that we will be publishing by various authors lamenting the increasing influence of fantasy as a mass-market category.

Fantasy as Pollution

Gregory Benford

Fantasy literature has a long and honorable tradition, and I have always respected its greatest works. My first published story was fantasy. Of late, however, I have been disturbed by the gradual intrusion of fantasy values and methods into science fiction. I surmise this comes about from a certain intellectual shift among writers, and also because the demand for fantasy-flavored works is stronger. Overall, I'm opposed to it.

Norman Spinrad once remarked to me that it is harder to write good science fiction than good fantasy. Science fiction must *create* a suspension of disbelief in the mind of the reader. Fantasy *requires* this as an initial investment from the reader. The harder work of writing science fiction is rewarded, at least in principle, by a larger return: an engagement with one's imaginary world that means more to the reader, because he's helped build that world himself.

I suspect the reason many people like fantasy is that it is escapist in a fundamental sense. Fantasy springs from the wistful hope that we can impose on the world a *human program*. It anthropomorphises evil into the stock images of the vampire, werewolf, Frankenstein monster, etc.. It anthropomorphises nature by introducing halfhuman forms (faeries), imaginary animals whose unpleasant aspects are omitted (dragons, unicorns), and by showing superhumans who can control the world with human-like powers divorced from intellect (wizards, witches, warlocks).

Fantasy fearlessly faces the past. It calls us back to old beliefs and superstitions. It is the literary fossil of vitalism, the comfortable notion that the world is really run by forces we can comprehend readily, "naturally", in terms of driving emotions and desires which are human-like, rather than in human intellectual terms (the program of science). In the past twenty years, dating roughly from the popularity of Tolkien, the resurgence of fantasy has led to its becoming a publishing category in its own right. (I shall simplify by treating the vast bulk of this material, which is psychologically naive. Most of it is heroic fantasy – the true backbone of the business. The rare exceptional works are not the cause of the publishing revolution we've witnessed. Otherwise, Peter Beagle would be rich today.) Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment* conjectures that a lack of fairy tales in childhood causes a late-adolescent lust for the fantasy of oversimplification. Perhaps so, but why does this generation need so much literary refuge? Well, note that the rise of category-fantasy parallels the increasing pressure in and on western society. This reinforces the intuition many of us have, that the appeal of it lies

precisely in its harking back to the comfy knowns of our civilization's earlier days.

Fantasy thus has a great investment in the solidity of the past, and the natural world. This leads it to have the same high investment in an ordered narrative and essentially nineteenth-century methods of storytelling. Thus the writer of fantasy cannot afford to adopt a tone of epistemological mockery, or use ironic juxtapositions which call into question the whole meaning of literary action. This is why fantasy is so deeply conservative and clings to the bourgeois orthodoxy of narrative. (It is no accident that the biggest fantasy list is edited by those enemies of all modernism, the Del Reys.)

The irrealism of Borges, Calvino, Barthelme, etc. may seem allied to the spirit of science fiction at times, but fantasy cannot at root share this. Fantasy has too great a stake in the old order, in the forest versus the city, in vitalism versus the machine.

All well and good; none of the above means that fantasy is bankrupt or worthless. The genre is blessed with talents like Leiber and Lynn, Disch and Delany (though notice how atypical their work is). Occasionally gems like Phyllis Eisenstein's *Born to Exile* shine forth. However, some consequences of the genre are restricting. Life in fantasy-land tends to be simplified to the point of a cartoon. Characters are reduced to myth figures who do quite nicely, thank you, without those messy human vices of doubt, ambivalence, or subtlety. Evil loses because of the mightier sinews of the hero (or heroine), or else because it is, after all, *eeevil*, and good must conquer. This "internal rightness" which wins through is the true core of most fantasy. Good wins because it is good, period. In this sense the patty-cake zen of *Star Wars* is a fantasy-style element. (In fact, there is a suspicious similarity between the Force and the mysticism lying beneath fascist rhetoric. I expect *Revenge of the Jedi* will depict some scenes reminiscent of *Triumph of the Will*. An enormous amount of fantasy has this same emotional underpinning. So, too, does some dull-witted power-trip science fiction, as Spinrad devastatingly demonstrated in *The Iron Dream*.)

Of course, some advances in fantasy in this decade have introduced better characterization and some thought about social issues. For example, Elizabeth Lynn's work is cleanly written and her people are well characterized. Janet Morris's fantasy scenarios are built upon an underpinning of up-to-date science (going over the heads of most of her audience, I suspect). Even in the best of this type of fantasy, though, I

consistently get the odd feeling of a point of view suspended halfway between the imagined world and 20th Century USA. I have yet to see a fantasy work featuring people as idiosyncratic in language and attitudes – as *alien* – as found in, say, Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County.

What we lose in fantasy is a vision of characters in new circumstances, new societies. To depict that requires not historical empathy or research, but imagination and thought. In realism, characterization has a reportorial purpose. In fantasy, this constraint is weakened. Thus fantasy which has as a partial purpose the sympathetic treatment of homosexuals, say, is defused by the penumbra of unreality that goes with the territory. (And for my money, anyway, the territory itself is often unreal *even on its own terms*. I grew up in the far back woods of Alabama, and I sense in many ostensibly rural fantasy works the sweaty imagination of a city author, sitting at his typewriter and wondering, *What does it feel like if...?*) Similarly, feminist fantasy tends to neglect the very real historical reasons why feminism was not a powerful force in the past. Agrarian cultures usually stress muscle power, undermining the evolution of many notions of sexual equality. Even more questionable are the Conan-like heroines. True, amazons did exist – but they were anomalies. Aside from a temporarily refreshing example of female independence, what can we learn from these societies?

More important, all these methods of dealing with current social issues by casting them into fantasy environments are hobbled by a simple fact: the reader discounts the impact of such ideas because they lack a connection to the reader’s own world. Those florid, overwrought sentences, packed with superlatives and imagery, can be vastly entertaining, of course. But they carry a subtle message: relax, sit back, enjoy the view, be impressed but not informed. Don’t struggle with a problem; let the writer do your thinking for you. What reader can honestly claim that his understanding of our future, or even our present (much less the people in it), was enhanced by the comfortable worlds of McCaffrey or Tolkien?

By contrast, those science-fiction works which use the tenets of realism require the reader to balance and weigh a perceived world and evaluate it with his own values – not those of a traditional and agreed-upon fantasy world, encumbered by the trappings of the past. Fine: these are the differences between the two genres. What bothers me is the oozing of fantasy values into science fiction.

Star Wars makes the point visually: light swords, princesses, knights, the lot. It is antirational and perhaps cryptofascist. Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover* series reads more like an alternate-universe middle-ages epic, with psi powers thrown in, than science fiction. Farmer's *Riverworld* series is a self-contained system within which an infinite number of games can be played with familiar historical figures. The internal workings are consistent and well thought out, but it means nothing more to us than an amusing problem. (Not, of course, that I necessarily decry amusement. Farmer has shown that he can comment powerfully on many human facets, in his other works.) There are many books which share this fascination with a hermetically sealed-off world, wherein characters stumble about gawking at the wonders. There are cute creatures, enchanted landscapes, and nearly always a fascination with sheer size, as if enormity ensured importance. John Varley's ingenious talent has run aground on this shoal in his *Titan* series.

Of course, science fiction has always been vulnerable to the charge of escapism. The *Ringworld* series verges on this, and shares some of the quality of an isolated let's-tour-the-big-object guidebook. The difference is that Niven and the others are talking about the possible (though far-distant) consequences of *real physical laws*. Just as the constraints of the sonnet impose a possibility of excellence which (for my money, anyway) free verse doesn't have, so the rules of sticking to real science make possible a greater success in the big-object subgenre. This is what distinguishes the *Ringworld* from, say, the sprawling, familiar landscapes of Silverberg's *Majipoor*.

The most disappointing recent intrusion of fantasy elements into science fiction came, for me, in Vinge's complex and interesting *The Snow Queen*. Spinrad's excellent review of this novel in *Destinies* (Fall 1980) brings out the crucial point: early on, Vinge elects to make her "mers" creatures the object of senseless slaughter for purposes of synthesizing an immortality virus. Several scientific objections can be made to this plot element – it would be much more effective, for example, if the FTL-level culture simply bred the mers and bled them for the virus. Apparently, Joan Vinge allowed the ordained plot structure, taken from a fairy tale, to dictate the science. This is the essential posture of science-fantasy: the trappings of science, which lend credibility, are subordinated to the devices and thought patterns of fantasy. I'm afraid that, for me, this choice violates the constraints of logic itself, not merely scientific fact. This, together with that old assumption, the galactic culture coexisting alongside a feudal planet complete with swords,

queens, etc. ... well, it is hard not to see this as a set of unquestioned clichés combined with a basic decision which corrupts the rest of the narrative.

A more subtle fantasy-like intrusion is the unexamined assumption that liberal capitalism (or, more rarely, state socialism) will form the backdrop of societies centuries from now. This has become so automatic that it probably seems natural even to the most hard-nosed high-tech writers. Worse, there are even semi-feudal regimes invoked in future high-tech societies. (I omit here, of course, books like *Oath of Fealty*, which is making a specific point about the return of feudal forms because of a high-tech development.) The usual excuse for such easy answers is that the author should be permitted them in order to spotlight some personal or political point. I doubt the reasonableness of this theory. The interaction of technology and society is a major piece of what science fiction is about in the first place; neglecting this connection is playing with a stacked deck. It is interesting that the group which seems most aware of the difficulty are the conservative hard-science writers such as Anderson, Niven, and Pournelle. I would like to see some writers from the political left present fully-realized futures which fit the technology into a social matrix which is – of logical necessity – different from the standard models of the present (fascism, socialism, communism, capitalism, etc.).

I realize this is a tall order, and so is the weeding-out of so many habits of thought we have all (I don't exclude myself) fallen into. But that is what science fiction is about: contemplating a future which is urban, diverse, technology-driven, and packed with ambiguities. It is easier to write about futures which, by their inclusion of fantasy elements and lazy habits of mind, peer backward into a past that is rural, simple, monothematic, antirational, and primitive. But that is to betray the promise of the field.

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The Swimmer **Steve Rasnic Tem**

*Thoughts of the last human,
swimming away from shore...*

He begins at the shoreline,
wading out from his family, his parents

silhouettes of rock or animals now
touching their lips in the leeward wind,
& losing his heavy accumulation of fact
he enters the last great circling of dying fish,
the wrecks of the forgotten ecologies,
to seek reflection in the waves.

He pursues his father's faces, all fathers
down mirrored spirals of seaweed to pupae
eating their way out of shells, their disorganized
faces floating away on silver membranes.
Learning their first manners his reflections
become friends, marry, become windows
repeating themselves as he pushes
into the source of waters, the blue fish a retrospect
of all his lovers come up from the deep.
Shadows dance with blue heat. Fish are birds
are machines slicing the red air.

In the open screen of deep water his breasts
sag like an idiot's eyes. His child's
tongue hangs limp and useless as his father
smashes his nose till it swells with visionary air
like the belly of a plump Buddha. Faces
spin him into the maelstrom of twined blood and hair,
algae like wheel spokes streaming
until he's a bloated fish,
with three arms and three legs,
his breasts, new eyes.

He would escape this flower's center
even when the force of waters
keeps him whole. He strokes through
the flotsam, his mouth full of lovers,
his ears full of homes he's known,
through his bedroom window, the hard questions
in his father's fists, through each desire

like debris leaving a shipwreck, branches
in a tree of light reaching the horizon
where the salt eats him away
to fish, to bags of water,
the eyes of the sea reading his portraits
of sun on every wave, the puzzled mouths
of fish in each of his cells intoning
his name, that same name for the ocean,
and every stroke of his swimming.

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Arthur Byron Cover's best known works include his story collection, The Platypus of Doom, and his fine novel An East Wind Coming (Berkley, 1979) which received less attention than it deserved. First-hand experience in specialty bookstores has given him strong views on science-fiction cover art – and old myths as to what will and won't sell.

The Shock of the Mundane Arthur Byron Cover

“Not all stories, even good stories, are necessarily visual. There are a great many stories that should not have pictures associated with them,” says Vincent DiFate in the July 1981 issue of *Starlog*. “But my job is to create those pictures whether they are there or not and sometimes I have to go outside the material in the book. But, more often than not, when I do that, it’s because of art direction or somebody saying that we have to mislead in some way in order to get people interested.”

I must make perfectly clear at the outset that I’m not picking on DiFate for saying that, because it’s the truth, pure and simple. Yet the trend toward deliberate misdirection in commercial science-fiction art is one of the most disturbing of recent years.

To celebrate the first paperback publication of *The Magic Labyrinth* by Philip José Farmer, Berkley Books has reissued the other three Riverworld novels in matching editions. Though by this time everybody knows that Farmer’s characters eventually discover metal on the Riverworld, they certainly didn’t discover it in time to be depicted with pistols, bloody

daggers, swords, battleaxes, armor, and SS regalia on the jacket of *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* and *The Fabulous Riverboat*. The fact that the characters are hairless is clearly established when Burton awakens early in the first volume, yet that little detail hasn't prevented the artist from depicting the elderly Mark Twain's white mustache in its full glory on the cover of *The Magic Labyrinth*. The entire set is marred by a veritable orgy of beards, mustaches, and long hair.

An art director might reply to this criticism that the covers, with their instantly recognizable figures, will prove to be more intriguing to the potential customer. To which I would reply that a cover inaccurately evoking the text seriously undermines the integrity of the novel. The customer is bound to notice. The next time he sees a book by Farmer, illustrated by this artist, or published by Berkley, he's more apt to remain a customer in potential only – because he's been trained *not* to trust the Riverworld covers.

Of course, it's possible to misrepresent a book and still be entirely accurate, as in the case of Del Rey's recent reissue of William Tenn's *The Square Root of Man*. The scene of a female vampire wearing a nightie and driving a wooden stake through her own heart at the stroke of midnight occurs in "She Only Comes Out at Night," just as the cover says. However, the purple mist adorning the background – a futile effort on the artist's part to add a mood of mystery and horror to the painting – is singularly inappropriate to a tale which, like *most* of Tenn's work, is witty, urbane, and disturbingly rational, despite the improbability of its premise. The story's tension is derived from its mixture of a traditional supernatural theme with the ingredients of modern rustic civilization, a point of interest nowhere indicated in the painting. I also question the wisdom of mating a supernatural scene (based on an eight-page story) with 220 pages of interplanetary travel, futuristic settings, alien planets, and robots writing television comedies, *all* narrated in a witty, urbane, and disturbingly rational style. Does the Del Rey art department really think the average horror-fiction fan is going to be satisfied by this collection, regardless of its quality? Does the editorial department really think a science-fiction fan who has never heard of William Tenn is even going to open this book, although it presumably contains exactly the sort of material he is searching for?

The common denominator between the paintings I've discussed is the effort on *someone's* part to ensure that the paintings apply an unsurprising treatment to their subject matter. People expect to see Twain sporting a white

mustache, they expect to see vampires surrounded by fog, and that's exactly what they get, even if it tells them nothing about what they're buying.

In *Wonderworks* (Donning, 1979) Michael Whelan presents four preliminary stages of his painting for Poul Anderson's *Ensign Flandry*. Scrawled across a sketch of a feline humanoid striking a warlike pose on a wooden ship, the art director's comments read, "Make her more humanoid...prettier face...put sword in a more aggressive manner..."

Science fiction is theoretically a literature about (I want a drumroll for this) the unknown. Yes, about what we presume to be mankind's inevitable adventures in the time and space of the future. Its earliest proponents have always claimed that science fiction augments our perceptions of the present. What, then, am I to conclude about art directors who strip a science-fiction creation of an important detail of its verisimilitude by ordering it to be made prettier – *more familiar*?

The policy of "familiarity at all costs" is by no means confined to science fiction; its sister fantasy is likewise beset by the Hoary Demons from the Forest of the Old Hat. Someone, somewhere – who? where? – has already pointed out that the reissue of *The Song of Rhiannon* by Evangeline Walton, part of a series based on *The Mabinogion*, has a woefully inadequate cover. This tale of Druids and magic in ancient Wales is represented by two lovers at Stonehenge during a lightning storm. Only the golden bird in the upper right corner tells the viewer that the book is a fantasy. As the previous reviewer mentioned, the man wears a very modern T-shirt, and the woman looks as if she's modeling a negligee for a Sears catalogue. They appear to be quite comfortable on a Sealy Posturpedic mattress, and I bet they have a gas-guzzling camper parked just offstage. In this case, the motifs of modern fantasy haven't been reduced to a cliché so much as they've been eradicated. Though the painting itself possesses a modicum of competence, I can't say it succeeds in communicating the portrait of serenity played against an ominous and tumultuous background it strives for, partially because the lovers are much too prominent. In addition, the painting lacks the very stuff of life itself. Not a hair in either figure is out of place; indeed, the man seems to have just stepped out of the local hair styling salon. Walton's series of novels strives for the passion of Dvorak. But the cover is as antiseptic as muzak.

Once I asked a Ballantine sales representative how the recent reissues of James Branch Cabell novels (all originally selected by Lin Carter for the Adult Fantasy Series) fared in the Market Place of Bottom Line. "Not very

well,” he said, shrugging. And no wonder. Cabell’s satirical examinations of human foibles are bubbly glasses of Perrier spiced with a dash of lemon, and the reissue paintings by Howard Koslow are flat glasses of Mountain Dew left in the open air a little too long. Say what you might about Lin Carter’s selections for the Adult Fantasy series (he recognized a good story, but he didn’t always recognize a bad one!) the covers caught your attention and kept it. But Koslow’s painting for the reissue of *The High Place* portrays the deal-with-the-devil theme with stunning banality. A costumed gentleman, presumably the protagonist Florian, sits on a rock and shoots the breeze with Old Nick himself, as Hell gapes below; on the backside, Florian, looking a bit like George Washington, is being wed, his wife-to-be’s chastity belt securely locked and the key symbolically hanging between their heads. Though I read and enjoyed the book several years ago, I can’t say I was upset when it was the reissue’s turn to be stripped and returned to the publisher for credit from the science fiction bookstore where I worked. I didn’t feel as if I were stripping a Cabell book.

The original paperback cover sums up the novel in particular, and the Cabell I remember in general. Deliciously drawn by Frank C. Papé and “illuminated by” Donna Violetti, the front presents Nick in the shape of a red-horned man snorting red smoke; his forked tongue protrudes, his tail is curved between his legs, one foot is shoed, the other hoofed. He wears a ruffled shirt and green knee-breeches. The viewer sees a single reptilian wing running up his spine and through his jacket. He pulls half a yellow cart, and half a man holds onto the cart’s interior. Three tiny devils with serpent tails pull at the man’s foot. The colorful details within each prop enliven the painting with their pleasing shades and geometric shapes.

The paperback’s spine presents the man’s red heart, and the flame of his life in a brighter shade. An armored angel, perspiring, snorting lightning, and holding a sword of flame, pulls the man’s other half. And three white cherubs whose buttocks end in curious puffs of smoke pull his other foot. Though the theme is old the approach is witty, not quite as dry as Cabell’s writings but very much in their spirit. And why not? Someone familiar with the first edition realized that having an artist other than Papé illustrate *The High Place* was like having Hal Needham direct the remake of *Casablanca*.

Five years ago the Brothers Hildebrandt would have beaten the subject to death; as of 1979 general standards have fallen so low that the assignment is handed to Howard Koslow, an artist with an unlikelier potential for

inexplicable popularity.

Frankly, art departments are exhibiting an extreme lack of professional pride. One can understand, if not approve of, an inexperienced artist screwing up human musculature, but it confounds me that art directors permit it to happen so frequently. The staff of DAW Books' art department is surely composed of peculiar tentacled creatures peering at ragged copies of *Gray's Anatomy* and vainly striving to comprehend what is forever beyond their grasp. Not only are they utterly confounded by the subtleties of human musculature, but their hiring policies are prejudiced toward tits-and-ass aliens as well. (Just once I'd like to see a batch of covers by knee-and-ankle men. And shoe men! That would be ecstasy.)

I'm sure everyone has their favorite lousy DAW cover. Mine is the painting used on Andre Norton's recent collection *Lore of the Witch World*, wherein a lovely Amazon type wearing nary but a fur cloak, a rawhide skirt, and fur-lined boots stands holding a spear on a snowcapped precipice. Her entire torso and most of her legs are exposed to the winter wind. And the viewer can see quite plainly her *huge* ass outlined by her skirt. Well, artists have the right to draw women with big asses, it's in the Constitution. However, a close examination reveals, at least to my satisfaction, that her thighs, as rendered by the artist, *cannot possibly fit* the aforementioned rotund posterior.

I realize that thus far I've been bitching like some wizened crank, chomping chewing tobacco and spitting out the juice on the wooden sidewalk in front of the general store. Lamenting the passing of the good old days and mourning the loss of quality in my life. The whining voice in the background saying "But it sells! It sells!" doesn't bother me. During the five years I've worked undercover in speculative-fiction bookstores, I've picked up the skill of recommending books to customers on the basis of those they've enjoyed – and disliked – in the past. If even a "sci-fi klassic" known 'round the world has a hideous cover, then convincing the discerning reader that he should try, for example, William Tenn or Evangeline Walton becomes infinitely more difficult.

Abstract covers, at odds with the rather prosaic realism in vogue today, sell better than ugly monstrosities. I don't dispute DiFate's claim in *Starlog* that surrealistic science-fiction art died a grisly death in the early seventies, though the more reckless part of me would like to. However, the supposition that abstract science-fiction art is commercially unfeasible by definition

strikes me as suspect. The Ballantine edition of *The Lord of the Rings* had abstract covers for years, colorful Barbara Remington landscapes with twisted trees and eerie animals; the paintings played with the mind, evoking images and, incidentally, telling the customer much more about the books than the dead hunks of canvas which the Del Rey art department has nailed to the new editions. Is anyone going to complain that the Remington covers didn't sell books?

Isn't it possible that the abstract science-fiction art of the early seventies suddenly withered on the newsstands because the same permutations were being used long after they had ceased being innovative or novel? Around 1972 it seemed that all the Berkley covers looked alike, regardless of their nifty shades of color. And isn't it possible that the low technical standards of the current vogue of realism will cause the collective buying public to clamp its hands firmly about its collective change purse and start thinking about that overdue power bill? Will the audience finally end its quest for another Tolkien or Heinlein because the art has begun to bore it to tears?

An artist who, throughout science fiction's paperback history, has consistently produced high-quality abstract work is Richard Powers. He has taken the dreamscapes and symbolic shapes of Yves Tanguy and trained them to serve his own purposes. He has updated them, increased their illusion of speed, and added science-fiction motifs. For me, Powers, more than any other artist, sums up and embodies the essence of genuine speculative literature. Regardless of the period of his art, his subjects are uplifted into essentially intellectual realms of mysticism. Powers' current commercial project is a set of covers for Macmillan's *Best of Soviet Science Fiction* series. Though many of the stories and novels are primitive by our "standards," the best achieve the resonance of a beautiful fairy tale; others put to shame most of the works by the English-speaking writers who've emerged since the early seventies (despite the smug remarks of feather-headed critics who can't conceive of excellent science fiction originating in a language other than English, as if imagination was limited to those who spoke an arbitrarily chosen vocabulary).

In the spirit of the times, Powers' paintings more bluntly represent the contents than they have in the past. One recurring theme is, appropriately enough, Russian architecture. The faces are stern, confused, or frightened as they peer toward the nether regions beyond the canvas. The viewer of the paintings for Savchenko's *Self-Discovery* understands at once that the body

on the slab is soon to be transformed. The painting for the anthology *New Soviet Science Fiction* is Powers' homage to the Soviet science-fiction author himself, dreaming of cosmonauts and oneness with the universe (the latter being a Russian tradition) while two men personifying the Communist bureaucracy gravely look on. A man in a time machine emerges above priests standing before a cathedral in the painting for Bilenkin's *The Uncertainty Principle*. In virtually the entire set, geometrical lights and colors representing microbes and merging minds and the concept of power itself are played against sweeping backgrounds that could be dreamscapes or the scope of the universe, depending on what sort of mood the viewer is in.

Powers' painting for the Strugatsky brothers' *The Ugly Swans* sums up and reflects the book more accurately and honestly than could any single realistic work. White figures in the foreground march through a gray dreamscape toward a distant city silhouetted in the center, evoking the people who must live in the novel's dreary provincial kingdom. Powers brilliantly captures the kingdom's rainy skies, the characters' resignation to the inescapable boundaries of life, and the persistent hope, expressed by the protagonist and embodied by the children, that one day man will rise to the next evolutionary plane.

An artist whose oeuvre exhibits a range touching upon virtually every subgenre within the science-fiction field is Don Maitz. A typical Maitz painting is frequently a combination of abstraction, realism, and unabashed color experimentation. His cover for Gene Wolfe's collection *The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories* presents the viewer with a man squatting before a fire beneath the glare of futuristic lights. Wearing a tank strapped to his back, the man breathes through an unseen mouthpiece. The huge setting sun, casting a yellow reflection in the sea, also sets the sky ablaze in muted orange shades. On the back of the book, mandrills sit about a coconut tree and watch the man as if he were a performer, a genuine absurd touch that has always been a rarity in science-fiction art.

Maitz's rendering of the title-character for Wolfe's *The Shadow of the Torturer* is mesmerizing; wearing a black mask, holding his sword before him, he stands on a symbolic platform against a gray background. The sense of reality is heightened by intricate detail Maitz has woven into the interior lining of the Torturer's cape.

I'm not suggesting that Maitz and Powers are consistently the oversoul's gift to the science-fiction field. They've both produced uninspired art. Even

Picasso had his off days (several, in fact). I merely suggest that the quality of their best work should become the standard that art departments should strive for.

An art director might reply that a crummy painting by Rowena sells just as well as, if not better than, a painting by Maitz. I'm unable to dispute that; facts and figures aren't at my fingertips. But keep in mind that there are many variables. Two authors who shared an Ace Double once compared notes; according to the accounting department, one half of the book sold more than the other half. Keep in mind that it must be difficult finding art directors who know something about speculative fiction and who also happen to be good at their work.

When I first began planning this article I considered devoting myself exclusively to one art department – that of Berkley Books. Upon discovering that their best covers were, well, *passable*, and that most of their recent worst covers were indifferently bad, I included Del Rey Books in my researches. Gradually I realized that Del Rey covers boldly made my points for me, whereas most Berkley covers tried to conceal the issues. Art which is indifferently bad isn't worth writing about.

However, I don't want to leave the reader with the impression that Del Rey covers are uniformly bad. I've got to get the percentage right. Occasionally, H.R. van Dongen presents us the familiar under the most unexplained circumstances. For *The Best of Hal Clement* he presents a boy lying among a debris of stone blocks, receiving medicinal aid from a huge, gray, fishlike alien with large yellow-orange eyes, fins, tiny tentacles, and a mouth in the middle of what I suppose must be called a face. The only truly distinct lines in the painting are those of the alien, drawing it to the viewer's attention, creating the illusion of reality as surely as if the creature actually posed for van Dongen.

This cover is empirical proof that the realistic commercial art currently in vogue is not in itself at fault. But in the main it has run its course. It is time for science-fiction art directors to begin searching for other modes for their artists to explore, lest realism suddenly go the way of abstract art in the early seventies.

The author would like to thank Lydia C. Marano for her assistance in preparing this article.

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Advice to the Alienated from Cousin Clara

In my previous column, you may recall, I tackled the traumas of writing workshops. This time, by popular demand, I have to deal with those other great gatherings of gross, verbose, bellicose, and comatose sci-fi citizens. I refer, of course, to science-fiction conventions.

A poor soul signing himself “Undesirable, Des Moines” is among my many correspondents asking for advice on how to survive such events. The main topic worrying Undesirable, like everyone else, is that perennial question: How do I get laid?

Dear boy, I will do my best to help. I don’t have a photograph of you, but let’s assume you are of average looks – no better and no worse than most science-fiction fans. That is to say, you are about 5' 8", weigh approximately 220 pounds, suffer from acne, and are afflicted with one minor physical deformity. What can you do?

First of all, some things to *avoid*. Do not wear your usual oversize corduroy pants with a seat that sags six inches below your bottom and legs that stop one inch above your socks. Try to resist the temptation to put on your polyester short-sleeved shirt with pocket protector and four colors of ballpoint pens. Either grow an identifiable beard, or shave; do not settle for that strange in-between condition. Give your plastic raygun to your younger brother, and likewise your phaser and your Captain Kirk walkie-talkies. Avoid wearing Spock false ears unless you *really do* look the part. If you like T shirts, refrain from those with slogans such as “Girl Wanted – No Experience Necessary” or “World Muff Diving Championships, Tijuana, 1978”. Likewise, underwear emblazoned with quips such as “Home of the Whopper” can actually produce reactions that are just the opposite of what you intend.

When planning your stay at the convention hotel, avoid sharing your room with five other males such as yourself. Remember to wash your hair – and the rest of your body, too, if possible – some time in the seven days preceding the event. And give serious thought to the possibilities of using nail clippers, mouthwash, and underarm deodorant.

Now for your strategy during the big event. First of all, check the program for items like “Female Stereotypes in Science Fiction: an open discussion” or “Imaginative Literature and Feminist Utopias: an all-female

panel”. Such events may be run and attended by self-possessed, aggressive young women so enticed by your lack of self-esteem that they will tolerate your dowdiness and obesity.

If this doesn't work out, go to daytime program items which feature professional female writers and editors. Linger afterward and flatter them outrageously. Never underestimate a writer's ego, dear Undesirable! They really do want to be told things like “I enjoyed your latest book more than any other science fiction I've ever read”, or “You are the greatest writer in the world and it's a disgrace that you aren't more popular than Robert Heinlein”.

Editors, too, will be vulnerable to excesses of praise, especially since they get less of it. Try sycophantic remarks such as “Thank God there's still someone in the field with integrity!” or “Since you took over at Piranha Books I've noticed my local news stand has given them twice the display space”. Try not to shuffle your feet. Avoid checking your zipper as you speak. Make eye contact. Be sincere. Practice in front of a mirror beforehand, and, if you can, bring a couple of books to be autographed. In the case of editors, do NOT try to sell them unpublished short stories from your creative writing class!

If you have no luck accosting professionals, try going for second-best: the women who are chasing after, and being rejected by, those few male professionals who possess some charisma. Introduce yourself as “Harlan Ellison's roadie” or the science-fictional equivalent. Imply you can introduce a female admirer to her hero, if she'll have a drink with you first. Or pose as an editorial assistant and promise a speedy reading of any young woman's manuscript – suggest, in fact, that you would be willing to spend a few minutes going to collect it from her hotel room right away.

If, by Saturday night, you are as unsuccessful as ever, DO NOT GIVE UP AND GET DRUNK. Go to any party, no matter how wretched, and mention the large store of drugs that you have in your room. If, in reality, you have been unable to afford or obtain the real thing, you can always bring out some unbranded aspirin tablets that you've kept wrapped in a scrap of aluminum foil, and wash them down with vodka and orange juice.

Let me see, is there anything I've forgotten? Oh yes – costumes. Two basic rules here: don't wear anything that exposes the intimidating, pallid bulge of your naked stomach. And do try to incorporate a cute, furry animal of some kind with your costume – a marmoset, perhaps, or a sloth. Young

women will come running up exclaiming “Oh, how cute!” and will beg to pet the little critter. Allow the female of your choice to do so, and give her a short lecture on its adorable tricks and habits. This will lead naturally to your casual offer to let her watch you feed it from the supply of special tropical fruit, seeds, and roots that you keep in your room.

Good luck, Undesirable, and I suppose, to be fair, next time I’ll have to advise unfortunate young women how to avoid people like you.



John Varley is the name most often mentioned when people try to think of important writers who emerged in the 1970s. Is his reputation really justified by the content of his work?

None So Blind Charles Platt

The writer of good, meaningful science fiction builds and explores alternate realities in such a way that, even though we know the scenarios do not exist,

we find them logically plausible and cannot prove them to be impossible. By this measure, John Varley does not write good science fiction and is not a conscientious author. The worlds that he builds seem science fictional because they are full of gadgetry and jargon, but actually they are no more rationally plausible than the fantasy-lands of a sword-and-sorcery novel. In addition, Varley has no grasp of human psychology and lacks any talent for visual description. To argue this further I will refer to three examples:

“The Phantom of Kansas”, a minor but in many ways typical Varley story, is narrated in the first person by a female protagonist in a future where sex changes and clone-growing are everyday options. Fox, an artist who produces “weather sculptures”, is pursued by a fanatic; three times he has murdered her and three times her body has been cloned and re-grown with memories of her earlier self implanted. She eventually encounters her nemesis and discovers he is another clone of herself, grown illegally and sex-changed. She elopes with him.

Titan, Varley’s second novel, describes the adventures of Cirocco, a woman astronaut, inside Gaea, a giant semi-sentient alien construct which ultimately communicates with Cirocco and offers her a live-in caretaker role.

“The Persistence of Vision” is the Nebula-winning fable of a young drifter who finds sanctuary in a Utopian commune where the adults are all deaf and blind. Their disability helps them to develop psychic faculties through which they escape from normal space-time. Their children, eager to follow, blind and deafen themselves and perform the same favor for the narrator.

Varley’s fans seem to like the breezy acceptance of biotechnology in his stories such as “The Phantom of Kansas”. Characters change sexes and cheat death with an idle nonchalance that gives them an aura of omnipotence; Fox, for instance, was born female, was made male by a mother (now 200 years old) who clung to old-fashioned gender preferences, then changed herself back to female almost arbitrarily.

Real-life sex-change patients have written powerfully about their tormented longings and ambivalence toward their bodies. Most of us harbor deep curiosity about how it would feel to be of the opposite sex. But Varley trivializes such difficult questions and complexities of emotion. He uses clones and sex-changes much as hyperdrives and tractor beams would have been used thirty years before – not to illuminate, but to amaze. His stories are reassuring in that his characters have never heard of Future Shock; but this is

the reassurance of a fairy tale. It tells us nothing of how real people will deal with the awesome potential of biotechnology, and how it will change the real world.

Varley does not write about real worlds or real people. His future societies are sketchy versions of 1970s white-middle-class U.S.A. with poverty subtracted from the picture. His people are motivated always by the same basic pleasure-curiosity-fear-escape set of emotions. Their actions derive not from complex internal needs but from needs of the plot. Thus Fox spends much of her story avoiding a murderer, then goes and finds him when Varley wants to stage an encounter. The characters in *Titan*, where there is very little plot to speak of, behave quite arbitrarily. And they speak in Heinleinesque quips even at times of high drama. “I’m sorry, but I think I’m going to be hysterical. Isn’t that a laugh?” says a woman named Gaby, on coming back from death to an unexplored, possibly hostile, totally alien world. (I’m reminded of the daughter in *Farnham’s Freehold* who jokes “sorry about the sound-effects, daddy” when she screams during the agony of childbirth.) Gaby conquers her panic within minutes, though, so she can have a typically improbable sex scene with Cirocco. Minutes after *that*, she describes her new philosophy: “This is ... the first time I’ve really known myself. And I’m going to love. I’m going to care about people. And it looks like you’re it.” Gaby then kills a conveniently docile woodland creature by crushing its skull with a rock.

There is equally bogus, Hallmark-card sentimentality in “The Persistence of Vision”. The deaf and blind commune members are portrayed as somehow innately kind and noble, “better” than the rest of us, freer to love, because they express themselves only in “honest” body language and have rejected the hypocrisies of the outside world. Sex is a recreation without focus, without resonance, without value judgments, a ritualized enactment of the “if it feels good, do it” philosophy of the 1960s. And as in the rest of Varley’s work, gender roles are completely erased, not out of some idealistic need to portray a sexually-equal future (Joanna Russ, among many others, has shown that characters can be full of rich, quirky traits reflecting their sexuality, without remaining trapped in the old roles) but because Varley is insensitive to sensual and sexual nuances. His stories narrated in the first person (which alone indicates an insecurity about describing people) are always in the same voice, regardless of whether it is intended to be male or female. His narrators are, in fact, neuter.

The most classic example of improbable actions and arbitrary sex occurs in “The Phantom of Kansas” when Fox encounters her murderer and finds he is a sex-changed clone of herself, trying to kill her to take her place in society. She stabs him and the blade sinks “three centimeters” into his back. Within minutes, she loses stomach for killing the man, he loses stomach for killing her, and they start having sex – despite his serious knife wound, presumably gushing blood, and despite his foul physical appearance – he has a filth-encrusted, emaciated body, hideous festering scars, and a vacant eye socket. Varley ignores (forgets?) these details because he’s getting off on one of his shallow, flashy ideas: the thrill of having sex with your very own sex-changed clone. A fitting fantasy for this child of the Me Decade, for whom narcissism speaks louder than nuance.

But he cannot describe even this scene in terms that are his own: “It was like something you read about in the romance magazines. All the overblown words, the intensive hyperbole. It was all real.” Faced with depicting deep emotion, he reaches for *True Confessions*.

“The Phantom of Kansas” attempts to make a point by allowing the reader to assume, at first, that the narrator is male. This would be a clever comment on our sexist bias if we had assumed she was male because she exhibited cliché-type male traits. However, since Varley’s characters have no traits our assumption takes place for want of any information, and the revelation is reduced to the level of a gimmick. Varley plays a similar game with the setting of this story – a “Kansas” which turns out to be a vast man-made cavern on the Moon. This again is rendered meaningless in that visual description is so sparse and stunted that the story could be taking place almost anywhere. Varley never describes such basics as Fox’s home, or the streets of her town (if, in fact, there are streets; they could just as well be tunnels). And when faced with depicting the very visual “weather symphony” he effectively admits his own limitations: “What can I say? It’s been said that there’s nothing more dull than a description of the weather. I believe it, even spectacular weather. ... You have to be there...”

Varley does no better in *Titan*: “Saturn was a dark gray hole, seventeen degrees wide, covering 1000 times the area of the moon as seen from Earth. The rings were an incredible forty degrees from side to side.... Sunset lasted fifteen seconds.... Down there were storms as big as the Earth.” –Faced with evoking a vivid, dramatic picture, he resorts to a ream of statistics.

Later in the novel, daunted by the need to describe Gaea, he keeps

comparing it to Disneyland – which he has visited apparently as a substitute for travelling in the real world – and uses second-hand video-age similes: a giant dangling cable is described as “curling like split ends in a shampoo ad.”. And he turns to the works of other writers for help in creating mood or imagery that he cannot evoke himself; *Oz*, *Dune*, and Heinlein’s *Orphans of the Sky* are mentioned, among others.

He gives up completely at the prospect of explaining how Gaea works. His explorers enter it when it absorbs their space ship, by means unknown. It learns their biology without killing them, sedates them, removes their clothing, and revives them scattered widely over a verdant interior landscape which has breathable air and edible wild life. One of the explorers wakes up knowing an entire alien language. This is all possible because Gaea is omnipotent. So anything can happen; Varley has eliminated all his problems at a stroke. Which is not to say that he then makes no mistakes – when his characters hitch a ride in a floating blimp-creature, for instance, Varley neglects to explain how the people breathe an internal atmosphere of pure hydrogen.

He is equally lazy in his other work. He omits details of how the internal government of the commune members in “The Persistence of Vision” really works, or how such handicapped people could possibly handle sophisticated electronics and factory equipment without assistance. His assertion that it is harder to deceive and be a “bad person” when you communicate by body language is contradicted by real-life evidence. And there is no rationale, of course, for his notion that sensory deprivation might aid development of psychic powers.

Even a less whimsical, seemingly more science fictional story such as “The Phantom of Kansas” is ridiculous in its assumptions and sloppy in its execution. Why have giant lunar caverns been excavated at incredible expense? Varley never explains. How are “weather symphonies” created? He mentions a few “generators” and leaves it at that. Why is Fox surprised by the idea of intercourse with a sex-changed clone of herself? If clones and sex-changes are so common in her world, she should be familiar with the idea; it’s obvious enough. How are the clones made? How are a lifetime of memories recorded in one small cube? How and why do clones grow to maturity thousands of times faster than a normal human being? How does the omnipotent computer in the story override its own programming, for sentimental reasons, to allow Fox to abscond with a murderer? The answer is,

of course, that nothing is constrained by rules of real life; events occur in whatever fashion is convenient to the plot.

All of this laziness and incompetence would be forgivable if Varley had a higher purpose – if his work was profound, or moving, or communicated an important message. But most of the short stories are unpretentious adventures without serious intent. And where there is a message – in *Titan* or “The Persistence of Vision” – it tends to be narcissistic, antirational, antisocial, and escapist to an extreme degree.

At the end of *Titan*, Gaea tells Cirocco: “I’m offering good friends and evil enemies, eternal day and endless night, rousing songs and strong wine, ... the chance at a life you won’t find on Earth ... I. can give you certain powers.... How would you like to be a Wizard?” – a prescription familiar to any player of Dungeons and Dragons. Naturally, Cirocco seizes this chance to fulfill all her infantile yearnings. She wants nothing more than to stay in never-never land, where a wise mentor will look after her always. And Varley seems pleased to stay there with her, for the remainder of his trilogy.

“The Persistence of Vision” has pretensions of profundity and a reputation as a thought-provoking story, but it is facile and vapid in its ultimate message. The narrator turns his back on modern urban life because of its shortages and strife; in classic 1970s style he sees himself not as a part of society, responsible for the conditions he lives in, but as an unencumbered, self-oriented individual free to opt out whenever he chooses. Much as teenagers join up with est or the Hare Krishna movement, he turns to the closed world of a commune which has rejected real life and gone beyond science. Passively, he allows them to blind and deafen him, the better to share their retreat: “We live in the lovely quiet and dark” is his exit line.

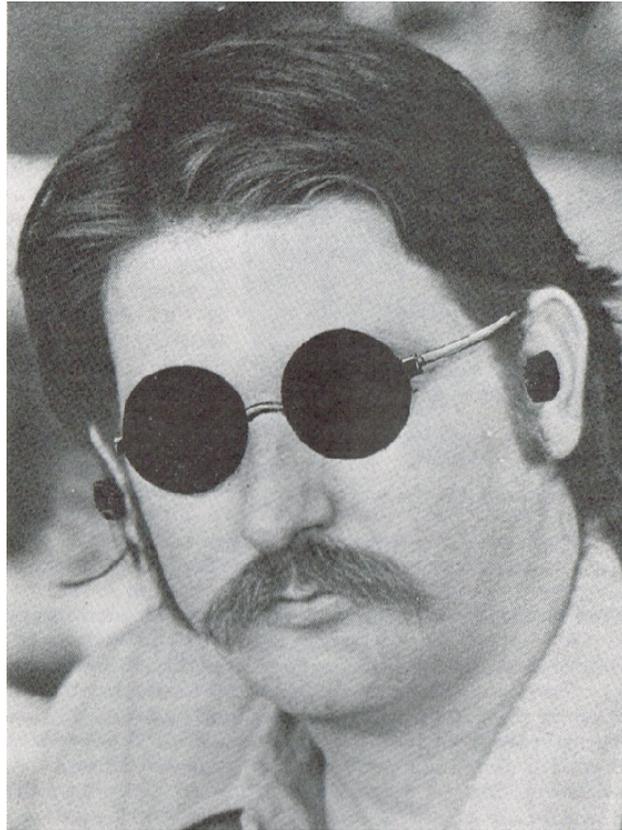
As a prescription for social behavior this is not so much thought-provoking as criminally simplistic, odiously facile, and extremely stupid. There is no reasoned thought here, just a series of half-baked myths and fantasies.

John Varley emerged at a time when the older generation – Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, Heinlein, Simak, et al. – had largely abdicated and were no longer molding the field, and the 1960s generation – Dick, Disch, Malzberg, Silverberg, Moorcock, Delany, Zelazny – had peaked and dispersed. Readers were eager for a new direction, a new talent. Varley was new, his stories used new science (no matter how simplistically), and were “optimistic”.

As the novelty wears off, however, Varley’s repertoire of wonders

begins to look as trivial as a Ripley's Believe It Or Not. His "optimism" is derived by erasing all real-world complexities of feeling and emotion. His science is at the level of a Sunday supplement – he does none of the careful extrapolation which should be at the core of good science fiction. Worst of all, he has nothing substantial or meaningful to say, and no serious intentions – other than to imitate Ciccio in *Titan* and his narrator of "The Persistence of Vision" and "live in the lovely quiet and dark" of his own second-rate imagination.

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*Photo of John Varley by Jay Kay
Klein*

Death is a touchy subject; so is the publication date of The Last Dangerous Visions. These were just two reasons why we couldn't resist the following tongue-in-cheek speculation from one of the surviving contributors to that collection.

L.D.V. / R.I.P.

Jane Doe

As many of us already know, Harlan Ellison's *Last Dangerous Visions* anthology has been running a bit behind schedule. Some contributors, especially those whose stories were held over from *Again, Dangerous Visions*, have been waiting as long as twelve years for their work to be published.

What has escaped most people's attention is that, in the case of a growing number of *L.D.V.* contributors, the delay has lasted longer than they have. Thus far, no less than eight have dropped dead while waiting hopefully to see their work in print. The casualty list consists of Leigh Brackett, Doris Pitkin Buck, Graham Hall, Edmond Hamilton, Ward Moore, Edgar Pangborn, Tom Reamy, and Wallace West. Two more writers – Anthony Boucher and Cordwainer Smith – were already exanimate when their stories were first purchased, so the grand total of departed *L.D.V.* contributors has now reached ten.

The June 1979 *Locus* supplied a definitive summary of the contents of *The Last Dangerous Visions*. Of 102 authors listed, 92 currently remain alive. One can't help wondering – *who's next?*

A cheerful circular was sent to all of the surviving contributors this Fall, assuring them, in the manner of a "Ten Simple Steps to Success" leaflet, of an imminent rosy future for their work. It seems mean-spirited to debunk well-intentioned promises of fame and fortune, but the sad fact is that Harlan Ellison still hasn't written his introductions to the stories and has become involved in yet another dispute with yet another of the book's publishers. Putnam/Berkley sent Ellison their contract in 1979; it took him till the Fall of 1981 to sign it, by which time the publisher was no longer willing to offer the same terms, the book business now being on harder times than formerly. So Ellison has started offering the project elsewhere (thus far, Timescape have already turned it down) and we can expect another delay in publication – allowing ample time for more contributors to take a turn for the worse. Perhaps plans should be made at this point to reshuffle stories among the projected three volumes of *L.D.V.* so that one book can consist entirely of work by the deceased.

Attempting to look ahead and see what the next few years hold in store, I have tabulated the names and ages of all contributors and have used the death rate over the last ten years to estimate the death rate we may expect

over the next ten, assuming that the anthology remains unpublished within that period, as seems likely.

Since many of the contributors are not well-known, their ages were hard to ascertain. However, most of the lesser-known names are definitely under fifty; and in estimating future death rates, my concern is primarily with older authors, anyway. So, arbitrarily, I have listed the ages of all those under fifty as “UF”. The ages of those over fifty are as of the end of 1981, with the exception of late authors, who have their ages listed at the time of death.

Notes: (1) indicates a dead author. (2): Half of this story’s wordage has been apportioned to each of its two collaborators. (3): Exact age was unavailable. This is an estimate. (4): For the purposes of their story, The Firesign Theater are considered as four individuals, all under fifty. (5): No one knows what happened to Janet Nay. She is missing and may or may not be alive.

First let’s look at the ages of those already claimed by the Grim Reaper. Of 72 authors in the under-50 age group, two expired during the last ten years; i.e., about one-and-a-half percent. Of those aged 50-59, 2 out of 20 succumbed, i.e., 10%. In the 60-69 group, 3 out of 12 passed on: 25%. In the 70+ group, 4 out of 8 gave up the ghost: 50%.

I will use these rates to estimate how many more may fall by the wayside in the next decade. Admittedly, these death rates are probably higher than the national averages, but this may well reflect the kinds of lives that writers lead (at least one of the victims, for example, died of alcoholism). You might argue that the death rate for science-fiction writers should be declining at this point, since average income has increased, and hence nutrition may be improving. However, I see no reason to assume that this trend will continue throughout the next ten years.

By the end of 1991, 70 *L.D.V.* contributors will be in the under-60 age group, with a death rate of perhaps 5% yielding three demises. There will be 18 in the 60-69 group, 25% of which would mean 4.5 fatalities. Thirteen will be headed for 70 and over, and here a 50% rate will mean that no less than 6.5 meet their Maker. Grand total: fourteen. If we add this figure to the ten who have already joined the choir invisible, we get 24, and if we then add the name of Janet Nay we reach a grand total of 25 – almost a quarter of the 102 contributors.

Obviously, if Harlan Ellison wants to avoid the embarrassment of transforming many of his introductions into obituaries, he should get to work

right away. No more stories are being bought for *L.D.V.*, which means that no new, young contributors are being added; thus the average contributor's age, and hence the death rate, can only increase as each year passes. Already, 56,050 words of the collection are by authors currently residing six feet under. A further 210,675 words are by those who will be aged over 60 by 1991. So an entire volume of work by authors who've breathed their last becomes a real possibility, especially if writers of the longest stories happen to be the ones who go first.

One other factor should be considered, and that is the survival of the anthology's editor. Harlan Ellison, currently aged 47, will soon be in the 50-59 age group where his contributors have suffered a 10% failure rate. Perhaps the incidence of mortality is less severe among anthologists than it is among contributing authors, but I wouldn't bet on it. It seems wise, under the circumstances, for Mr. Ellison to begin work as soon as possible.

Name	Age	Words
Russell Bates	UF	7250
Alfred Bester	68	2000
Michael Bishop	UF	6000
Nelson S. Bond	73	5000
Anthony Boucher	57	850
Leigh Brackett	63	5000
Mildred Downey Broxon	UF	5300
Edward Bryant	UF	10000
Frank Bryning	UF	5500
Doris Pitkin Buck	60	5500
Algis Budrys	50	1350
Octavia E. Butler	UF	3250
Orson Scott Card	UF	7000
Grant Carrington	UF	3800
Delbert Casada	UF	2000
A. Bertram Chandler	69	7000
Graham Charnock	UF	6000
John Christopher	59	21500
William E. Cochrane	UF	18800

Michael G. Coney	49	8000
Gerard Conway	UF	5500
Arthur Byron Cover	UF	2000
Philippe Curval	52	7200
Jack M. Dann	UF	9500
Avram Davidson	58	2000
Chan Davis	UF	9000
Hank Davis	UF	1000
Gordon R. Dickson	UF	6000
Stan Dryer	UF	3000
G.C. Edmondson	59	7700
George Alec Effinger	UF	15000
Gordon Eklund	UF	17000
Howard Fast	67	1200
Jonathan Fast	UF	1750
Leslie A. Fiedler (3)	50	2800
The Firesign Theater (4)	UF	5000
Franklin Fisher	UF	4700
Felix C. Gotschalk	52	2600
Ron Goulart	UF	3800
Joseph Green	50	6300
James Gunn	58	9100
Joe Haldeman	UF	10000
Graham Hall (1) (3)	31	3200
Edmond Hamilton (1) (2)	73	5000
Charles L. Harness	66	13125
Harry Harrison	58	4000
Frank Herbert	61	3500
Steve Herbst	UF	1300
Patricia C. Hodgell	UF	4000
Leonard Isaacs	UF	1000
John Jakes	UF	3000

Langdon Jones	UF	20000
Raul Judson	UF	3800
Daniel Keyes	54	4000
William Kotzwinkle	UF	5000
Susan C. Lette	UF	1500
Robert Lilly	UF	900
Anne McCaffrey	55	7000
Vonda N. McIntyre	UF	1600
Michael Moorcock	UF	7500
Raylyn Moore	UF	9250
Ward Moore (1)	75	4000
John Morressy	51	1200
Janet Nay (5)	UF	6800
Edgar Pangborn (1)	67	6500
Richard E. Peck	UF	2000
Doris Piserchia	53	5000
Charles Platt	UF	9800
P.J. Plauger	UF	10000
Jerry Pournelle	UF	11000
Joseph Pumilia	UF	1200
Tom Reamy (1)	42	17000
Mack Reynolds	64	1800
D.M. Rowles	UF	2000
Fred Saberhagen	51	4800
Bob Shaw	50	4000
Robert Sheckley	53	4000
Clifford Simak	77	6600
Cordwainer Smith (1)	53	2500
Bruce Sterling	UF	2250
Craig Strete	UF	3500
James Sutherland	UF	6000
Robert Thom	UF	15800

Robert Thurston	UF	3500
Wilson Tucker	67	7500
Lisa Tuttle	UF	6800
Steven Utley	UF	2000
A.E. van Vogt	69	7000
John Varley	UF	11500
Daniel Walther	UF	4200
Ian Watson	UF	4200
Manly Wade Wellman	78	5400
Wallace West (1)	79	6500
Jack Williamson	73	3000
Richard Wilson	61	47000
David Wise	UF	1800
Robert Wissner	UF	3000
Laurence Yep	UF	17000
Pamela Zoline	UF	16000

More than one author has signed a contract including an “escalator clause” guaranteeing extra money if his book wins a Hugo. Should an award that is voted by such a small and uninformed section of the reading public be endowed with such power?

The Hugo Farce

John Smith

No new is good new, so far as public taste is concerned these days. Even in science fiction. This looks like being the Decade of the Sequel (maybe the eighties will be written up as one big sequel to the seventies).

So, as Norman Spinrad has already pointed out, every novel on the 1981 Hugo nominations list was a sequel or destined to have sequels written to it. None of them came across with any real surprises, anything to challenge the mind. Finding out that Vinge won over Silverberg was like hearing that that Quaker Oats beat Cream of Wheat in a taste-test. Actually, *The Snow Queen* was probably most ambitious and best written of the five books.... But was

that why it won?

Results in the other categories confirm that Hugos aren't any kind of measure of good ideas or good writing. Best novella, "Lost Dorsai", used a concept that Dickson had invented twenty years ago. And his writing hasn't improved measurably since then. Each vote he received was a vote for nostalgia. So much for fans' supposed faith in the future. Where the future of literature is concerned, no one's ever told them it exists. Or rather, they choose not to listen.

As regards the Disch and Ellison novellas: these may not qualify as real science fiction, but then, neither does *The Snow Queen*, and at least Disch and Ellison are still trying new ideas in new forms – which is why they finished last.

In the novelette category, Dickson won again, pursued by that conceited master of mediocrity, Barry Longyear, who could probably be prevented from ever winning another award if we introduce a minimum voting age of eighteen. Note that the Waldrop novelette which won a Nebula came in last on the Hugo list.

Simak won the short story award, of course. After all, he was guest of honor at the convention where the awards were given out. And such a nice old guy. Isn't that what Hugos are all about?

Cosmos won the nonfiction award. Since the Hugo voters are basically illiterate, their response to the idea of "nonfiction" was to remember a national best-seller that tied in with a TV show. How else could *Cosmos* have been nominated?

Lastly, the best editor. No other category shows so well that Hugo voters can't shake off thought-patterns of twenty years ago. Back in the days of the "best magazine" award *Astounding* usually won. It continued to do so as *Analog*. Then the award was retitled "best editor" when paperback story collections started outnumbering the magazines, which were dying off anyhow. Did the fans understand that anything was happening? Did they realize there were now some important non-magazine editors? Of course not. Ben Bova won the first "best editor" award and went on winning it every year – because, after all, he was the editor of *Analog*, wasn't he?

Bova moved to *Omni*. The voters had learned his name, so they stuck with him, even though he was now doing something totally different. In fact Bova didn't stop winning Hugos until he stopped being eligible.

Sheckley took over at *Omni*, but the fans who vote didn't grasp that.

They turned to the next most obvious choice: Ed Ferman, who always used to come in second, after Bova. That's how Ferman won his 1981 Hugo. Not because he's a good editor, and not because he published an especially good magazine this year, but because traditionally *F&SF* always used to be thought of as number-two magazine after *Astounding*, and the one-time editor of *Astounding* wasn't in the picture any more. I say "traditionally" – that is, until the *early 1960s*, which is the period most fans are still living in. Twenty years ago!

Incidentally, note that of the five finalists in the best-editor category, even now, in the 1980s, four of them are magazine editors (Jim Baen is known for editing *Galaxy* and *Destinies*, not for having been editor at Ace). And the fifth name on the list, Terry Carr, is best known to voters as the one-time editor of an amateur magazine.

It's pretty clear that science-fiction fans have never gotten past the idea that magazines shape the science-fiction field. That's why there isn't a single important name ever nominated on the best-editor list. No one who really influences the future of science fiction. Hartwell, Schochet, Wollheim – the fans don't acknowledge that these people exist.

So once again the Hugos reflect the tastes of a small group of short-sighted illiterates who have no idea what's happening in science fiction, because they prefer the field as it was twenty years ago. What really pisses me off is that we're going to see "Hugo Winner" plastered on more book covers, and publishers are going to jack up their payments to those authors accordingly. It's a farce. The Hugos are not just irrelevant, they have a negative influence on science fiction, and we'd be better off without them.

Moments of Truth

"When we published Julian May's *The Many-Colored Land* last winter, the applause was thunderous. In case you haven't read it, we want you to accept a copy as a gift from Houghton Mifflin.

"If you think this is a bold-faced attempt to influence your vote on the Hugo and Nebula awards, you are perfectly right."

– Robie Macauley, Senior Editor, in a form-letter.

The long gap between last issue and this issue has left poor Gabby Snitch

swamped in untold gossip and our readers woefully ignorant of vital developments in the sci-fi social scene. Here's what's been happening.

Tales to Astonish by Gabby Snitch

You know the “No Frills” books that those money-grubbing, market-minded moguls of Jove Books dreamed up as a November sales scam? Plain white cover, no blurb, no author’s name, no title (other than “Science Fiction,” “Western,” etc.) and not many *pages*, either! Well, everyone’s been wondering – who wrote *No Frills Science Fiction*? Jove says that’s confidential info, but your pal *Gabby* knows the secret scribe is none other than JOHN “Sleepy” SILBERSACK, one-time Berkley SF editor!

When I called John, at first he refused to comment ... said he was too *embarrassed!* “You could say it took me more than an evening but less than a day” to pen the 80-page manuscript, he eventually confessed. “It’s so dreadful that I couldn’t bear to read the galley proofs – certainly not for the amount they paid me.” Hmmm!

Speaking of publishing personnel: When I got word SUSAN ALLISON, the Ace ed, was promoted to Executive Editor, I wondered – what does this really mean? “This is the title that department heads have at Ace, and I’m a department head, so I have it,” sassy Suze set me straight. Meanwhile, I hear her handsome hubby RICHARD HUTTON has a hit on his hands with *Genetic Prophecy*, a heavily-hyped hard-science high-tech handbook that’s really hot. Hutton’s also working on a possible PBS science series, and has signed to do a book of profiles of scientists with Patchin ed CHARLES PLATT (who backed out of a four-book deal recently and is now so broke he’s writing movie reviews for *Science Fiction Digest*. Isn’t it amazing what people will do when they’re desperate enough!).

Maybe you’re wondering why I’m not gabbing gossip dating back to the Denver worldcon.... fact is, the con was so *dull* there’s nothing to *tell*.

Even *Locus* ed. CHARLIE BROWN seemed desperate for news. He asked me, of all people, to pass him juicy tidbits from the NYC scene! Well, I told him my journalistic scruples wouldn’t allow such a thing.... Especially since the MONEY he was offering was an INSULT! Serve him right, I say, that the post office lost all the first-class Californian subscription copies of *Locus* in October.

Liveliest Worldcon item was the SFWA meeting – where members

roasted absent Prez NORMAN SPINRAD for his spending spree (1000s of \$\$\$ of SFWA funds financing last May's Nebula excesses at the Waldorf in New York – see my column in *Patchin Review* #1). Norm wasn't at the con – he claimed he was boycotting frivolous fan-fests for professional reasons though some snide cynics suggested he stayed home because *Songs from the Stars* wasn't nominated for a Hugo ... Either way, when I contacted Norm for comment on the dollars-dispute he claimed treasurer JACK CHALKER's figures show that SFWA's doing so well, they can *afford* to splurge.

Speaking of Spinrad: he threw a New York party in early October. Lured by promises of a “Dr. Feelgood” co-host dispensing free pharmaceutical samples, most of New York sci-fi-dom crammed itself into an apartment the size of a hotel bedroom. DAVID HARTWELL, JOHN SHIRLEY, CARL LUNDGREN, GINJER BUCHANAN, JOHN DOUGLAS, JILL BAUMAN, SUSAN ALLISON, ADELE LEONE, LOU STATHIS, NICK YERMAKOV, MERRILEE HEIFETZ, and ELLEN DATLOW were there, but – no sign of Dr. Feelgood! Just an apple-brandy punch, shunned by shrewd guests but not by Norm, who was later found slumped down clutching his stomach and *moaning*, out on the fire escape.

At the party LOU STATHIS told me he's now a Contributing Editor to *Heavy Metal*, but has no intention of muscling in on BRAD BALFOUR's editorial job, 'cos he couldn't stand the celebrity chitchatting involved. (Latest Balfour coup: an upcoming article promised from Andy Warhol.)

Earlier in the month, triumphant trailblazing trillionaire KIRBY McCAULEY invited a few dozen close friends to housewarm his new penthouse on Park Ave South. He was shocked when an editor who'd better remain nameless took advantage of his hospitality – got drunk, overturned a wastebasket on the new wall-to-wall carpet, and stole Kirby's favorite rubber Hong Kong jumping spider!

And speaking of oddball behavior ... which award-winning West Coast writer, married with children, was spotted hanging out with a local sci-fi personality in a notorious West Village *gay leather bar*? He's a contributor to this magazine, so I guess I'd better say no more....

Now here's some serious stuff for you people who say all I'm interested in is idle chit-chat. DAVE HARTWELL claims book returns at Pocket are now lowest in the industry ... VICTORIA SCHOCHET announced the Berkley expanded booklist at Fantasycon, and needs fantasy novels to fill the slots ... BARRY MALZBERG says that I'm wrong – he never proclaimed he

was giving up all forms of writing ... “Bohemian Bob” SHECKLEY is searching for a new home in the Florida keys ... “Bon-Vivant Bob” SILVERBERG assures me that contrary to my report, he did *not* write the review of *Lord Valentine’s Castle* in *Venom* magazine, and he doesn’t know who did ... and here are two more denials just in! MARTA RANDALL says even though she was asked to distribute copies of *Venom* at a couple of science-fiction conventions, she is not and never has been the editor ... meanwhile “the editors” of *Venom* (that’s how they sign themselves) have sent me a postcard denying that DAVE HARTWELL finances them. (Note for conspiracy buffs: by an odd coincidence, this postcard and Marta’s letter were both mailed on the *very same day*.) Previously I’d asked Dave if he was the mystery money man making mischief with that mendacious mag. He paused a long time and then said “No Comment”!...

ROBERT ANTON WILSON claims to have more than a dozen additional books planned tying in with *Illuminatus / Schrodinger* et al. ... TED STURGEON has signed to write a new novel, additional to his as-yet incomplete *Godbody* project ... Gregory Benford is negotiating with Timescape Books re his new novel *Against Infinity* and reports editor Hartwell opines it’s not only a Good Book, it’s *commercial* ... Karl Hansen is signing to stretch his sicko sex-’n’-violence saga *War Games* into several sequels for Playboy Press ...

And speaking of Playboy: editor SHARON JARVIS tells me her new “Of Alien Bondage” sci-fi-porn series (to be ghosted by aNDY oFFUTT) has to be a big hit – or else! “It will either make me or break me,” laughed Sharon. “I mean I’m already eccentric, I might as well be notorious!”

I talked with her at the party thrown at the end of October by Davis Publications to launch their new mag *Science Fiction Digest*. The event was held at the super-posh mahogany-panelled Union League Club – so posh, in fact, they threw out Aussie DAMIEN BRODERICK because he was wearing jeans (can’t say I blame them!). “The help here are all one color, and it isn’t ours,” sniffed an asst. ed. who’d better be nameless. I met none other than Joel Davis at the party, who muttered darkly about distribution and editorial content of one of his other magazines – *Isaac Asimov’s*. Two months later, and rumor has it that SHAWNA McCARTHY won’t be stepping up to fill the position of departing IASFM ed. GEORGE SCITHERS. Is Shawna annoyed? “No comment,” she told me testily. “No comment, no comment, no comment!”

Last social event I went to this Fall was of course the annual editors-meet-authors-and-get-drunk SFWA party, where I learned BARRY M. MALZBERG has been commissioned to write an *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry on the history of the violin, and SAMUEL “Chip” DELANY is thinking of starting his own fanzine (“You mean a little magazine?” “No, a *fanzine!*”), no title yet but probable cover price 75 cents. Chip also told me his grandmother had her 102nd birthday in November. Many Congrats of the day!

I talked to JIM FRENKEL, who said he’d shaved to celebrate buying the first two books for his fledgling pub. co.. One title is *Mallworld* by SOMTOW SUCHARITKUL – Mallworld? I asked. “Yes, it’s supposed to be funny,” he explained.

“You know that I live a life of exemplary dullness,” TOM “Tasty” DISCH told me, when I asked him for gossip. So I went and talked to SUSAN SHWARTZ about her rejection letter to EDWARD BRYANT (see Patchin Review 12). She smiled wistfully: “I don’t know how I always end up offending these sensitive males who slouch.” Neither do I, Suze. You’re a charmer!

Last and least I s’pose I *have* to mention the *big scandal* everyone was talking about at Fantasycon – MICHELE LUNDGREN, wife of famed artist CARL, got herself evicted from DAVE “Hospitality” HARTWELL’s publishing party, for threatening to “disembowel” an allegedly amorous Pocket Books female sales rep.! “She never approached me to deny or to refute the facts,” Michele claims of the Other Woman, “so as far as I’m concerned I was in the right.” If any other lusty ladies out there have got ideas about cuddly Carl, better *forget ’em!!*

I’m sure a lot of other stuff happened during the last couple months, but if you think I’ve got nothing better to do than spend my time sniffing out tittle-tattle, you’re wrong! In fact, if anyone out there wants to take over my job, that’s just fine, but meantime, I’m still paying \$5 for each gossip item, assuming it’s printable. I mean even *I* draw the line *somewhere*.

Loose lips sink spaceships!

Love, Gabby

Moments of Truth

The Torment of a Professional

“There’s no point in even speaking to people, ... (who) ... do not understand the faintest edge of the enormous physical labor that goes into writing. I mean, it’s not just the emotional and intellectual exercise, it’s the physical labor. You sit on your ass and have to write, and you get hemorrhoids and your lower back hurts and your head aches and you still keep on. You keep on doing it and you do it for a long time until something is finished. That’s what separates professionals from amateurs: they finish what they write.”

– Harlan Ellison, interviewed in *Twilight Zone* magazine.

(Remember, we pay \$5 for each published entry. Send us a photocopy of the next item that catches your eye. Remember to include your name and address.)

Unreliable reports allege Swedish editor-writer-agent Sam Lundwall has claimed that anyone can buy a Nebula or a Hugo. But Sam is reliably reported to have denied the earlier statement. Gabby Snitch has the story.

Sam Slams Fan Sham! Gabby Snitch

I try not to mention this kind of thing in *The Patchin Review* – I mean, it’s *embarrassing* – but as some of us already know, our weird, wacky world of sci-fi-dom is full of *fans* producing mimeographed amateur mags called *fanzines*. And this is an international thing: for instance in Sweden there’s a fanzine called *Fandhome* (which is some sort of a pun, I guess, or else it means something in Swedish). And the editor, Anders Bellis, claims he interviewed Euro-SF champ and famed editor-writer-agent SAM LUNDWALL back in 1979, which is not exactly *late news* except that the interview is full of crazed claims about corruption in Nebula and Hugo voting procedures, and other allegations which Bellis has now translated and reprinted in *Fandhome* #2 for circulation in the U.S., maybe because he’s got some kind of grudge against Lundwall and wants to cause trouble – who knows? These fans can be kind of bitchy once in a while! Anyhow, some of Lundwall’s statements are *surprising* to say the least ... except it seems Bellis may have invented the whole thing, because Lundwall now denies he said

any of it (see below). Bearing that in mind, here are a few excerpts:

LUNDWALL: Some time I'm going to tell you how the voting is done when it comes to Hugo and Nebula (awards), what you do to obtain a Hugo or Nebula. I know everything about that. I'm going to the Nebula meeting next month. It has nothing to do with literary qualities, I assure you. I'm connected with both these prizes. I'm in the committees for them.

BELLIS: It must have something to do with the judgment of the colleagues?

LUNDWALL: No, not that either. The Nebula can be bought and everybody knows it. There is a fixed price on the Nebula. The Hugo can also be bought, but that's a little more complicated. You can actually order a Hugo or Nebula, and I'm not joking!

BELLIS: Now wait a minute! The Hugo is voted upon partly by fans....

LUNDWALL: Whoever is a member of the WorldCon (World Science Fiction Convention) is eligible for voting, right? Do you know how many are voting in the Hugo contest? It has never been more than 200 persons! It isn't expensive for a publishing house to buy a Hugo. They are bought nearly every year. They nearly gave a Hugo to Perry Rhodan two years ago and it was stopped due to the simple fact that that damned fool Forry Ackerman (Forrest Ackerman, editor of the Rhodan series) made it officially known and said "We bought a Hugo this year!". So they had to stop it. But they had the votes, they had a clear majority in votes. But that stupid idiot made it publicly known that "The Hugo cost us \$1,000, but it was worth it." ... There are few voting on the Nebula, as well, seldom more than fifty or sixty persons.

BELLIS: But is it as simple to get a majority in votes there?

LUNDWALL: It's very easy, I tell you. If I was willing to pay \$3,000 or \$4,000 I could get it this year.

BELLIS: Why don't you?

LUNDWALL: Why should I? I know, and everyone in the business knows, that it doesn't matter. That was part of the reason why we founded the John W. Campbell memorial award.... The Hugo is manipulated by the publishing houses, because they always print on the books, "This one got a Hugo." ... The Nebula is given away in a kind of rotation system: Who's gonna get it this year, boys? ... The Hugo is interesting because the publishing companies use it ... they simply buy a hundred attending memberships – that's no money, really. Then all these vote on their book and

it gets the prize. No problem. ... That isn't possible when it come to the Nebula, but the Nebula is special because of other reasons.... It's usually Harlan Ellison who auctions the Nebula, that's why he gets so many; he actually gives it to himself.

And so on!! Straight-talking Scandinavian Sam spouts further farfetched facts (we don't have room to reprint the lot).... He reminisces, for instance, about Swedish publisher Askild & Karnekull, for whom he translated the *Foundation* trilogy written by Isaac Asimov – “And rewritten by me!” boasts Sam. “Read it and compare it with the original. You'll be astonished. I ought to get half of the royalty. ... I converted his damn lousy English into good Swedish and corrected his logic where necessary. We know how he wrote it, so this is no critique against him. But I rewrote that damn book and made it readable, remember that!”

Want to see the whole spiel? Then send a couple of Kroner (or maybe an international postal reply coupon) to Anders Bellis, Vanadisvagen 13, 113 46 Stockholm, Sweden. And say Gabby sent you.

Remember, though, that Sam denies everything. “It is all faked” he claims in a letter to me dated October 27. “I can say without hesitation that this entire thing is made up from beginning to end, why I don't know. Anders Bellis is a young aspiring fan and this might be a way of becoming well-known by attacking someone well-known, I don't know. ... I could say a lot of things about the Nebulas, of course – I really don't trust them at all, and this is one reason why I am a Campbell Memorial Award judge. I have been grumbling about the Nebulas a long time, not to mention the Hugos – and as we all know the Perry Rhodan fans actually planned to get Perry a Hugo some years back. I am sure they could have swung it, since all they needed were enough memberships. I have let these views be known, and maybe Bellis used this, embellishing it with sundry things to make it more interesting. Never trust fans!”

Hmmmmmm! What interests me is that Sam avoids answering my question about whether he actually gave Bellis an interview. Meanwhile, I'm still waiting to hear from Forrest Ackerman....

Good News & Sensible Suggestions **Edward Bryant**

Denvention Two has begun to fade into sainted memory, but not without leaving some good news and sensible suggestions as a legacy. In line with the latter I am proud to be the first to announce a startling bulletin from the World Science Fiction Association, the umbrella corporation that gives the worldcon its continuing legal status from year to year. The WSFA also administers the loose constitution that governs the general nature of the worldcon and defines such annual procedures as the Hugo awards.

The WSFA conducted four short morning meetings during Denvention at which matters of general concern were thrashed out. Those sessions have been adequately reported in *Locus* and *Science Fiction Chronicle*. I understand, however, that a fifth ad-hoc session was held on Sunday night in the Brown Palace room registered to Bob Hayduke, Midwest member (allegedly) of the Columbus Mafia, that loose confederation of science-fiction fans who constitute a floating “cavalry” of convention-experienced personnel ready to intercede at any moment and help struggling worldcon committees who have encountered insurmountable difficulties. Purportedly there were some sixteen members present, evenly divided between the WSFA and the Columbus Mafia.

The central issue was the problem of the general growth of the worldcon from year to year. Many feel this growth cannot go indefinitely unchecked. The Hayduke meeting was called to consider a simple though ambitious answer.

The Hayduke Proposal (as the sponsor has modestly christened it) is to secure a permanent site for the worldcon with adequate facilities capable of nearly infinite expansion. There is, Hayduke explained, precedent in the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society’s clubhouse. Over the years, LASFS raised the cash to buy first one, then a second and larger gathering place. Why not do the same thing on a grander scale for the worldcon?

The Hayduke Proposal suggests acquiring the land and physical plant of Jonestown, Guyana. Present at the meeting was a business attache from the Guyanese Legation in Denver. That spokesman indicated that his government’s lack of success in putting the Jonestown facility up for public bid has led them to consider extraordinary tactics in disposing of the property. He suggested that there would be considerable tax advantages included in any final settlement.

My informant tells me that a newsletter extolling the virtues of setting the worldcon permanently in Jonestown is being prepared for distribution

through such science-fiction-fan organizations as the N3F. The publication will push the climate (warm around Labor Day), the economy of eating jungle fruits and fishes, and the convenience of connecting air service through Port Kaituma.

The orthodox news magazines have not bothered to report the Rocky Awards which were handed out at the Hugo Ceremony on the Sunday evening of the worldcon. The Rockies were given for splendid achievement in one area of science fiction or another. They are named both for the mountains that lurk behind Denver's smog and with the aim that they become a science-fiction tradition, obliging the Chicago committee to award them under the rubric "the Bullwinkles".

The Rocky for Dustjacket Copywriting went to G.P. Putnam's Sons for this cover line on Frank Herbert's *God Emperor of Dune*: "Now, the trilogy expands to encompass a story too large to be contained."

The Rocky for Best Quote went to Robert Sheckley for his endorsement of Ed Naha's *The Science Fictionary*: "If you don't buy any other book this year, you might as well miss this one too."

The Most Creative Copywriting Rocky was awarded to Berkley Books for the *New Voices* anthology edited by George R.R. Martin. The five contributors were all listed on the cover. Arsen Darnay's name was misspelled. Worse, M.A. Foster was misspelled as "P.J. Plauger".

A special presentation for great copy-editing went jointly to Bantam Books and Harper and Row for *Nebula Award Winners Thirteen*, edited by Samuel R. Delany.. The book included a memorial listing seven deceased writers. In both hardcover and paperback, three of the seven names were misspelled.

Finally, the Rocky Award for Most Sobering Rejection Slip was a walkaway. The winner was a long-time editor who has communicated to several writers that he/she cannot use stories whose protagonists are either female or "ethnic". Having learned better, I shall not name him/her.

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Moments of Truth

"He doubled his knee and drove it hard into his assailant. 'Let me up or I'll kill you.'

“Theremon cried out sharply and muttered through a blinding haze of pain, ‘You double-crossing rat!’”

Neil Barron, who submitted this little gem, comments: “The story from which this was taken was voted the best SF story ever written by the SFWA in 1968-69 and is often cited by other SF readers as their favorite. What else but ‘Nightfall’ by Isaac Asimov?”

(Neil receives the modest sum of \$5 for his observant work.)

NOTE: Letters relating to The Patchin Review are considered publishable, including writer’s name and location, unless the writer states otherwise. Letters may be abridged. We will not interfere with correspondents’ grammar or spelling.

Letters

From Alfred Bester, Ottsville, Pennsylvania

AN OPEN LETTER TO ALGIS BUDRYS

Your reaction to *Golem 100* was a sad disappointment, my dear AJ, and I must explain why.

When your *Rogue Moon* came into *F&SF*, Bob Mills, then the editor, asked me to read the Ms and advise him. It was so unusual that he was afraid to publish it. I begged him to run the story. “It’s offbeat, sure,” I said. “It breaks all the rules. It’s new, it’s different, and that’s what sf is all about; breaking new trails in ideas and techniques.”

That was a professional’s understanding and warm appreciation of a colleague’s experimental daring.

Now I knew that the *Golem 100* experiment would probably be a bit much for the layman (it does make tremendous demands on the reader) but I’d thought that my colleagues would understand what I was trying to do; break a new trail into a broader aspect of fiction in which visual impact on the eye is as important as the cerebral impact of words on the mind. In short, AJ, it wasn’t pyrotechnics merely for the sake of “reader-cheating,” your words, but with a very serious and painfully executed plan. If it was a failure I bitterly regret it, but I’m not sorry that I tried.

For over a year I’ve been considering, off and on, carrying the experiment even further, enlarging a story to include color and tactile impacts

as well. Braille? Colored print? paper texture? I don't know, but if I can have a try, one way or another, I'll be much interested in your reactions and those of my colleagues.

Dear boy, there are no "universal storytelling standards" for courageous, creative artists, only for hacks and critics. What happened to the courage of the author of *Rogue Moon*?

From Arthur Byron Cover, Woodland Hills, California

Meaning no personal disrespect to Mr. Silverberg, but I think it was a little presumptuous of him to assume that he was involved in the struggle to make sf into literature (his letter to issue #2).

I don't hesitate to concede that "Born with the Dead" qualifies as literature, but novels such as *Dying Inside* as well as the other work of that period, show the novella to be the sole exception, rather than the rule. *Dying Inside* is, at base, just too emotionally immature to qualify as literature ... or as any one of the shades between lit and grade-A sf – whatever its period or mode. *Dying Inside*'s direct descendants are "Aztecs", "The Storms of Windhaven", and "Stardance", a trio of ballerinas with broken toes.

Perhaps the problem lay in Silverberg's attempt to graft sf conventions onto the conventions of the typical Northeastern neurotic novel, which isn't literature either. Better that he had somehow gone directly to the source, which is probably Chekhov. But then again Chekhov *never attempted* to write immortal fiction; he simply tried to be as good as possible. And his characters touch the heart; David Selig never will.

SF must create its own literature.

From Richard Lupoff, Berkeley, California

If science fiction were central to my intellectual or professional life, I am sure that I would devour every word (of *The Patchin Review*).

At present, however, I find that I am neither reading science fiction nor writing it.

For fifteen years I did my best to write intellectually stimulating and honest science fiction. (I must confess that I lapsed from grace a few times and wrote pot-boilers. One must pay for the groceries somehow.) I fear that I never really achieved more than marginal acceptance during that time, and since the current publishing recession seems to have set SF into a "back-to-basics" mode, even that degree of acceptance seems to have turned into indifference – if not outright hostility – to my work.

Actually, Bob Silverberg's letter in *The Patchin Review* #2 pretty well reflects my attitude. You're fighting the good fight, Charles, and you have my good wishes. But don't expect me to join up.

And, in all honesty, I think you're fighting a sort of anti-entropic fight. You may achieve some victories, but they will be limited, local, and temporary. In the long run, science fiction relapses into the sludge of action-and-adventure stories (which Brian Aldiss aptly dubs "power fantasies") or into the tinker-toy realm of so-called "hard" science fiction.

The major difference between Silverberg's response to this realization and my own, is that Bob seems to have decided to pander to the baser appetites of the science fiction fan while I have opted to get out of the field and write other kinds of books.

At least for a while. I'm not burning all my bridges, not quite yet. I'm not swearing that I'll never-ever-ever write another science fiction novel. But if I find myself doing so, I'll be surprised.

«Having been through a "goodbye cruel science-fiction world" period myself as a result of the total failure of my novel *Twilight of the City* (which I thought was an important book) I empathize with these sentiments. However, I now blame myself for my book's poor sales much more than I blame publishers or science-fiction readers, and I have come to believe that books which die in the manner of mine and perhaps some of Richard Lupoff's are usually in some sense misconceived – regardless of how much literary integrity they may have. The success of a *Radix* or a *Timescape* demonstrates that it is quite possible to do substantial, creative work in this field – easier than elsewhere, in fact. I would like to know which other mass-market category allows an author to pursue literary experimentation and receive reasonable rewards.»

From Alice K. Turner, Playboy Magazine, New York

If peevish complaints about the rejection notes Edward Bryant receives from editors are what we are to expect from *The Patchin Review*'s "lone voice of sanity and moderation in a field noted for its hot-heads," I question your hearing. Mr. Bryant whines noisily about the fact that Susan Schwartz's secretary mixed up his rejection note with that of another writer – unfortunate, but it happens – about Ted Klein's apparently misguided attempt to be kind when turning down an unsuitable story, and about my own rather

more brusque reply. Editors have to write a great number of rejection letters. Writers like Mr. Bryant, who react so childishly to well-intended attempts (like Ted Klein's) to explain editorial decisions, are the reason that most of these letters are terse and noncommittal (and why we often use printed forms). Mr. Bryant's next rejection from *Playboy* (should his next offering fail to appeal) will be a NQRFU. Perhaps he can get another column out of that.

«Alice is replying to Edward's column in *Patchin Review* #2. For those who are wondering, "NQRFU" translates as "Not Quite Right For Us", a form-rejection. Edward's reply follows Ted Klein's letter below.»

From Ted Klein, Twilight Zone magazine, New York

Occasionally – now, for example – I write letters intended for publication. But I consider the rest of my letters to be private, including the rejection letters I write as the editor of *Twilight Zone*. I don't like to see snippets of private correspondence (from me, Alice Turner of *Playboy*, and Susan Schwartz of DAW) quoted without permission in your magazine, especially when they're followed by Edward Bryant's sophomoric little self-justifications.

I confess to having received two or three stories from Bryant over the past year, and to having rejected them. I write dozens of such letters each week and assume that Alice and Susan do, too. Most of them are, at bottom, just glorified thankyou notes whose primary purpose is to make the rejection seem a little less unpleasant and impersonal. One offers a few polite criticisms and balances them, whenever possible, with some compliments; that's all there's time for. Pulling specific lines out of such letters and dressing them up with sneering little replies may have soothed Edward Bryant's bruised ego, but I regard what he wrote – and what you chose to publish – as a cheap, childish shot.

Edward Bryant replies: "I must admit some surprise at the vehemence of Ms. Turner's and Mr. Klein's objections to what I thought were rather mild one-liners in my last column. In truth, I hesitated days after receiving copies of their letters before rereading my text to rediscover those peevish, noisily whining, childish, sneering, sophomoric little justifications of a bruised ego.

"As it happens, I have been collecting all manner of

intelligent, helpful, cruel, destructive, impersonal, or noncommittal rejections for fourteen years now. I wasn't using my column as a therapy session. My perhaps misguided sense of humor thought that sharing some distinctive rejections with my colleagues might be both instructive and wryly amusing.

"I do apologize to both editors if they feel I have compromised their private correspondence. But otherwise I must wonder that both Ms. Turner and Mr. Klein seem to have skins as thin as the clothing on *Playboy* and *Gallery* models."

«Personally, I see the Turner/Klein letters – which were written with mutual consultation – as a coordinated, intimidating message: Any writers out there who think poking fun at editors is fair game should think again, if they want to sell their work in future. This amounts to a bullying restraint of free speech, which I think is much more reprehensible than Edward Bryant's quotation of not-very-personal business correspondence. Editorial power, which can be literally sufficient to bankrupt a writer, is impressive enough without cloaking it in bogus dignity and invoking it to squash a small hint of irreverence.»

From A.A. Attanasio, Honolulu, Hawaii

A spirit of mischief runs through *The Patchin Review*. After reading Issue #2's various cross-criticisms, put-downs, and evasions, I glimpse behind the persona of the sf writer a scaramouch. The jest is: one *can* earn a living by writing sf, with or without the s, in one's own passionate and peculiar words, but it sure is tough. So where's the camaraderie? All this striving makes everybody bellicose. In our soulful English tongue, "strive" and "strife" come from the Breton "Straif", blackthorn, sometimes called sloe, after its fruit, and closely related to "slay". What slays me is Brian Aldiss' left-handed ear-tweaking of *The Patchin Review*'s ear-tweaking. That was noblehearted and witty of you to publish but really tautological. This is a trickster journal. Ask Gabby. It's as tricky as anything *about* writing, which itself is ancient magic, the conjury of spelling; and only black magicians did it for money. I'm glad there is this verbal space for sf's shadowself. Great glad fortune to you.

From Brian Aldiss, Oxford, England

The new "Todd's Column" in your second issue is devoted to saying

something about Chris Priest's novel *The Affirmation*. It fails to say anything coherent.

I thought that your original intention was to run criticism of a thoughtful kind, such as Algis Budrys'. Who is going to trust a reviewer who summarises Priest's central character as "not only full of shit but a nut"?

The Affirmation is a subtle and frightening study of a man balancing between fantasy and the real world. There's much in the novel that is beautiful, much that is thoughtful....

Priest's novel has been warmly received by readers who do not normally include science fiction in their diet – though while saying this, I realize it will not seem a recommendation to your present reviewer.

«Some people suspected that "Todd Lerner" was Charles Platt using a pseudonym. On the contrary, I had *The Affirmation* reviewed by an "outsider" because at the time I felt too prejudiced to treat the book fairly. And as I've said before, the only pseudonyms used here are Gabby Snitch, Aunt Clara, John Smith, and Jane Doe.»

From George Flynn, Somerville, Massachusetts

As the Hugo administrator in 1980.... I was opposed to the establishment of (the nonfiction Hugo award) out of simple reluctance to inflate the number of awards. However, I also wrote the definition for the nomination ballot, and can assure you that the "absurd grab-bag" (of nominees) you mention (Editorial, *Patchin Review* #2) was part of the original intent. The accompanying text referred to "works of criticism, history, bibliography, art, etc."

Be that as it may, I am writing mainly to comment on your statement that "because the nonfiction category attracts fewer votes anyway, it is easier to get your work nominated in this category than in any other." A copy of last year's Hugo voting report is enclosed, indicating that both parts of this statement were indeed true, though on the *final* ballot the nonfiction category drew more votes than any of the three short-fiction categories. For 1981 I have seen only the published ranges of nomination votes, again giving the nonfiction category a lower minimum than any other professional category except the Campbell Award, which has similar problems. The data thus tend to support your argument of a shortage of suitable nominees.

Others have probably pointed out one error in Algis Budrys's impressive

essay: P. Schuyler Miller's *ASF* column was "The Reference Library", not "The Analytical Laboratory".

Pace Jerry Pournelle, that "ghastly neologism" *trivialize* is cited as early as 1846 by the *OED*.

From Neil Barron, Vista, California

Your editorial questioned the desirability of a Hugo for nonfiction. I don't agree, although I suspect that most of those voting for a Hugo are relatively uninterested in what passes for scholarship in SF. And this year's Hugo winner, *Cosmos*, is only tangentially connected with SF and probably won because of Sagan's ubiquitous presence on PBS and elsewhere. Granted that there are many meretricious books, fiction and nonfiction, there are still enough nonfiction works of merit currently published each year to make an award desirable, although how many fans are likely to read them is problematical.

I can't see why nonfiction works are any more vulnerable to politicking than fiction is. Log-rolling is common in almost every field I've heard of. And all literary awards are unavoidably subject to temporary faddishness and/or weaknesses in selection and judging. Most Nobel Prize winners for literature wouldn't even be recognized by English graduates.

In short, I think fictional achievements have no more – or less – intrinsic merit than scholarly ones, and both should be recognized.

«There is, of course, fine work done both in fiction and in nonfiction-about-fiction. Neil Barron's own *Anatomy of Wonder* is a formidably excellent guide to the literature. My point, though, was that the lit. crit. industry is fundamentally parasitical, depending on fiction for its sustenance. If we have to have Hugo awards I think they should go to those at the source rather than those on the sidelines.»

From Joel Rosenberg, Willimantic, Connecticut

As far as the Shirley/Ellison thing, I'm less than happy. Controversy between personalities, rather than ideas, seems to me to be a waste of good paper. But if I have to choose up sides, I'll happily stand with the rest of the world, next to Ellison. (It's John Shirley against the world – so why is everybody rooting for the world? Answer: 'Cause Shirley is an insufferable ass, that's why.)

On the substantive issue, Shirley is correct: "All the Lies that Are My

Life” is not SF. But Ellison didn’t bully his way onto the Hugo ballot; such things are secret ballots. It would have been more generous and accurate to impute the story’s presence there to a deserved appreciation of the man’s work, rather than a weasel-word like “momentum”.

Now, as to whether or not Ellison was trying to sic his readers on Shirley, the notion is laughable; Shirley has demonstrated himself quite capable of making his own enemies – and then leaving SF (hah!) while staying around to pick fights. Poor John; attributing folks’ hostility as being Ellison-inspired while he has spent quite a bit of effort trying to earn that hostility (see his *Empire* columns, f’rinstance) suggests that the man, if not certifiable, is more deserving of pity than contempt.

From Dray Prescot, Vallia, Kregen, Alpha Scorpionis

Your review of the 25th volume of my autobiography, *Legions of Antares*, is astonishingly erroneous for so few lines! The Empress of Hamal was indeed slain, by one of the Wizards of Loh. See page 180. As for these Wizards, it was another such who dispatched the evil one, and not I. Further, my name is spelled with one “T”, never two. Surely literary integrity must have undergone a strange metamorphosis since my last visit to the planet of my birth. In my new homeland, such a reviewer would soon find himself pulling the oar of a galley in more honest labor.

From Gregory Benford, Laguna Beach, California

Janet Morris raises the issue of whether it’s legit to treat tachyons, since these are rather outré for mainstream science. I thought about this long and hard while writing *Timescape*, of course. Over a hundred scientific papers have been written about tachyons, nearly all theoretical. The work of the 1960s was based on avoiding causality problems by “reinterpreting” backward-in-time motion of a particle (an electron, say) as forward-in-time motion of an anti-particle (a positron). The first major paper attacking this notion I wrote with two other physicists, David Book and William Newcomb. ... We published it in *Physical Review* in 1970. Since then there have been many field theories constructed to try and get around the causality problem.

Whitrow’s book, *Natural Philosophy of Time*, is a pleasant look at philosophical issues, but the sentence Janet quotes simply says nothing more than the obvious: until tachyons are observed, there is no strong reason to believe in them. ... The point here is that Whitrow’s opinion is just that: an opinion.... As is also the case with extraterrestrial life, *absence of evidence is*

not evidence of absence.

The trouble with Janet's stance is that she unwittingly runs to an authority figure, Whitrow, rather than simply standing at the unresolved center of the issue. To decry tachyons in sf – leaving aside their obvious use as metaphor, etc., which is why I based a novel on them – is basically anti-scientific. Such an attitude imposes a conventional wisdom that shuts off debate and experiment.

Crank Mail

«In future, all unsigned mail, weirdness, and gratuitous insults (as opposed to properly argued insults) will appear here.»

From Richard McEnroe, Staten Island, New York

Truth to tell, I'm kinda glad to have finally received some recognition for my role in the recent election (Gabby Snitch exposed Richard McEnroe as a Reagan supporter last issue – ed.) particularly in light of the difficult conditions under which I was required to operate. The cotton in the cheeks and the fake buck teeth were damned irritating, and the pissing on garage walls and training rabbits to attack was embarrassing enough, but having to deal with Libyans – shit, those assholes don't even know which superpower to buy an inferior airplane from! I mean, we've still got F111Bs up the gazoo!

Oh, yeah, a word of warning for Janet E. Morris. You want to watch out with that index-finger point-shooting trick. You're liable to wind up with a nasty festering sore from cylinder-gap flash and lead shavings when the fired round clears the cylinder and hits the barrel forcing-cone. That's one of the two best ways to really screw up a good typing hand (the other being to write someone else's series). You'd be better off with a .45 anyway, a .38 might not kill on the first hit, and then you'd be obliged to track the cripple into the executive lounge and put it out of its mercy. Sportsmanship, you know....

From Anonymous, postmarked Minneapolis, Missouri

I've got lots of "Moments of Truth". I did something called "The Master Race Scrapbook", a collection of neat quotes from various science-fiction people including J. Pournelle, C. Sheffield, and A. Hitler. My favorite from that group was one from Sheffield which went, "It's a cosy theory that there are no taboo subjects in science fiction ... (but) ... When did you last read a

story that made open fun of the Negro?” My current favorite is from Ellen Datlow’s article in *Empire SF* where after a lengthy explanation of *Omni*’s editorial policy she concludes, “What we absolutely will not buy are stories containing explicit sex or built exclusively around a sexual theme, or stories with excessive, gratuitous violence – other than that, we’re wide open.” The woman has a fine sense of humor.

Why are science-fiction writers so ugly?

From Anonymous, postmarked Marina del Rey, California

Regarding the Ellison-Shirley feud: Ellison is a hack, though this does not mean some of his stories are not interesting in a manner vaguely reminiscent of 1930s agitprop like Odet’s *Waiting for Lefty*.

Unfamiliar with Shirley, I searched out one of his old F&SF stories and found it slightly interesting, as Ellison’s sometimes are, but nothing as earthshaking as his rhetoric led me to expect. I anticipated an updated synthesis of Dickens, Poe, Hugo, and Waugh and got – well, John Shirley, who also has a bad case of agitprop. Both writers should reflect that G.B. Shaw is not best remembered for his trenchant assessment of the Soviet Union or his political theories. It is by one’s work, rather than exalted and inflated claims about its moral and/or social significance, that a writer is judged.

From “Urashi Thomas” postmarked Arlington, Texas

Mr. Patchin:

I looked all over for the warning label, you know, like they got outside the smut stores and on the side of every pack-o-fags, but I coodn’t find one on your magazene. I thought that kinda queer.

Get male soon.

The large sums of money paid for recent work by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle have roused resentments in some quarters. But a book that gets best-seller treatment can still be good science fiction.

A Feudal Future Charles Platt

Technologically accurate, near-future science-fiction novels are in short supply. Heinlein pioneered the form. Pohl and Kornbluth raised it to

unsurpassed levels of sophistication and satire. Niven and Pournelle are part of that tiny minority still willing to do the work entailed in writing it today.

In *Oath of Fealty* (Timescape, 328 pp., \$13.95) they develop in practical detail a concept that we have seen treated more superficially in the past: the arcology, or totally-enclosed city, as proposed by architect Paolo Soleri. Niven and Pournelle suggest not only how such a closed system could be made to work in symbiosis with the outside world, but how it could become a Utopia in which technology erases poverty, and crime no longer exists.

Todos Santos, a vast building one-fifth of a mile high and two miles on each side, has been erected in an area of Los Angeles conveniently burned to the ground a few years previously by rioting ghetto dwellers. The novel acquaints us with the arcology via that trusty science-fiction ruse, the guided tour, conducted here in masterly style reminiscent of Heinlein's classic "The Roads Must Roll". We see the giant building through the eyes of a visiting politician trying to decide whether to commission one in his part of the world. At the same time, since this is a multiple viewpoint narrative, we are also shown the city from the perspective of a rookie cop who has just joined the internal security force.

Principal characters are introduced along the way, including the chief architect (a man of conscience and vision who sees the city as a prototype for space colonies and star ships); the general manager (Todos Santos is run as a corporation); and its financial director (a glamorous, shrewd, formidable woman). When kids posing as eco-freak terrorists break in on a lower level and place dummy explosives beside hydrogen pipelines, a city official, thinking that the threat is real, orders the release of nerve gas. Two youths are killed; one turns out to be the son of a Los Angeles councilman. The scene is now set for conflict between people of the old city and the new.

It is a disappointment of the novel that this conflict tends to take second place to a series of pro-forma, obligatory pairings among the cast of characters. Smalltalk slows the story, and the details of each person's drinking habits supplant the meticulous, wholly believable details of the city itself. It seems uncharitable not to praise a careful attempt to develop characters, yet writers should concentrate on what they do best, and Niven and Pournelle are really not at their best when writing in depth about human relationships. The dialogue is somewhat undistinguished: with the exception of a Canadian visitor, everyone uses identical speech rhythms and idiom. The erotic interludes that occur are described a little self-consciously, as if the

authors are uncomfortable about it. The characters' motives make a kind of theoretical, diagrammatic sense, but this falls short of deeply felt drama. For instance, it seems contrived, and therefore not very meaningful, when a man and woman who have worked closely together for over a year suddenly start an affair and, within twenty-four hours, are debating how many children to have. Possibly Niven and Pournelle are trying to counter complaints about skimpy characterization in their past work. If this is the case it demonstrates how unwise it can be to listen to one's critics.

The authors do infinitely better (probably better than anyone else writing science fiction today) when visualizing and depicting in detail the realities of their near-future world: the social Impact, everyday life, and various competing self-interests in the arcology. They present a shrewdly drawn scenario which tackles Important social problems – urban crime, terrorism, our relationship with technology – and suggests workable answers.

The answers tend to be pro-capitalist and authoritarian. Enlightened self-interest is building a better, brighter middle-class tomorrow. And the Utopian community is crime-free because every square foot, including private apartments, is kept under surveillance via closed-circuit TV. Big Brother is benevolent, here; every citizen is a shareholder, and the cops – I mean, the friendly local security personnel – have *their* apartments monitored too. Beneath the modern architecture, behind the corporate machinery, Todos Santos is a castle – a feudal Utopia.

Before dismissing this as unpalatable it's worth examining the alternatives. Niven and Pournelle convincingly compare carefree daily life inside Todos Santos with the rituals of furtive anxiety endured by citizens still trying to survive in old Los Angeles, which is degenerating into one big ghetto. Surely, they suggest, it would suit many people to sacrifice privacy in exchange for gaining peace of mind? Todos Santos is not so different from your local shopping mall, and might well succeed for the very same reasons.

True, though the authors are assuming that most citizens share their desire for total citizen safety, with extreme measures justifiable in order to achieve it. How many of us really want security so much that we can accept closed-circuit TV in every bedroom and bathroom, and nerve-gas outlets in the basement to guard against terrorist attacks?

Jerry Pournelle's outlook on this kind of topic is well known: much of his work has been preoccupied with ways of defending against forces which may threaten individual liberty. In his novels, trust is scarce and a tight

community of comrades, whether they be mercenaries or members of an arcology, consider almost any means legitimate to protect themselves. This philosophy has its virtues – it can sustain a community which truly cares for its own and nurtures intellectual values which might not survive a more laissez-faire regime. On the other hand, of course, it fosters elitism and xenophobia. There are lessons of history which may well justify such an outlook as applied to national defense, but on an everyday, personal level one could argue for a little more tolerance and generosity towards one's fellows – and perhaps a little more anarchy in one's life style.

To be fair, *Oath of Fealty* freely admits that its Utopia will only appeal to some. And the authors take pains to express a variety of viewpoints pro and con. Urban poor in old Los Angeles are described with compassion – a slightly condescending compassion compared with the authentic empathy of a socialist writer like Orwell who chose real-life poverty over middle-class security, but the intent is fair-minded and the needs of inner-city minorities are represented accurately. Even ecological activists trying to halt progress are portrayed as if they may have a legitimate point of view – though one senses Niven and Pournelle gritting their teeth and wincing as they wrote this part.

The more a novel attempts, the greater its chances of failure. Any work of ambition opens itself to severer criticism than one which stays safely within the old adventure formulas. Personally I feel that the achievements of *Oath of Fealty* far outweigh its failings, and it may well be the best conventionally-told science-fiction novel of 1981. Niven and Pournelle have explored the practicalities of an idealistic concept which has great relevance to our everyday lives on Earth and our future in space. They have done a thorough job and, for the most part, a fascinating one. Few best-selling authors, rich enough to sit back and turn out one weary sequel after another, are willing to be as conscientious or as daring.

Kirby McCauley's Dark Forces collection has won praise from almost every quarter. Herewith, the dissenting viewpoint.

The Horror! **John Smith**

When Marlon Brando muttered “The horror, the horror” in *Apocalypse Now*

it seemed a symptom of his dyspepsia. I could well say the same in surveying the present state of the field of supernatural horror, and for much the same reason.

The world of the macabre is presently a glamor area of publishing, a growth field that is still expanding. What this translates into, of course, is profit, which does not foster much in the way of nobler instincts. Consequently the paperback racks are glutted with black-as-night covers, spectral lettering in red foil, and airbrushed fangs. The waves have come and broken on the shores of decent writing. There was I he multitude of vampire novels, culminating in Robert McCammon's *War and Peace* of bloodsucking, *They Thirst*. There were the approximately 14,000 "evil child" books. I'm sure that the spate of werewolf movies (*The Howling*, *Wolfen*, *An American Werewolf in London*, etc.) will foster a similar spate of lycanthropic tales.

Well, one cynically expects publishers such as Zebra and Manor to grind out reams of eldritch drek. But one also expects a few discerning editors and conscientious publishers to provide a supply of exemplary (and scary) stories. Alas, this is not necessarily so. A case in point is Kirby McCauley and his *Dark Forces* collection (Bantam, 538 pp., \$3.50) – a *Dangerous Visions* of supernatural fiction.

Kirby is a pleasant fellow from the upper midwest who has found a great deal of success as a literary agent. At this point he owns ten percent of both Stephen King and Peter Straub. Not bad. But Kirby also believes he is an editor, and therein lies a problem. One suspects, in the reading of the book, that he served more as compiler than as actual editor. The selections suggest being indifferently chosen, apart from the name-value of their respective creators. One can't argue with the promise of the list of contributors: Nobel prize winner Isaac Bashevis Singer, Ray Bradbury, *Night of the Hunter* creator Davis Grubb, Russell Kirk, Joyce Carol Oates, Robert *Psycho* Bloch, Edward Gorey, Theodore Sturgeon, cartoonist Gahan Wilson, Joe Haldeman, the late Robert Aickman, and Stephen King. And those are only about half the contributors. Then one reads the stories themselves; and one begins to suspect there's something to the phrase "second- (and third-) rate stories by first-rate writers".

Here are some specifics.

Dennis Etchison leads off the book with an essentially one-note joke of a story which suggests that late-night convenience stores are manned by

zombies. It merely confirms what most of us have suspected; it's difficult to consider seriously.

One expects godlike things from a Nobel winner. But Isaac Singer's "The Enemy", while undeniably well written, comes across still as an essentially pointless exercise about the (presumably) occult persecution of a Jewish feuilletonist. You don't know what a feuilletonist is? You're not alone.

Edward Bryant's "Dark Angel" proves once again that writers probably shouldn't attempt to write in the persona of the opposite sex.

"The Crest of Thirty-Six" by Davis Grubb concerns supernatural passion and the idea of being reincarnated as a catfish. It also depends heavily on local southern color. Robert Aickman's "Mark Ingestre: the Customer's Tale" is overly long and diffuse, and eventually gets around to giving us a version of the Demon Barber of Fleet Street legend. In "Where the Summer Ends" Karl Edward Wagner repeats the word "kudzu" about eighty too many times (we get the point early on) and creates a terribly minor piece about little monsters that lurk beneath the vines. The last line is niftily well crafted. Unfortunately a lot of banal lines have gone before.

"The Bingo Master" by Joyce Carol Oates contains a fair amount of Oates, but a hefty tinge of Flannery O'Connor as well. As with Singer, the writing is fine. But the reader struggles to figure why this nonfantasy should be included in the book. T.E.D. Klein's "Children of the Kingdom" is one of two short novels in *Dark Forces*. It works during a long buildup that concerns the tenor of life in the Big Apple. But when we find out that all the gruesomeness is caused by a species of grotesque, randy little Pillsbury doughboys lurking down in the sewers when they're not upstairs impregnating Earth women, everything falls apart. This is a perfect tribute to H.P. Lovecraft. It's just as silly as the master.

It's hard to say an unkind word about a writer like Gene Wolfe. Then again, my mother told me to hold my tongue if I couldn't say something nice.

Theodore Sturgeon's "Vengeance is." is perhaps the worst story in the book. Because Sturgeon ranks so high in most of our fond memories of classic humanistic science-fiction stories, his contribution is doubly a disappointment. One ordinarily expects a writer of Sturgeon's stature to recall some of those hard-earned apprenticeship lessons in how to construct drama. But this short piece, suspiciously bottom-of-the-trunkish, depends on a series of silly coincidences. Two nasty rednecks just happen to accost and rape a

woman with a hideous and unique venereal disease. The disease just happens to have the side effect of blocking painkillers, so that the malady's pain is actually exacerbated by morphine. Actually it's the reader who is raped.

Ramsey Campbell's "The Brood" concerns those pallid Things that live in your basement. *yawn*.

Clifford Simak's stories are always warm and lovable. I wouldn't say that he is the Susan Polis Schutz of the fantasy field, but if he keeps working, he might achieve such an unenviable distinction. His "The Whistling Well" reminds us – through engraved gizzard stones – that the dinosaurs were our spiritual brothers. Big brothers, of course, but still part of our ethical lineage. Wait till the Scopes lynch mob hears about this.

Russell Kirk's "The Peculiar Demesne" is actually not such a terrible fable of soul-stealing in a mythical African nation. On the other hand. Lisa Tuttle's "Where the Stones Grow" is a surpassingly silly and minor little piece that manages to replay *The Monolith Monsters* in supernatural terms. And Joe Haldeman tells us what he did on his summer vacation (went to Marrakesh), with a fantasy element apparently grafted on as an afterthought.

You'd think Robert Bloch would get tired of writing about maniacs. Not yet, apparently. His contribution is yet another bloody portrait of the psychopaths, ending with the sort of labored double-meaning line that should have gone out of existence with the Lefty Feep stories.

Edward Gorey's "The Stupid Joke" certainly is. But it mercifully has far fewer words than Ray Bradbury's utterly predictable time travel story, "A touch of Petulance". As for "A Garden of Blackred Roses" by Charles L. Grant, this collection of vignettes about decent folks afflicted with cursed flowers is frequently evocative. But it's also so elliptical as to be virtually unintelligible.

Gahan Wilson's "Traps" is another joke. It could have been summed up as a cartoon with a great saving in time accruing to the reader. "Where There's a Will" by Richard Matheson and Richard Christian Matheson is not a joke, but is rather another replay of the old premature-burial chestnut. "Owls Hoot in the Daytime" is yet another of Manly Wade Wellman's Uncle Remus stories about John the Ballad Singer. It's fine for them what likes grits in their lit.

Dark Forces closes with "The Mist", a short novel by Stephen King. The big problem with this one is that it's a cheat. King spends considerable time and space setting up a cast of characters and a sinister situation in which

a secret army experiment goes awry, generating a mysterious mist that spreads all over New England. The problem is that the mist is inhabited by people-eating monsters. And the cheat? This reads so abruptly at the end as to seem the first third of an undeclared new novel. It's not nice to suspend readers without warning.

So why say all these nasty things about an earnest effort to duplicate for the supernatural fantasy field what Harlan Ellison did for science fiction in 1967 with *Dangerous Visions*? I answer that, as a reader – and fan of the horror story – I can accept the consumer's responsibility of defending myself against the obvious ripoff artists. But what, now, of victimization by a presumably credible editor, and apparently trustworthy writers?

It has to be said: the book just isn't good. Chart the bulk against the quality, and the quotient is simply appalling. We, the readers, should be getting so much more.

The Patchin Review *hereby endorses* Science Fiction No Frills *as the best novella of 1981.*

Cheap Frills Charles Platt

Supermarket no-frills products are standard-sized packages of usual-quality merchandise at bargain prices. That, however, was too honest a concept for Jove Books, who seem to have taken “no frills” as a invitation to rip off everyone from author to consumer. Rather than commission a Goulart or a Harrison to turn out a standard adventure of normal length for an average fee, they chose to be cheap and paid onetime employee John Silbersack a pittance (and no royalties) for 20,000 words of anything at all that came into his head.

Ironic, then, that despite their worst intentions they've ended up with a masterpiece. As lilies grow in shit, *No Frills Science Fiction* transcends its origins, and Silbersack joins that pantheon of immortal, underpaid, hack-fiction wordsmiths numbering Edgar Rice Burroughs, John Russell Fearn, and – most especially – Lester Dent in their ranks.

Silbersack's desperate prose, logically absurd plot, episodic action, fanciful scenarios, earnestly silly characters, and wilfully naive style show true rapport with and respect for the texture and traditions of penny-a-word pulp fiction. In addition, probably without knowing it, he has written a book

of high imagination and rare wit that would be camp if it weren't so deadpan.

Here's what happens. Alex, a space cadet, the menacing Admiral Haigg, and Dana, a beautiful blond space law-enforcement officer, go with Alex's father, Dr. Harrison, to investigate a ruined colony on Pluto from which Harrison recently escaped as lone survivor of an explosion he is suspected of having caused. Once on Pluto, Alex and Dana are mysteriously teleported to the planet of a distant star. Here they encounter a Professor Carberry in a society of intelligent machines led by a robot who laments that few people seem willing to call him by his chosen name of "Poppy". The robot explains that "teleportals" built by a lost civilization are being mysteriously reactivated all over the galaxy. To discover what's happening and how to return to Earth, Alex and Dana accompany Poppy and the Professor to the Library World, where they fight off swarms of enormous man-eating ants and are forced to flee in a convenient disused space ship to the home planet of tyrannical aliens who have been abducting humans from places in Terran history such as the *Mary Celeste* and Bermuda Triangle. Fearing Earth peoples' aggressiveness, the aliens are putting Earth on trial, with the abducted humans as witnesses for the defense. Alex's father turns up among them. There is a desperate fight, an escape attempt, planetary annihilation, and (of course) a happy ending for Alex and Dana.

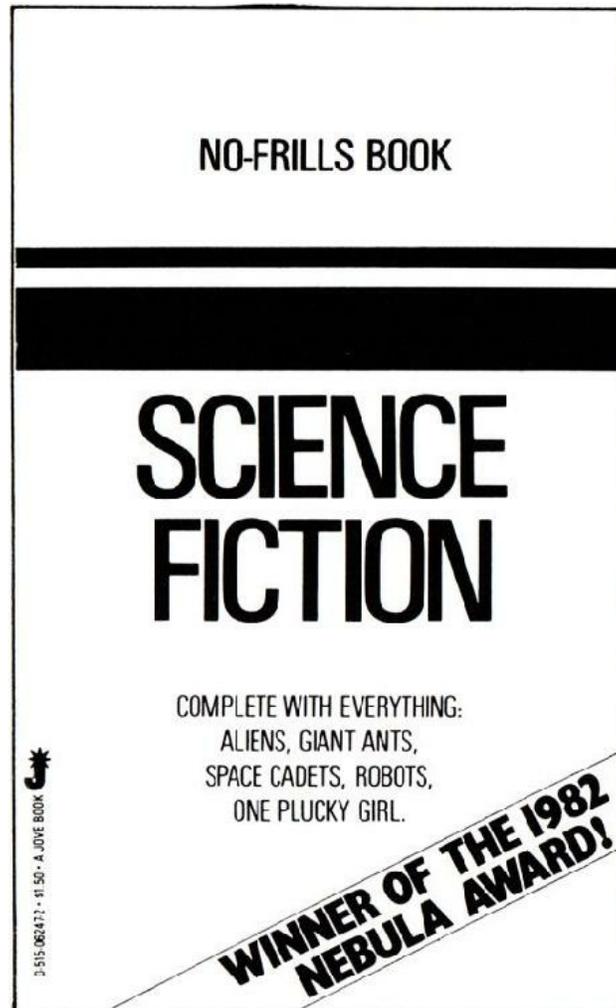
In the first chapter, Silbersack shows symptoms of clumsy conscience as he tries to write by rote the sort of space-cadet nonsense he thinks is expected of him. Luckily, he soon loses all such misplaced sense of responsibility. The rest is a romp, widening in scope and increasing in pace exponentially as the author homes in on his assigned wordage limit.

"The professor was muttering contentedly in the brush, pocketing plant specimens and dissecting small vermin with his fingernail clippers." (Page 36). "He took the news of Earth's destruction calmly. There were no emotions equal to the task." (Page 57). "All around, night clung like roofing tar to jutting rocks, flowed into cracks and fissures, filled small craters." (Page 15). "He'd get out to the farthest ends of the solar system years before his chums. And with a mystery to solve. It was just too much. But he knew the job ahead would be no pleasure trip. There was a mystery to solve, and his father's reputation to vindicate." (Page 6).

This, I submit, is the work of a natural talent. There is just no way you can fake the deranged and impulsive idiosyncrasy of this writing. I suggest anyone who can't enjoy it has lost not only all sense of wonder but all sense

of proportion. I salute John Silbersack's Dadaist folk-art nihilism, his erratic expediency, his virtuoso pseudo-science, his muddled eclecticism, his humble defiance. He should be signed up immediately by Belmont-Tower to write three or four novels a month for the next several years, restocking our field with the kind of diabolically addled adventure-popcorn that made science fiction fun to read in the first place.

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No Frills Science Fiction (Second Edition)

The Patchin Review Survey

The Patchin Review seems to have been cut off the review-copy lists of some hardcover publishers, perhaps because they didn't like what we said about

their books. Consequently, this Survey is incomplete.

Because of the long gap between last issue and this issue, a lot of books accumulated from the publishers who *were* still sending copies. There is insufficient space to review everything, so we are only including each publisher's complete output of the last two months (mid-October through mid-December).

A total of 66 fiction books are dealt with here (but you may find fewer represented, depending how the layouts work out). Of the 66 titles, 4 are horror/supernatural, 35 are science fiction (ranging from a *Star Trek* novelization to fringe material such as *The Banished*) and the rest – 27 titles – can be labelled fantasy. Of these fantasy titles, 24 are new – they may be volumes of reprinted stories (such as Terry Carr's collection from Timescape) but are not reissued or reprinted books. Of the 35 science fiction titles, only 20 are new. It's easy to see where things are going: even though more science fiction is still being published than fantasy, 43 percent of it is old stuff recycled, compared with just 11 percent of the fantasy.

Another statistic: no less than 16 of the 27 fantasy books are part of some sort of series. Two-thirds of them! In science fiction the figure is 29 percent, or less than one-third.

Of all the 66 fiction titles, twelve (nearly one in five) mention some sort of author-award on their covers or page-one blurbs. At this rate, perhaps all awards will soon become meaningless and need no longer be mentioned at all.

Compiling this Survey is a laborious business, incidentally, and it would be interesting to know if readers find it truly worthwhile, or if it could be dropped in future.

Ace

Rudy Rucker *Spacetime Donuts*

Standard decadent future (citizens plugged into electronic pacifiers, kids on drugs, world run by giant computer) swiftly mutates into microcosmic voyages and reality games, with educational mini-lectures. Like Heinlein on acid. 196 pp. PB. \$2.50

Frank Herbert *Direct Descent*

This 1954 *Astounding Science Fiction* story, slightly modified, reset in big type with wide margins, bulked out with mediocre illustrations, published as a trade paperback, reprinted as this mass-market "book", asks – Can

humanity's storehouse of irreplaceable knowledge be defended from the alien military conquerors? It can. 188 pp. PB. \$1.95

Fred Saberhagen *Mask of the Sun*

Reissued time-travel / multiple-universe adventure: Mike Gabrieli goes back to ancient Peru to rescue his brother, catapulted through time after discovering an Aztec relic. Good, factually based boys' adventure. 234 pp. PB. \$2.75

Jack Vance *Galactic Effectuator*

Fix-up of novella and two stories detailing the ponderously jocular dealings of Miro Hetzel, gentlemanly interstellar investigator, with variously vexatious extraterrestrials. Amiable deadpan humor tends to plod. 219 pp. PB. \$2.25

Roger Zelazny *Madwand*

Pol Detson, one-time Changeling, now a "madwand" or partially trained sorcerer, undergoes rites, battles wizards, aided by a trusty dragon.... Zelazny once seemed a rare, individual talent; now simply does what the others do, a bit better. Pretentious style – "Is life a quick illusion or a long song?" – slips sometimes into colloquialisms: "I can't seem to get a handle on it," complains Pol. Illustrations show cute dragons, misshapen people. 282 pp. TP. \$6.95

Roger Zelazny *The Dream Master*

Reminder of how substantial Zelazny can be. Firmly grounded in realism, a haunting battle within pathological dream worlds, featuring neurotic doctor, blind patient, intelligence-enhanced guide dog. First published 1966. 182 pp. PB. \$2.25

Robert Lynn Asprin, Ed. *Shadows of Sanctuary*

Mass-market edition of second sequel to *Thieves' World* (which has also been reissued). Set of stories by McIntyre, Cherryh, Asprin, Offutt, Morris, and others, sharing one fantasy locale: the supposedly vulgar and decadent, really rather harmless, planet of rogues. A cliqueish indulgence. 338 pp. PB. \$2.50.

Clifford D. Simak *City*

The unashamedly romantic classic, augmented with 14-page epilog – a mournful, weary, and (as the author points out) unnecessary appendage first

commissioned for *The Astounding-Analog Reader* (1972). Simak's lyricism is a bit theatrical, but his images work as effectively as ever.

Richard S. McEnroe *Warrior's World*

Based on an outline by Niven and Pournelle, using characters created by Philip Francis Nowlan in *Armageddon 2419 A.D.*, which was a fix-up of novelettes published 1928 and 1929, which were originally used as a basis for Buck Rogers comic strip. McEnroe adds some weapons technology but basically tells it effectively, straight and simple. 199 pp. PB. \$2.50.

Marion Zimmer Bradley *Survey Ship*

Danger, intrigue, and a lot of tiresome squabbles among six young starship crewpersons. Lack of external action, plus constant chit-chat, builds sense of claustrophobic domesticity. The art by Steve Fabian is carefully executed. 232 pp. PB. \$2.50

Gordon R. Dickson *Lost Dorsai*

At last in mass-market paperback!! The Hugo-winning novella of soldier turned pacifist, plus pictures, plus a short story, plus a fragment from Dickson's next novel, plus an embarrassing tribute to Dickson from Sandra Miesel ("the plume and sword alike are his to wear" etc.), suitable for "Reading level: ages 12 and up" (it says in the Ace newsletter). Baen, you have much to answer for. 287 pp. PB. \$2.95

Gregory Benford and Gordon Eklund *If the Stars Are Gods*

Reissue of 1977 Berkley fix-up incorporating title story (1974), postulating various alien encounters within the solar system. Slightly uncomfortable mix of standardized dialogue and ambitious ideas with moments of impressionistic prose, prefigures Benford's development as a more authoritative novelist. 215 pp. PB. \$2.25

Edward L. Ferman, ed. *The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction* (23rd Edition)

Stories from November 1976 through mid-1979 by (among others) Knight, Reamy, Bryant, Disch, Delany with generally progressive bias; plus reprinted features ranging from Joanna Russ's conscientious self-examination as a science-fiction critic, down to the wretched Baird Searles's pedestrian middlebrow chatter. 273 pp. PB. \$2.50.

Dennis Schmidt *Satori*

A snappy mix of dramatic action, vogueish ecofreak platitudes, and glib neo-Zen satoris reflecting the author's experience as ad-agency executive and karate black belt. *Way-Farer* and *Kensho*, volumes 1 and 2 of this series, have been reissued, chronicling with this volume brave efforts to defend the delicate balance of technology and Nature, yin and yang, and so forth on planet Kensho. 293 pp. PB. \$2.50

Keith Taylor *Bard*

A tale of Felimid mac Fal, harp-strumming Druid Bard of Erin. The blurb reads: "Here trods the unicorn, with blue vapor curling softly from nostrils soft as a woman's breast and dainty, precise hooves lethal as maces." Luckily Taylor's prose is considerably better written and takes itself considerably less seriously. Rural, flowery, engaging. 293 pp. PB. \$2.50

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro *Time of the Fourth Horseman*

In a disease-free future, communities of children are infected with lethal viruses in a covert attempt at population control. The conspiracy is uncovered and a doctor of conscience fights back with extreme measures. Improbable but grimly compelling. 250 pp. PB. \$2.25

Atheneum

Irma Walker *Inherit the Earth*

The solitary plight of a young ESP-talented girl beset by hostile normals; her quest for others sharing her talents. Not a groundbreaking plot but unusually well told, with vivid backgrounds and moments of graphic horror. The psi-talented protagonist is drawn with compassion; her (mainly male) persecutors are uniformly, inexplicably vile. 262 pp. HC. \$12.95

Avon

Linda Haldeman *Esbae*

Slightly quaint tale of college student's unwitting evocation of a demon who orders him to hand over his girlfriend as a sacrifice; but she's protected by a white-magic sprite, so a classic good/evil battle eventually ensues. Literate, but cluttered with large chunks of everyday campus life. 224 pp. PB. \$2.50.

James Blish *Titan's Daughter*

Reissue of classic superwoman-vs-the-rest novel, trapped, alas, in the idiom of its era. 143 pp. PB. \$1.95

Ralph A. Sperry *Status Quotient: The Carrier*

Wordy and labored history of lone immortal survivor on an alien world; in diary form, with hardly any secondary characters or dialogue. An interesting document of solitary madness, but a perverse choice of subject matter. 253 pp. PB. \$2.50.

Bantam

Mike McQuay *When Trouble Beckons*

Second novel in the Mathew Swain “21st Century Private Eye” series (see Patchin Survey #2) moves offplanet to Freefall, colony of drone-workers and nest of corruption. Pretensions of Ethical Significance near the end can’t compensate for lines like “He was dead. Dead as a doornail.” – even with irony as an excuse. 216 pp. PB. \$2.25

Robert Nye *Merlin*

This “very adult fantasy” (it says here) is more a jovial, earthy bit of wit rewriting Arthurian legend from the viewpoint of a corrupt, moderately perverted Merlin. Short, stylized chapters and short, stylized paras embody a shade too much intellectual conceit. 238 pp. PB. \$2.95

William Stout (artist) William Service (writer) Byron Preiss (packager) *The Dinosaurs*

Bet you never knew dinosaurs could be cute. Heavily stylized full-color comic-book fine-art, like stills from an animated movie, shows big and little critters feeding, fighting, frolicking through the Mesozoic. Would-be graphic commentary (“Grinding their hides hard against rocks, stumps or each other, the ceratopsians try to ease the maddening itch of fly larvae....”) paralyzes itself with terminology. 160 pp. TP. \$12.95

Russell M. Griffin *Century’s End*

Rather wordy drama of cultism and conspiracy on the eve of the 21st century. Not quite satirical enough to be fun; but the cult-followers are authentically, maddeningly deranged. 260 pp. PB. \$2.25

Frank M. Robinson *A Life in the Day Of...*

Some very substantial stories, here, from science fiction magazines of the 1950s through men’s magazines of the 1960s and 1970s; plus a modestly eloquent autobiographical commentary. Robinson’s writing is authoritative and full of realism. An unusually strong collection. 262 pp. PB. \$2.50

Jeremy Rifkin *Entropy*

Fuzzy pseudophilosophical pontifications on harmonizing humanity with the physical laws of our environment. A muddled impulse to sanctify conservation as a global religion, founded on the old false assumption: "First, the earth is virtually a closed system." Rifkin should interrupt his Zen meditations long enough to read Pournelle's *A Step Farther Out*.

Berkley

Charles L. Grant *A Glow of Candles*

Twelve shyly crafted, delicate stories in which pathos, rather than horror, is the recurring emotion. 211 pp. PB. \$2.25

Damon Knight *The World and Thorinn*

No matter how carefully written, how conscientiously detailed, this quest of a young man to solve the riddle of his verdant world is clearly, from the start, a devolved-humanity-on-a-starship novel. Gentle wit and wonders cannot ultimately compensate for a lack of freshness. The illustrations are discouragingly vapid. 228 pp. PB. \$2.50

Poul Anderson *The Dark Between the Stars*

A new collection of nine Anderson stories, uncompromisingly packed with science and technology, solvable problems, human drama. 207 pp. PB. \$2.25

Arthur C. Clarke *Dolphin Island*

Reissue of 1963 juvenile-oriented adventure of runaway teenager who learns to communicate with dolphins. Authentic experimental details, but Clarke waxes whimsically romantic about our aquatic friends.

Cheap Street

Roger Zelazny *A Rhapsody in Amber*

Nicely produced small-press volume of three stories, "Recital", "Walpurgisnacht", and "Then, Again...", each short and slight but very deftly told. Alas, illustrations by Duncan Eagleson are clumsy by comparison. 32 pp. Hand stitched. No price supplied.

DAW

A. Bertram Chandler *The Anarch Lords*

John Grimes, space-pirate hero of Chandler's Rim Worlds series, is

appointed governor of the anarchists' planet, faced with corruption to clean up and defiant citizenry setting siege to his mansion. Not much off-planet action in this typically old-fashioned seafaring-type space opera. 208 pp. PB. \$2.25

Lin Carter *Darya of the Bronze Age*

"With an ugly, gloating chuckle, Zoraida ran her bejeweled hands over the panting breasts of the Cro-Magnon girl who writhed helplessly in Fumio's powerful grip." (Why use one adjective where two will do?) Darya is trapped by foul thugs of Zanthodon, subterranean world of dinosaurs, pirates, and proto-humans. Various torments, including a sleazy whipping scene, precede her eventual rescue. This is Volume Four; Volume Five on the way. 173 pp. PB. \$1.95

Tanith Lee *Night's Master*

Reissue with same scenario as *Delusion's Master* (see below). 188 pp. PB. \$2.25

Tanith Lee *Delusion's Master*

In bygone times when the Earth was flat and Lords of Darkness manipulated mortals, Chuz, master of madness, and Azhrarn, master of night, squabble over the fate of Jasrin and her king. Fantasy above-average in graphic style and imagery. 206 pp. PB. \$2.25

Philip K. Dick *Now Wait for Last Year*

The obsessions – drugs, a femme-fatale, inscrutable male authority figures – gain an extra dimension of real-life poignancy in this fast but fine novel written near the end of Dick's most productive period. A desolate spirit adds maturity to the absurdist wit. 205 pp. PB. \$2.50

Del Rey

Lester del Rey *Police Your Planet*

Reissue of 1975 novel derived from 1953 serialization. Tough tale of tough cop's crusade to clean up the Red Planet. Complete with Martians and beautiful girl. Tersely written; definitely a classic. 217 pp. PB. \$2.25

Alan Garner *Red Shift*

Neolithic stone axe-head, possessed in turn by second-, seventeenth-, and twentieth-century young men, links their various emotional crises, drawing historical parallels between the epochs. Garner's provincial penchant

for shallow chit-chat persists unabated. 156 pp. PB. \$1.95

Katherine Kurtz *Camber the Heretic*

Yet again, evil men threaten to seize power; this time Camber must muffle his Deryni super-powers and hide as an ordinary mortal before he can save his people. Complete with four family trees, an index of places, and a 12-page small-print index of characters. 510 pp. PB. \$2.95

Patricia Wrightson *The Ice Is Coming*

Authentic and careful fable derived from Aborigine lore and legends. Interesting content, but the prose is unevocative. 196 pp. PB. \$2.25

Patricia Wrightson *The Dark Bright Water*

Sequel to *The Ice Is Coming*. Once again the hapless primitives must defend themselves against a threat of environmental upheaval. 197 pp. PB. \$2.25

Poul Anderson *The Broken Sword*

Reissue of Anderson's fantasy of elves, trolls, and savage warriors. Competently told within its limited form. 207 pp. PB. \$2.50

Paul O. Williams *The Dome in the Forest*

Third volume of trilogy using post-holocaust world as background for saga of primitivism. *Riddley Walker's* after-the-bomb peasants were more interesting – and a lot more authentic. 214 pp. PB. \$2.25

Frank Herbert *Under Pressure*

Tense, overplayed, but effective drama of an undersea mission threatened by sabotage. Full of nuts-and-bolts realism, plus slightly glib speculative psychology. 220 pp. PB. \$2.50

James White *Tomorrow Is Too Far*

Joe Carson, aerospace factory security chief, suspects some sort of conspiracy, discovers they're covertly using him for space exploration and wiping his memory clean. Implausible premise developed in workmanlike fashion. 183 pp. PB. \$2.25

James Tiptree Jr. *Out of the Everywhere*

Ten stories including "The Screwfly Solution" and a new novelette and novella. Intelligent and well told, readable despite recurrent sanctimoniousness. 276 pp. PB. \$2.75

Donning/Starblaze

Darrell Schweitzer *We Are All Legends*

Competent but dully written fantasy vignettes plus linking matter, misleadingly billed as a novel. The “realism” (noble knight downgraded to cowardly antihero) is Schweitzer’s own dour, mean spirit, attacking the few qualities that make this genre worth reading. His obsession with hideous, treacherous women creatures, and sex-as-death, is mildly interesting as a neurosis. 193 pp. TP. \$4.95

Doubleday

Roy Torgeson, ed. *Chrysalis 9*

Ninth volume of new stories. Indiscriminately edited: sensitive, clever pieces rub shoulders with unresolved fragments. 186 pp. HC. \$10.95

Marvin Kaye *The Amorous Umbrella*

Sequel to *The Incredible Umbrella*. Once more Prof. Adrian Fillmore flies via umbrella to *Riverworld*-ish regions peopled by figures of fiction and legend, including Shakespearean characters described in iambic pentameter / script format. Ambitious professorial humor. 271 pp. HC. \$12.95

Isidore Haiblum *The Tsaddik of the Seven Wonders*

Slapstick Jewish humor, comic characters blundering from epoch to epoch, mismatched idiom, deranged dialogue, multiple viewpoints and none of them rational. A cleverly complex, classic folly. 184 pp. HC. \$10.95

Gene Bylinsky *Life in Darwin’s Universe*

Comprehensive synthesis of all topics related to evolution, including origin of the universe and existence of extraterrestrial life. Clearly written, factually up-to-date, imaginative, with many lesser-known, interesting details and well-reproduced photos and drawings. 238 pp. HC. \$17.95

Manly Wade Wellman *The Lost and the Lurking*

Down-home country horror with them small-town folks lookin’ to make a heap a trouble for “Silver John” (continuing hero from *The Old Gods Waken* and *After Dark*). Strange goings-on, compellingly told if you don’t mind the patois. 179 pp. HC. \$10.95

Dutton

Gardner Dozois, ed. *Best Science Fiction Stories of the Year*

Dozois does his usual thorough, meticulous job of reading everything, summarizing it and selecting the most imaginative well-written material available, including newcomers Swanwick and Waldrop besides stalwarts Asimov and Niven. Too bad the type is so small. Too bad, too, the paperback has to wait a year for the hardcover. 224 pp. HC. \$12.95

Playboy Press

J.N. Williamson *The Banished*

Glowing white spheres abduct misfits from suburbia. Some return saying spacefaring ancestors from Earth's bygone civilizations will rescue the meek from upcoming armageddon. Muddled mishmash of misunderstood geology and misused theology, culminating in Resurrection Day. 255 pp. PB. \$2.75

Ron Goulart *The Cyborg King*

Second in Star Hawks series, derived from comic strip. Bumptious jaunt with the tiresomely quip-prone Star Hawk duo and their cute robot dog Sniffer, rescuing the big computer from control of the bad cyborg. Harmless nonsense. 190 pp. PB. \$2.25

Robert E. Vardeman and Victor Milan *The Fallen Ones*

Fourth in the "war of powers" series. Mildly graphic violence and mildly amusing moments distinguish this marginally from the average deposed-princess fantasy. 222 pp. PB. \$2.50

Timescape

Brian W. Aldiss *An Island Called Moreau*

Reviewed as hardcover in Patchin Survey #1. Not a "major novel" (increasingly meaningless phrase) but a worthy one. 158 pp. PB. \$2.25

Wilson Tucker *Resurrection Days*

Obnoxious middle-aged wish-fulfillment vision of 1940s man catapulted into far-future U.S.A. where other males are submissive morons and women rule. Hero treats the women with smug condescension, calls them cute names like "cupcake", and they do his bidding in wide-eyed awe. 191 pp. PB. \$2.25

Howard Weinstein *The Covenant of the Crown*

Not one of the greatest Star Trek novels, but it would be foolish to expect much from a book dedicated to the memory of Harry Chapin. 191 pp. PB. \$2.50

Michael Moorcock *The War Hound and the World's Pain*

Slightly corrupt self-pastiche with the tone of *Byzantium Endures* cannibalized to elevate Elric upmarket. Old hack habits persist, e.g. “‘It is a Cure,’ I cried, following my instincts, ‘a Cure for your Pain. It is a Cure for your Despair. It is a Cure.’” (It is a Grail Quest told in Short Chapters with a modicum of Repetition.) 240 pp. HC. \$12.95

Edward Bryant *Particle Theory*

Cleverly conceived stories written around definitively original ideas. Bryant lacks passion – he writes apparently from obligation rather than compulsion – and some may weary of his use of death as a romantic resolution for imperfect love. But these are memorable tales well told. 252 pp. PB. \$2.95

Frank Herbert *Without Me You're Nothing*

Bombastic guide to home computers claims to debunk & demystify but is infatuated with half-baked jargon. If you don't own a computer this won't make any sense. If you do you'd be better off with the classic *BASIC and the Home Computer* by Dwyer and Critchfield. 304 pp. TP. \$5.95

George R.R. Martin *Sandkings*

New collection of stories. Martin's work is grounded to some extent in the rational world, but uses the texture and rhythms of genre fantasy. Not a subtle writer (few shades of gray, here; many superlatives) but a careful one. 238 pp. PB. \$2.75

Suzy McKee Charnas *The Vampire Tapestry*

Sensitivity and intellect employed to renovate the vampire myth and establish it in the everyday world. A worthy attempt, and anthropologist Dr. Edward Weyland is as real a vampire as can be – but never as real as the contemporary American settings that Charnas parades him through. 294 pp. PB. \$2.75

Andrew Offutt and Richard Lyon *Web of the Spider*

Final volume of “War of the Wizards” trilogy. Seductive, sensuous Tiana intervenes to resolve the battle between Wizard Ekron and Wizard Pyre. Pure, unashamed formula fiction in standard adventure prose. 292 pp. PB. \$2.95

William Barnwell *The Sigma Curve*

Last of the “Blessing Papers” trilogy (see Patchin Survey #1). Thomas finds the Blessing Box, learns how civilization collapsed at the peak of the Sigma curve and can now be rebuilt. 239 pp. PB. \$2.75

Phyllis Eisenstein *In the Hands of Glory*

Idealistic saga of one woman’s mission to fight corrupt practices of the Galactic Patrol; and her love for a rebel doctor. Straightforward science-fiction adventure competently retold from female perspective. 236 pp. PB. \$2.75

Terry Carr, ed. *Fantasy Annual IV*

Ten stories, a couple from obscure sources but half from *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. The presence here of Disch’s “The Brave Little Toaster” emphasizes that by “fantasy” Carr means not sword-and-sorcery but modern fiction by fantasists. 342 pp. PB. \$3.50

Warner

Robert M. Powers *The Coattails of God*

Survey of history of rocketry, followed by visualization of a practical starship – limited to existing technologies. For a popular audience; Powers often explains the obvious and his journalism is not authoritative. This is a middlebrow summary, not a work of imagination, and not a source book. 288 pp. HC. \$15.95

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Note

We apologize for the absence of Gabby Snitch from this issue; she is still recovering from the exigencies of the Christmas/New Year party season. We expect to have her back next time.

At 64 pages, last issue was too thick for our printer's folding machine and had to be hand-folded, with the result that copies wouldn't lie flat – the

magazine tended to spring open. Rather than seek a different printer with a heavy-duty folding machine, we have reduced the number of pages this time.

Policy

The Patchin Review exists to promote and publish frank opinions and arguments relating to the writing, editing, and marketing of science fiction and fantasy. Although this magazine is biased in favor of adventurousness and experimentation, space will be provided for all possible viewpoints. There are no taboo topics.

The small, incestuous nature of the science-fiction field often discourages writers from expressing frank opinions. In the interests of encouraging free speech, *The Patchin Review* allows any contributor to use the house pseudonym John Smith or Jane Doe. With the exception of these names and our columnists “Gabby Snitch” and “Cousin Clara”, no pseudonyms are knowingly permitted.

The Patchin Review is edited and designed by Charles Platt and co-published with Leslie Epstein. Contributing artist: Ariane Lenshoek. Staff writer: Richard McEnroe.

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Advice to the Alienated Cousin Clara



Drawing by Ariane Lenshoek

“Puzzled” of New York writes:

“Dear Cousin Clara:

“I used to have lots of friends. I was invited to publishing parties, I received free copies of new books, and editors took me out to lunch.

“Then I started a little magazine of science-fiction criticism. Suddenly, everyone has turned against me! Several of my oldest pals have stopped talking to me. One of them refused to stock my magazine in her bookstore, and another even threatened me with legal action!

“I tried to tell people that my magazine is just a bit of good-natured fun. No one believed me. So I wrote an editorial explaining that it’s all done for very idealistic reasons, and has lofty aims. But this doesn’t seem to have made any difference, either. What can I do?”

Oh, Puzzled, you silly, silly boy! Surely you don’t imagine that distributing an evil little package of sneers, diatribes, and embarrassing revelations is a way to win friends and influence people? Certainly not if the diatribes and revelations happen to be true!

Let me make an analogy. Let’s suppose you are one of the children in a large, conservative family. You begin to suspect that, although the members of your family all go to church and claim to be clean-living, God-fearing folk, they are failing to put their pious ideals into practice. Dad has a regular

rendezvous with his secretary at the Pink Pussycat Motel, Mom is usually drunk by noon, Grandpa hangs out in the park exposing himself to little girls, your brother, who claims to be an insurance salesman, is really a loan shark and numbers operator, and your sister has been making extra cash by selling her soiled panties through a classified ad in *The Fetish Times*.

Sickened by this climate of moral hypocrisy, with the best of intentions you gather the family together and lecture them on their failings. You describe, unflinchingly and in graphic detail, each person's secret life of sin, and exhort them to cast aside their corrupt indulgences and turn instead toward beauty and truth.

Well, Puzzled, what do you think happens next? Does the family embrace you in repentant tears, thank you for showing them where they went wrong, and return to the Faith? Of course not! Your brother punches you in the face, your sister calls you a prudish creep, your mother asks what she has done to deserve such a cruel, ungrateful, vindictive son, your grandfather hits you with his cane, and your father cuts you out of his will and kicks you into the street.

It seems to me, Puzzled, you have to be clearer about what you really want. If you seriously see yourself as some mad, mutant missionary who's been sent to save the soul of science fiction, you have to remember what being a missionary entails. Anyone who goes around trying to "save" people is liable to become a dreadful bore, shunned by normal society. You may convert some of the more gullible natives, but the rest, enraged by your endless admonishments, are liable to boil you alive and eat you.

If, as you imply, your real goal is to become socially acceptable, you should stop all this silly nonsense about literary criticism, and publish a fanzine. You know – one of those duplicated things on soft, thick, colored paper, mailed free to your friends.

Producing a fanzine is easy. You write most of it yourself, and you don't even need to use pseudonyms. A diary in which you recount the monotonous texture of your everyday existence can take up several pages. Complaints about the post office always go down well, and other popular topics include the kind of records you like to listen to, the time you went abroad and met European science-fiction fans (Irish ones, ideally), how you made a fool of yourself at your first science-fiction convention, tricks your cat plays on visitors, and (for those seriously interested in the space program) the time you drove your van to Florida to watch the Shuttle take off. Be sure to include

several bad puns. Try not to mention science fiction, but if you really can't avoid it, then limit yourself to nostalgic comments about your favorite books of the 1960s (or earlier).

Writing all this will be extremely dull for you, of course. But it will make you much more popular. The choice, dear Puzzled, is yours.

Literary Darwinism

F. Paul Wilson

Droids to the left of you, unicorns to the right, thick-thewed barbarians behind, and a daunting array of gleaming hardware ahead. Where else could you be but in the science-fiction and fantasy section of your friendly neighborhood bookstore?

A superficial survey is discouraging – everything appears to be formularized, packaged to start the browser salivating in response to his personal Pavlovian dinner bells.

Awful, no?

No. Not in the least.

Many people loathe surprises in their reading. Publishers know this, and so a tacit code is developed: a young, night-clothed woman fleeing a mansion dark but for a single lighted window guarantees gothic fans their money's worth; Conan-type warriors are another kind of promise, as are unicorns and hardware. What's wrong with that? They sell. A market has been established for these genres and subgenres. A demand exists; the publishers supply it. Both groups are happy. A perfect symbiosis has been established.

But what of those who don't mind surprises? Who pursue them, in fact?

Fear not. A careful look reveals that all is not lost. Beneath the veneer of sameness there lies surprising variety. Between the latest instalment of the *Pirates of Io Saga* and the fifth volume of the *Feathered Behemoth Trilogy* wait unheralded gems.

Their Majesties' Bucketees by L. Neil Smith comes to mind as a recent example. I defy anyone to categorize this delightful novel, completely devoid of human beings, in which a trilaterally symmetrical alien detective living in the equivalent of Earth's Victorian era solves a locked-room murder. The cant of Victorian prose is seamlessly reconstructed, and the intellectual excitement of an era in which technological advances are being made not in far-off government and corporate labs but down the street and around the

corner in lofts and garages, is perfectly rendered.

This book is a find. But it fits no subgenre – unless there’s a group of alien detective fans hiding out there. It’s a mutant, yet it appears to be finding an audience. Not a pre-fab audience, but a custom-made, word-of-mouth audience. Del Rey took a chance on this one and so far the reviews are pretty good; I see it disappearing from shelves so I must assume sales are, too. So there’s something around for the adventurous types.

But what about those dour, tight-lipped, finger-wagging neo-Puritan biddies who moan constantly about Literary SF (a subgenre in itself, as formularized and predictable as space opera), to whom any book that’s uplifting, positive about the human spirit, or in any way enjoyable, is either regressive or trivial? Is there anything for them?

Yes, even for them, although you’d never believe it to listen to their incessant whining. Admittedly, there’s not *much* for them, but then, there aren’t too many of their kind. They make a lot of noise, and have a fair number of camp-followers who mouth the proper buzzwords to keep themselves in the good graces of this vocal minority (just as conservative politicians invoke the Almighty whenever they can to stay on the good side of the Moral Majority, and liberals sing hymns to FDR and JFK to keep their A.D.A. ratings) but the hardcore numbers in the seri-lit camp are few.

Despite all the wailing and gnashing of teeth, there *is* something for just about everyone. According to *Locus*, a total of 1843 new science-fiction books were published in 1978, 1979, and 1980; and 1798 reprints in the same period. That’s damned near a free market. With over 3600 titles to choose from, I can’t see too many tastes going unsatisfied. You’ve got Disch and Burroughs and Norman and Varley and Malzberg and E.E. Smith in there. Something for everyone...

...but not in equal proportions. And there’s the rub.

Let’s all agree on something (please?): Books are published to be read. Not to boost the short leg of an endtable or to start fires. To be *read*. Let us also agree that publishers must make a profit in order to pay their editors, typesetters, and printers, in order to stay in the business of publishing books (...to be read). Therefore it is counterproductive to print and distribute in the mass market quantities of a book that only a very select minority wants to read. Eighty percent returns means the publisher loses money, which means he has to make up that deficit elsewhere in the line, inevitably at another author’s expense (one that more people might want to read), either through a

smaller advance or a rejection slip.

Certainly no one should stop a publisher from putting anything he damn well pleases into print; and just as certainly, no publisher should be raked over the coals for rejecting books that won't sell. You might be able to make a case for affirmative action in real life, but not in publishing.

Laissez-faire, I say. Let literary Darwinism be the order of the day. There is no sane reason why publishers should not produce lots of the types of books that lots of people want to read, and very few of the books that very few people want to read. Authors whose works have a readership of 40 or 50 can self-publish or find a patron to finance minuscule print runs for their fans, thereby saving lots of trees.

The result is sterility, you say? Wrong. There will always be mutations. The viable ones will renew and rejuvenate the field; the mistakes will either spontaneously abort, be stillborn, or fail to procreate. There is a natural progression going on, continuous, unstoppable, leading I don't know where. Look back: the tenor of science fiction in any single decade is different from that in any other. For instance, 1940s science fiction was quite unlike that of the 1930s or 1950s. 1980s science fiction will be different from the last decade's. It will change in response to its environment.

Literary Darwinism. Natural selection. You'll have to resort to fascistic measures to alter the situation. So accept it. It encourages innovation, but not merely for the sake of innovation. Mutations are welcome, but they've got to hold their own. Writers must find an audience or move over and make room for someone else.

So it goes.

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Moments of Truth

“Thirteen contiguous days of SF; talk about overindulgence! The Gastronomes of Condom allege that *Norwescon* is consistently the raunchiest regional of the year....”

(From a 1982 *Norwescon* form-letter. If you registered for *Norwescon* early, did that have the effect of making you a long standing member in condom?)

Norman Spinrad, whose innovative new novel The Void Captain's Tale is due from Timescape Books early next year, doesn't mind too much when feminist critics condemn his work. It's what they don't say that bothers him.

The Feminist Mistake Norman Spinrad

Answering one's critics in print is always a mistake, but I'm making this mistake in full self-consciousness, and I'm not exactly about to argue with criticism of my work but with a certain lack of same, in the hope that such a quixotic venture may be made to serve as a springboard for a general discussion of the reasons for the lack of a certain sort of science fiction which I myself would very much like to read more of. Perhaps one big mistake deserves another.

The work in question is *A World Between*, published in October of 1979 by Pocket Books. This was my first science-fiction novel to be published in seven years, the previous one having been *The Iron Dream* in 1972, which won the Prix Apollo, was nominated for a Nebula, was recommended for a National Book Award, and is currently in print in eight countries. Not long after *A World Between* Simon & Schuster published *Songs from the Stars*, in June of 1980, which was reviewed in most of the usual places, favorably for the most part, and was in fact the lead review in *Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *Amazing*.

I mention the reception of *The Iron Dream* and *Songs from the Stars* to eliminate the possibility that the dearth of reviews of *A World Between* was a result of either a general animosity toward me or my work, or of my own inflated opinion of the critical newsworthiness of my first science-fiction publication in novel form after a considerable hiatus. Clearly, there was no critical conspiracy to ignore Norman Spinrad novels in general, nor could it be said that *Songs from the Stars* was more newsworthy than the appearance of *A World Between*.

Why then was *A World Between* not reviewed in science-fiction magazine review columns which gave prominent space to quite favorable reviews of *Songs from the Stars*? Maybe one book is better than the other by a wide margin, in which case why, if *Songs from the Stars* was significant enough to praise, was *A World Between* not significant enough to pan?

On this deductive evidence, the prosecution rests this phase of its case,

the contention that the studied lack of attention to *A World Between* was due to something intrinsic to that novel alone and not to a general attitude toward my work or my person.

A World Between did receive some reviews in America. It was reviewed favorably in *Ares* and *Future Life* and unfavorably in *Heavy Metal*. It was reviewed by Charles Platt in *Foundation*, in connection with an interview in *Science Fiction Review*.

It was also reviewed by Jeanne Gomoll in an overtly feminist fanzine called *Janus*. The first and last paragraphs of this review seem to serve admirably as an introduction to the heart of the matter:

“From one perspective, a book like Norman Spinrad’s *A World Between* is a hopeful sign for feminist sf readers. At the very least, the ideas in this novel contrast refreshingly with frequently heard complaints about some woman-authored sf, or even about feminist sf panels at conventions: that problems identified by feminists are minor and/or ludicrous and that fiction engendered by this awareness is thus of no consequence. In other ways, *A World Between* is irritating because of the author’s foolish assumptions about lesbian and gay behavior and communities....

“Still, read *A World Between*. I’d like to see the novel written again from a slightly different perspective and with less caricaturing of the woman-separatist faction. Nonetheless, the ideas and the stage created by Spinrad for these ideas are provocative.”

A World Between is a more or less Utopian novel set on a planet caught in the middle of a media war between militant political lesbian separatists from Earth and a less overtly male-supremacist space-arcology culture of Faustian scientists. The title says it all, the novel is the story of the attempt of the female head of government of Pacifica, the planet in question, and her male consort to preserve a democratic, more-or-less egalitarian system in the face of pressure from two sets of extremist ideologues.

Why did I write such a novel? A better question might be why didn’t someone else write such a novel?

After all, if the ideas dealt with were a “hopeful sign for feminist sf readers”, provocative to same in both a positive and negative sense, if a natural feminist response was to wish to see the novel written again from a different perspective, then why did this not happen? Why is there such a

dearth of science fiction dealing with the rich lode of novelistic material unearthed by feminist intellectual endeavors? Indeed, why did potential feminist critics largely ignore *A World Between* rather than use it as a springboard to discuss in print their differences with my judgments and opinions on a series of political, cultural, psychological and scientific questions, the exploration of which we could certainly agree are central concerns of the body politic, or should be?

It seems to me that these two questions have the same unfortunate answer.

Certain readers will now be screaming loudly that there has been plenty of feminist science fiction! They will be citing the work of Elizabeth Lynn and Vonda McIntyre, of Jessica Amanda Salmonson and John Varley and Joanna Russ. But with the exception of Joanna Russ, most of this “feminist science fiction” has been fiction informed by feminist ideology rather than fiction thematically based on the broad questions raised by feminist intellectual explorations.

Joanna Russ was sent a pre-publication copy of *A World Between* for possible endorsement on the cover. She was not favorably inclined towards the book, and wrote a long, detailed letter arguing with the political, social and economic premises. This engendered some correspondence between us of a personally friendly nature on the issues in question and our disagreements about them. This was the sort of dialectic I had expected with feminists – that there would be considerable argument and disagreements with the point of view expressed in a political science-fiction novel written by a male consciousness concerning material previously regarded as a feminist preserve.

And that’s what I got from Joanna, who, almost alone in the genre, has written science fiction *about* what have been considered feminist concerns, rather than conventional science fiction ideologically informed by feminist beliefs. I find much of Joanna’s fiction in this vein inflammatory, biased, wrong-headed, and sometimes loony, which is why I admire it and find it intellectually stimulating. It boils the blood, raises difficult questions, and cries out for dialectic response.

In her letter to the editor about *A World Between*, Joanna took umbrage at the fact that the house was publishing a novel like that by the likes of me, rather than by some feminist writer of the requisite gender. Indeed, aside from the “rather”, I found myself in concurrence. Surely the publication of

Skylark of Space did not stifle the further publication of space opera, nor did Conan eliminate sword and sorcery as a subgenre. Was there not room enough in the fertile ground plowed by *A World Between* to let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools of thought contend?

The genesis of the novel was a lengthy process. It began, perhaps, with a relationship with a lady of feminist persuasion, progressed through this connection into a reading of feminist literature, and smoothly metamorphosed into reviewing some of it for the *Los Angeles Free Press*. Musings on these subjects at the beginning of a short story called “The Light at the End of the Tunnel” were rightfully excised by Gay Bryant who bought it for *Oui* and then commissioned an article called *The Masculine Mystique*. an exploration of the male viewpoint toward “feminist” issues. The higher-ups at Playboy, Inc. nixed the completed article, which was then published at *Swank*. Gay Bryant, meanwhile, left *Oui* to become editor of a woman’s magazine called *New Dawn*, where she commissioned a shorter piece on the same general subject for the “men’s page”.

The impetus to write a novel like *A World Between* arose out of a journalistic odyssey outside the realm of science fiction, where I found what seemed like a whole vast sphere of discourse ideal for the science-fiction novel lying virtually fallow.

Are masculine and feminine roles the result of cultural conditioning or biological determinism? What factor differentiates each gender into heterosexuals and homosexuals? Is there an inherent conflict between feminist ideology and DNA programming? Are all male-dominant cultures inherently imperialistic and warlike? Does sexual morphology serve as an ideogrammic template for historical feminine submissiveness and can mutual sexual satisfaction and regard be maintained in the absence of same? In a crunch, which tends to be stronger, sexual preference or gender solidarity?

One could go on and on and on. Not only does this general sphere of discourse contain some of the vital unanswered – and largely unaddressed – scientific questions of our time, it also happens to be central to our lives and loves and emotions, our politics and sociology, our very concepts of what it means to be human. Obviously then, as both a rich lode of unanswered scientific questions and the central heartland of our spirits, it should be an ideal area of discourse for the science-fiction novel.

Why then, with a few honorable exceptions, were such science fiction novels not being written?

Why the whisper of critical silence with which *A World Between* was greeted?

A while back, at the Boston World Science Fiction Convention, I found myself on what may have been the first panel on “Homosexuality and Science Fiction”. Charles Beaumont’s story “The Crooked Man” came up. This was one of the earliest and best stories pleading for gay rights within or without the genre, published, I believe, in the 1950s in *Playboy* of all places. The premise was elegant, simple and ironic: a homosexual future world the mirror image of our own, in which the protagonist, the “crooked man”, is straight, must sneak around to straight bars, and, as a heterosexual, suffers all the horrors at the hands of a homosexual society that homosexuals were suffering at the hands of a heterosexual society.

Amazingly enough, there were a number of gays present who took umbrage at this Beaumont story. What they objected to was the fact that the gays in the story were depicted as vicious, insensitive bigots. I could hardly believe my ears. *Of course* the gays had to be depicted in this manner – the whole point was to show straight people what they were doing to homosexuals by putting them inside a straight protagonist trapped in a mirror-image of our world and suffering under the analogous bigotry. Therefore, if the straight character was the victim, gays had to be the bigots. Surely this was obvious.

Apparently not. Many gays present felt that this most mordant of anti-fag-baiting stories was prejudicial to the cause of gay rights because it depicted gays as less than admirable characters.

Bug Jack Barron begins with Lukas Green, black governor of Mississippi, musing bitterly on the troubles caused by one Malcolm Shabazz, a black militant politician who drew his power from the technique of playing into the worst white stereotype of the “nigger”.

“Malcolm Shabazz... was neither more nor less than a nigger. He was everything that [the whites] saw when they heard the word nigger... ignorant dick-dragging black-oozing ape-like savage. And that cunning son of a bitch Malcolm knew it and played on it, making himself a focus of mad white hate... feeding on that hate, growing on it, absorbing it....”

I wonder how that would be taken by a panel called “Blacks and Science Fiction” under the current political esthetics. Is it racist because it depicts an

evil black man in terms of the very racial stereotype he is using? Indeed is Malcolm Shabazz an evil man for using this technique if it serves a just cause?

The first question is as silly as the objections those gay men had to “The Crooked Man”. *The second question is the kind of moral complexity and ambiguity that should inform politically involved fiction.*

In *A World Between*, the “Femocrats” are depicted as social fascist ideologues who have constructed a female-supremacist society as nasty as anything concocted by the male “faschochauvinists” who are their particular devil. Whereas the male bias of the Transcendental Scientists is much more subtle and covert and insidious. The book has been attacked in print and in conversation because this is “unfair” to the feminist cause and image. It’s “wrong” to depict the Femocrats as worse than the Transcendental Scientists.

In the same way that the depictions of gays in “The Crooked Man” or the “nigger” Malcolm Shabazz in *Bug Jack Barron* are “unfair” and “wrong”?

I would contend that the answer is yes and we have now reached the heart of the matter.

Feminism has indeed had an effect on science fiction as it has on what is acceptable in cultural product in general. You are now about as likely to see the sympathetic depiction of a submissive homebody heroine worshipping her man as you are likely to encounter a villain in the mold of Malcolm Shabazz.

In *A World Between*, Cynda Elizabeth is a Femocrat with suppressed heterosexual orientation, which in fact comes into her full awareness under the sexual ministrations of a male. Nothing else in the novel seems to have more outraged those who have been outraged.

But after all, most of us know happy submissive housewives with worshipful admiration for their husbands; they may even be our mothers. And there have certainly been Jim Crow racists like Malcolm Shabazz. And there are gays with contempt and loathing for straights. And in a society of political lesbians, will there not be closet heterosexuals, just as there must be tormented closet homosexuals of both genders in, for example, a community of rigid Born Again Christians?

Well, of course, almost everyone would admit. But is it fair to present a negative image of an oppressed group? Why depict Malcolm Shabazz instead of Martin Luther King? Why depict bigoted gays instead of sterling examples

of gay pride? Why focus on a Cynda Elizabeth?

Why the fuck not?

A work of fiction is not an equal opportunity employer. Characters are chosen and given attributes in order to tell a story. In politically involved fiction, the story itself is constructed so as to elucidate a theme or a set of themes, to generate contemplation of certain political, social and psychological relationships. In politically involved science fiction, the physical and social matrix of the story is also constructed so as to elucidate the themes, and aid in the generation of contemplation of certain political, social, and psychological relationships between the social milieu and the characters.

Now admittedly there can be two sorts of politically involved science fiction.

The writer can choose to be “fair”, to be an “Equal Opportunity Employer”, even to take “Affirmative Action”. All gays or women or blacks or Christians or Nazis or Communists – depending upon the political ideology of the writer – can be depicted as heroic, sensitive, righteous, upstanding pillars of the community, and the societies they create or defend paragons of virtue. Equally, depending upon the political orientation of the author, all gays or women or blacks or Christians or Nazis or Communists can be depicted as blackhearted monsters of moral leprosy. Thus the characters are fitted into the story like values plugged into a political equation. The technical term for this is propaganda. Those who agree with the political ideology fictionally expressed will feel that they have read an idealistic uplifting novel. Those who do not will fling the book across the room.

The second kind of politically involved science fiction attempts to extrapolate characters in a society not from a political prescription for virtue but from the real world. Where heroism, villainy, strength, weakness, dominance, submissiveness, idealism, greed and all the other vices and virtues alas are contained in varying combinations in all human beings and their works. Here the characters and their setting do not fit neatly into the story like values in a political equation, and the total effect these elements add up to is not an even a mathematical solution. This sort of stuff, done right, is fraught with ambiguities, psychic and moral, with dangling ends, unjust outcomes, and therefore with food for thought. It also tends to be a better story because virtue is not a guarantee of victory, nor villainy of defeat,

nor is the reader always sure of whom he should be rooting for.

Most “feminist informed” science fiction that has been published is of the former kind. We now have mighty-thewed Amazons slaying the forces of evil; courageous, intelligent, intrepid female scientists; virtuous lesbians and gays of the starways; unisex societies liberated from the sexual dialectic; sensitive feminine men who change gender as often as their underwear. In other words, the values of moral feminism overlaid on the same old stuff, characters certified ideologically kosher as suitable role models.

But is this a bad thing? Is it not true that previous science fiction reinforced negative images of women and gays and denied female and gay readers positive role models? Isn't it now therefore just to present positive female and gay role models and to eschew characterization that might tend to tarnish the positive perception of same?

Who can argue morally against this position? Only Moral Majority type bigots who would no doubt contend that since homosexuals are the children of Satan, their places as role models should be taken by straight celibate Christians, and that since woman's place is in the home, virtuous female characters should be confined therein.

This is of course the political essence of social fascism: the attempt by a subculture to impose its own values by fiat on an inevitably multiplex macroculture. This is the engine behind all attempts at censorship, no matter how blatant or subtle. This is also how propaganda kills art.

As witness the dearth of science fiction that truly *explores* what feminists claim as their sphere of discourse, as well as the dearth of scientific inquiry into such areas of dangerous ambiguity as the relationship between genetic programming and human behavior, the true cause of homosexuality, the inevitable effect of sexual differentiation on hominid evolution, the biological parameters of war as a nearly universal male human group behavior, etc.

Where *are* all these novels that are crying to be written? Why do we have woman warriors and sensitive househusbands instead?

Why was *A World Between* at the very least not excoriated in print? Why did outraged feminist science-fiction writers not rush to their typewriters to turn out fiction challenging its premises? For that matter, why did it take until 1979 for this sort of science-fiction novel to be published?

If *A World Between* had been panned by feminist critics who compared it invidiously to other work of its kind more congenial and better done, if

indeed these other novels existed, one could put it down to the loathsome and perhaps inept nature of the book itself. But silence on the subject combined with the lack of much other science fiction in this huge and vital sphere of fictional discourse which is its concern points only, alas, to fear.

After all, this *is* scary stuff. Feminist ideology has imposed upon open scientific questions foregone conclusions based on its concept of what a just reality should be like. But do we inhabit a just reality? Is the psychic differentiation between men and women entirely developmental rather than partly genetic because we can construct a more just society if this is true than if it isn't? Is homosexual behavior a universal human potential rather than a developmental syndrome or genetic glitch because homosexuals will have a more positive self-image if we say it is? Indeed, is there any biological or genetic evolutionary reason why men and women should be designed so that it is even natural or possible for them to live harmoniously together?

Scientifically, we don't know the answers to any of these questions. And we aren't even looking. Perhaps because we're afraid of finding the answers. Because if the answers given by the universe conflict with our idealistic framework, we are thrown into an ambiguous reality indeed, and one not designed for our psychic or moral comfort.

But science fiction, unlike science, is not required to come up with the "true" answers. Or even *probable* answers. One may assume any set of parameters one likes, and then deal with the scientific, social, political and psychic implications. There are nine and sixty ways of composing science fictional lays, and every, single one of them is right.

What if male group-bonding and territoriality is the genetically determined basis of both teamwork and war? What if the biological ideogram of lingam penetrating yoni is the morphological basis of male-dominant female-submissive behavior? What if men as a gene pool are more intelligent than women as a gene pool? What if the reverse is true? What if the female orgasm is evolutionarily irrelevant, and with it, female satisfaction? What if the female orgasm is a heightened level of consciousness which the male consciousness cannot attain?

Each one of these questions and their reversals would seem to me to generate thematic bases for any number of science-fiction novels and the answers to none of them have been foreclosed by present scientific knowledge.

The reason these books haven't been written, I believe, is that feminist

thought, and particularly feminist science fiction, has acted as if its idealistic ideological prescriptions for the “right” answers to these unanswered scientific questions were a description of proven reality.

Ultimately, one must decide where one’s primary loyalty lies. Either to one’s accepted belief system, whatever it is, and to what one considers the proper idealistic framework of one’s chosen fellows, or to the responsibility of the artist to explore with an open mind and a vulnerable spirit precisely those areas of human concern most likely to enmesh both writer and reader in injustice, ambiguity, fear, outrage, humiliation, controversy, and guilt as well as idealism, hope and fulfillment.

The current derivative nature of so much science fiction leads me to believe that there are probably editors who would welcome work which broke ground in the fallow and fertile areas now fenced off behind admittedly idealistic ideology. The fault, dear sisters, probably lies not in your stars but in yourselves. You have certainly proven that you have the courage of your convictions. Whether you can apply your higher courage as fictional artists to the sphere of discourse in which they operate would seem to be a more open question.

It’s a mistake, as I said at the beginning, to argue with reviews in public, though I wonder if it is as bad a mistake to argue against silence. For it seems to me that there is an area of silence within the literature of science fiction that points to a deeper and more fundamental mistake, and perhaps one big mistake does call for another.

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Barry Malzberg was shown the following review of his new book about science fiction, and responds to our misapprehensions in the letters section on [Page 36](#).

A Junkyard of Dreams Charles Platt

Barry Malzberg’s *The Engines of the Night* (Doubleday, \$10.95) takes the form of a series of thirty-six short confessionals, like impromptu monologues from an analyst’s couch. They set out to reveal plain facts about how science fiction is published and how it ruins those of us who write it. Included is “Con Sordino”, an edited version of which was first published in *The Patchin*

Review #1. Many of the other chapters have also been published elsewhere.

Reminiscing at one point about the first time he met John W. Campbell, Malzberg portrays himself as a sincere young radical, determined to enlighten the editor who had once been his hero. Such idealistic dreams and egocentric expectations were doomed, of course. Campbell remained unimpressed, Malzberg was miserably disillusioned – he blamed himself afterward for having been so naive. He did not, it is worth noting, blame himself for having been in the wrong. The encounter stands as a model for all his subsequent frustrating encounters with science fiction.

He always expected a lot. Evidently he thought that readers would applaud the subtlety, wit, and insight in his grim visions; instead, they told him he was being repetitive and depressing. He thought his colleagues would be as ready to face unpalatable and unfashionable facts as he was (for example, about the space program); instead, many of them shunned him. Most of all, he thought publishers would reward his talent with adult book packaging, sensitive editorial judgment, and big money. Instead, he received the treatment meted out to writers of quantity adventure: his books were purchased cheaply and marketed indiscriminately, and they quickly fell out of print.

Was he wrong to expect so much? Malzberg blames himself, again and again, for having been naive. Naive for not realizing that science fiction is cynically published for adolescents; naive for not seeing that its writers constitute a conservative-minded Establishment hostile to change. In all these mea-culpas, however, he seems never to question his assumption that he and many of his colleagues deserved better.

When I interviewed Barry Malzberg a few years ago, he described the extent of his original literary ambitions. His models were Norman Mailer and Philip Roth; his dream was a Nobel Prize. To entertain such intentions implies a formidable belief in your own talent. If, subsequently, you fail, there are only two possible explanations: either you were wrong, or they were. A person of strong convictions will choose the latter; and indeed, Malzberg devotes a scornful and bitter chapter to the literary establishment, controlled, as he sees it, by a handful corrupt reviewers, whom he names on page 176.

Apparently, he turned away from writing contemporary fiction and started writing science fiction as a second-best. He makes no secret of his ambivalence toward the field: he waxes lyrical about its potential importance

as the only valid fiction of the twentieth century, and then attacks, quite accurately, its juvenile ideas and low levels of literacy. He seems to have felt that he could use it for his own ends and improve it in the process, much as he hoped to “improve” John Campbell. Thus, as a long-time reader he was a part of science fiction, not an outsider; but he also felt superior to it.

How intolerable, then, that his reception was, at best, mixed. Certainly he sold his work easily, and wrote much; but the reader-response must have seemed disappointing. Even his prize-winning novel *Beyond Apollo* was greeted more with outrage than admiration.

At some point, his logic may have been: If the audience was misinterpreting him so consistently, this again was a measure of his naivety, for having imagined that they would appreciate subtle, ambitious writing. So he would stop being naive – stop trying to give them what *he* wanted, and start giving them what he sensed *they* wanted. In fact he would give them more of it than any other writer, and he would write it faster, too. One chapter of *The Engines of the Night* describes with bitter sarcasm the writing of one of his novels in four days, in 1973. He implies disdain for a copy-editor who praised the book.

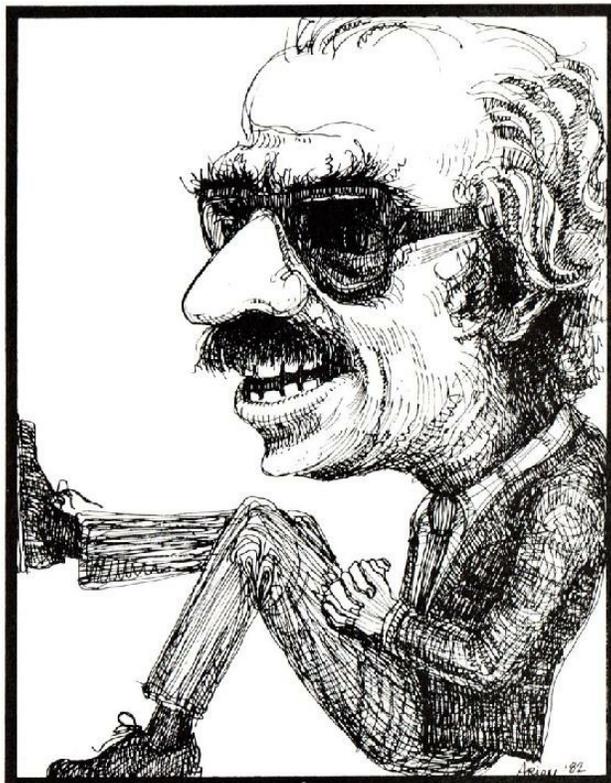
Alas, the writer who despises his audience ultimately despises his own work, and if he despises it too much he no longer has the stomach to write it. That his writing is no worse than that of his colleagues, and is produced more quickly, begins to seem hollow consolation. That he can do it in one draft, and need not even read it before he sends it out begins to seem more a measure of his cynicism than of his skill.

I infer most of this from the soul-searchings in *The Engines of the Night*, though do not know to what extent Barry Malzberg would agree with my phrasing of it. I do know that his book portrays him, and other writers, as victims of science fiction rather than vice-versa. Look what this miserable, shoddy field does to us all, he says, ignoring the effects which the writers in turn must have upon the field. To be fair, however, many of the bad publishing practices, disappointments, and absurdities he describes ring amusingly true, and there are a number of eminently quotable insights. This is indeed the work of a formidable talent – and yet, as in much of Malzberg’s fiction, one senses his reluctance to extend himself too far or apply that talent too rigorously. This is more a collection of memos than a memoir; the confessionals are not linked or built into a structure. He shirks the obligation of a conscientious essayist to derive some synthesis from the scattering of

home truths. There is much weary theory on how things got to be so bad, but nothing decisive; the inconsistencies are dismissed as ambiguities and we are left with an episodic tormented travelogue through a junkyard of dreams, toward a destination, in the final chapter, of helpless despair.

The title of the book refers to the dark forces of the world: our social and technological enemies out there, waylaying and undercutting us, threatening our aspirations and our survival. Malzberg seeks to warn and enlighten those of us who persist, like John Campbell, in being willfully naive in our notion that the future holds promise and talent will be rewarded.

Personally I take a different view: that some naive idealism is important, to sustain a flourishing imagination; that a balance between ambition and humility is essential to any writer; that if we fail it may be more because of our own shortcomings than those of others; and that the most personally destructive engines are those that lurk within.



*Drawing [of Barry Malzberg] by
Ariane Lenshoek*

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A.A. Attanasio's remarkable first novel Radix was nominated this year for a

Nebula Award. Here, Attanasio describes his particularly eloquent outlook on science fiction.

The Frontiers of Knowing

A.A. Attanasio

The artist is a limb of the wind. Idea-spells come and go with shifts of alpha frequencies in the brain. Discontinuous and divergent forces cusp through the psyche and become story, song, sculpture, and sometimes suicide. All of humanity is “as grass ... the wind passes over it, and it is gone.”

The science-fiction writer, more so than writers of any other genre, knows of this ephemerality, for the subject of all true science fiction is reality at the limits. Reality is etymologically rooted in the Latin *res*, which means a *thing*. Realty also sprouts from *res* and means real estate, domiciles and land. Just as realty is improved wilderness, so our human reality is a selected and cultivated swatch of actual reality.

The rough terrain at the edges of our knowing is the special domain of science fiction. Other genres of writing concern themselves with the copula of mores and mortality and hence are confined to tragedy and comedy. But, because of its cosmic reachings, the literary mode of science fiction is epic. By epic I mean a form that is elevated by its subject matter or style and, on rare occasions, both. The modern novel, excepting experimentalists like Joyce, eschews any such elevation. The subject and style are almost always quotidian, dealing primarily with what we can physically know, what has already been cultivated.

The epic mold is ancient. As in Homer and the death of kings in the *Iliad*, the outermost boundaries of our “improved wilderness” are explored in science fiction and clarified in a grand way by the sufferings of a few individuals, oftentimes a single hero. Yet the suffering is never depressive. It is transfiguring, made magnificent by language, and so the pain becomes awesome with its message of temporality. Doesn’t the same stink of death that pervades the gory demise of countless heroes in the *Iliad* also waft through the timescope of the *Foundation* trilogy, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the *Dune* sequence, *The Crystal World*, *The Forever War*, *Dhalgren*?

The role of science fiction in literature is clearly epic, at least so far as subject goes. As for style – that is science fiction’s great weakness. In Homer, suffering becomes poetry. In science fiction, it’s journalism. The

language of Homer, *Gilgamesh*, and *Beowulf* is fierce with beauty. Not so in most of the science fiction that is published today. The issues are often compelling when writers go to the limits of reality, but the tonality, the wroughtness of many science-fiction writers, is dull. In writing about the frontiers of knowing, the tropes of English, the lazy satisfactions with nouns and adjectives, must either be abandoned (hardly possible) or enriched with flexibilities of grammar and felt life. At least the verbal undertones of each noun must be activated. *Is* should be avoided, and all the neglected English verbs retrieved from their long thesaural sleep.

Consciousness itself is the extent of our reality, and its expansion is the task and the suffering of the artist. But the artist is a limb of the wind, a ghost of the blood, hungering as well as dreaming. And so, we must say with Goya, *Aun aprendo*, "I am still learning." Perhaps then, what we do dangerously for experience, for life, will matter more than what is quickly wrought for necessity and recompense. "Those who know the eternity of the end, know the trials of the beginning."

(Quotes: the first from the Old Testament, the second from the Chinese *Book of Changes*.)

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Recommended Reading

The Patchin Review doesn't run advertising, partly because doing so would make it impossible for us to continue mailing copies at Book Rate, and partly because doing layouts is enough of a chore without ads to worry about.

However, there are a couple of publications which deserve a little free publicity here. *Foundation*, the British magazine about science fiction, takes a sober critical perspective on the field but usually avoids being stuffy or academic. The most recent issue, Number 24, contains 108 pages (5.5" x 8", perfect bound) and features a long dissertation by J.G. Ballard on his life and career, plus opinion pieces and reviews.

Foundation is \$12 for three issues (one year). Make checks payable to Science Fiction Foundation and send c/o North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS, England.

Meanwhile, in the U.S.A., *Science Fiction & Fantasy Book*

Review has been revived under the editorship of Neil Barron, whose *Anatomy of Wonder* is one of the best reference books on science fiction. SF&FBR runs generally intelligent reviews of just about everything; it's a useful buyer's guide. \$10 buys a year's subscription (10 issues). Make checks payable to Science Fiction Research Association, and send to Elizabeth Cogell, Humanities Dept, University of Missouri, Rolla, MO 65401.

Robert Frenay is an artist, editor-publisher of New York Jazz magazine, and a subscriber to The Patchin Review.

Vulgar Means Robert Frenay Jr.

I see nothing wrong with artists (and by artists I mean also writers and musicians) acting like nitwits. Artists commonly practice “shameless”, “childish”, and “irresponsible” behavior. Picasso was something of a satyr, Gibbon was a *foop*, and Whistler is known to have hustled his great patron, Leyland, shamelessly. Van Gogh and Gauguin were literally crazy and Leonardo, who rarely finished any of his commissions regardless of whether or not he had received payment, was a lifelong antagonist of Michelangelo. An embarrassing number of the great Chinese scroll painters, one of humanity's finest art traditions, were drunks and eccentrics. Need we discuss Blake, Rimbaud, Poe, Fitzgerald, Norman Mailer? (Forget about musicians.) I would hate to see science-fiction writers separate themselves from this grand and unruly tradition.

Also, I believe sensationalism and vulgarity can serve as important elements in high art. Sociologist Herman Kahn charts a liberalizing trend in the evolving attitudes and belief structures of western culture. Certainly the work of Shakespeare and his fellow Elizabethans would have seemed very lively to the subjects of King Henry VIII. And Thomas Hardy's salacious *Tess*, which scandalized 19th-century England, seems rather delicate in its treatment when placed alongside the work of Henry Miller. The French Impressionists were considered vulgar in their time and Matisse and his ilk were labelled “*fauves*” (wild beasts) when they first showed their work. Mr. Kahn is on to something. This sort of thing has been going on for centuries,

and not just in the arts.

In the West, Holy Roman philosophy has long exerted a powerful influence on an artist's choice of subject and means of expression. Modern American religious practice, though, can hardly be said to rule out sensationalism or vulgarity – including as it does the Catholic “penitantes” (flagellants), the tantric yogis, and the holy rollers as well as mescaline eaters, homosexual priests, Hare Krishna chanters and cosmic sex cultists.

If it ever was, it is no longer a simple matter to distinguish between the sensational and the sublime. And one should not confuse the high standards and disciplined restraint necessary in the production of quality work with the moral restraints long imposed on the work of classical artists. If “art is what you can get away with” (McLuhan) then these artists clearly couldn't get away with much. The preponderance of naked women tastefully rendered “at the bath” as a subject of European classical painters shouldn't be taken as a sign of common concern for good health practices.

Concepts like vulgarity and sensationalism take their meaning from a given context, as in the Supreme Court's definition of pornography. This is especially true when dealing with the historically recent innovation of “popular” art forms. Henri Matisse once asked, “Isn't eloquence even more powerful, more direct when the means are vulgar?”. Duke Ellington took things a step further: “It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing.”

A vulgar literature? Why not? American marketing executives use sensationalism to sell everything from automobiles to cigarettes. If that's a form of “cheap” sensationalism, it's not the means I would question but the ends to which they are being put. The means don't justify the ends. I do, however, believe that artists and philosophers should feel free to use these proven means of gaining popular attention (my personal taste runs to breathless heroines with moist inner thighs and heroes with weapons of superior penetrating power) in order to convey ideas of high originality and profound impact.

Finally, with regard to criticism, I believe the only effective method for raising the standards of a popular art form involves first raising the standards of its audience. As a reader, I welcome the criticism of science fiction in literary terms – so long as it is lively and entertaining in addition to being instructive; so long as it is intelligible to the science-fiction audience; so long as it is true to the requirements of a popular art form.

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We plan to publish fiction now and then in The Patchin Review. The following is not necessarily a representative sample.

Christina's Clone

D. Gale

CHRISTINA flees to Southern California for rest and recreation at the hillside home of her friends BULLETS and ADELE BUCHSBAUM, a husband-and-wife team of literary and talent agents. Living in the guest house is FELIPE, a photographer. CHRISTINA goes on a shopping spree at the exclusive boutique of BLAINE NEFERTITI, and on the way back to the BUCHSBAUMs she damages ADELE's Rolls while engaging in an impromptu road race with a car driven by HUDSON PACKARD. PACKARD falls in love with CHRISTINA, an emotional entanglement CHRISTINA seeks to avoid. She has her L.A. lawyer HERMAN BERMAN handle the accident with PACKARD, who, nonetheless, gives CHRISTINA a ride home.

CHRISTINA "exploits" FELIPE's request of her to do location fashion modelling for him. They fly to an isolated tropical Mexican resort. CHRISTINA wakes up one morning to find herself rigidly tied to the bed with FELIPE taking flash photos of her. Outraged and accusing FELIPE of blackmail, she demands to be released and demands the film. CHRISTINA stalks out of the villa, is ravaged and molested by local Indians, and then abused by a greasy gendarme. FELIPE "rescues" her at the police station, they return to the villa, where ROSE HIPS, a model, wantonly poses for FELIPE. CHRISTINA calls HERMAN, flies to Mexico City, meets an engineer in the airport bar, they plan a trip to Geneva. CHRISTINA learns that the engineer is an employee of PACKARD. CHRISTINA intends on losing herself for a week in Jamaica – as she boards a plane in Geneva, she spots a "clone" of herself in the airport.

CHRISTINA spends a week with the Rastas, then another week in Florida scoring coke from a wealthy dealer. The dealer asks if she's setting herself up as his rival, since she scored several pounds only a few weeks ago. CHRISTINA knows that her "clone" has preceded her, and she flies back to L.A..

Lawyer BERMAN has researched PACKARD and found him to be a

wealthy businessman engaged in computer manufacture – the “Sultan of Silicon”. PACKARD is also a tragic figure, his wife and children having died in the crash of a company airplane. BERMAN suggests PACKARD would be her ideal mate. CHRISTINA accuses BERMAN of pimping for PACKARD, and tells him of the “clones” she’s seen. BERMAN says that if she’s afraid of PACKARD and doesn’t want to face him to resolve the auto accident intricacies, she can take an extended vacation while he handles everything. BLAINE NEFERTITI suggests the island of Santo Sutro, off the coast of Brazil, as the ultimate hideaway. It’s a resort where the super-rich of South America go to recover from drugs, alcohol, or, more commonly, the effects of cosmetic surgery. CHRISTINA charts a private Lear jet out of San Francisco to fly to Peru. She uses the opportunity of a few days’ wait in San Francisco to surreptitiously check out the HUDSON PACKARD operations south of the city.

On the flight to Peru, she discovers from the captain that the plane is one of PACKARD’s corporate possessions. CHRISTINA is becoming totally paranoid, and at various South American ports-of-call she indulges heavily in her standard escapes – sex and drugs. After one orgy of coke and sex in Peru, CHRISTINA is at the Lima airport, ready to fly to Rio and on to Santo Sutro, when she spots a ROSE HIPS “clone” in the airport lounge. CHRISTINA confronts the “clone” which denies any knowledge of ROSE. CHRISTINA is now desperate to get to the island. She takes the speedboat from Rio with a group of passengers who are covered in bandages. She is heartbroken when she is greeted at the dock by a snivelling FELIPE, who takes CHRISTINA to her quarters in the super-modern mansion of the resort’s owner/operator, Dr. HELMUT ESQUALITO. The next morning, CHRISTINA and the DOCTOR meet. ESQUALITO is an ultrasadistic monster who uses his resort to manufacture surgical “clones” of jet-set beauties who he plans to sell to his international clientele of powerful degenerates. CHRISTINA is his ultimate “model”. His masterplan is to peddle CHRISTINA replicas and raise funds to begin true cloning experiments. ESQUALITO will trade the clones for power, money, and nuclear weapons, to be used to blackmail governments. ESQUALITO has a sexual free-for-all with CHRISTINA. The next day, CHRISTINA attempts to “buy off” FELIPE, but FELIPE explains that the CHRISTINA clone now travelling the world will soon empty her accounts and liquidate all of her assets. After this is accomplished, CHRISTINA will be of no use, and will be thrown to the dogs. That night, the excited

ESQUALITO puts CHRISTINA through the hoops with some of his sexual monstrosities. The audience consists of FELIPE, ESQUALITO, and BLAINE NEFERTITI.

CHRISTINA is rescued by a party of Brazilian police and a small army of security guards organized by PACKARD. ESQUALITO commits suicide by jumping into the Doberman pit. PACKARD later explains that a routine rental report from his San Francisco headquarters tipped him off to her whereabouts. He called BERMAN, who explained that he too was worried since the police had busted a CHRISTINA clone emptying one of her London accounts. BULLETS BUCHSBAUM had reported FELIPE to the police when he found the real ROSE HIPS near death in the guest house from a drug overdose.

CHRISTINA follows through on PACKARD's offer of a period of recovery at his estate in Hillsborough, Calif.. CHRISTINA is nursed back to health, makes an intimate friend of PACKARD, and then departs for new adventures, having gained a powerful new ally.

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Editor of Timescape Books, David Hartwell analyses the changing science-fiction audience for us in a style reminiscent of columns I once wrote for Crawdaddy magazine.

Do You, Mr. Jones? David Hartwell

It seems to me that the science-fiction field got on its various hobbyhorses and rode off in all directions, in the middle 1970s. This may in the end turn out to be healthy and invigorating, but in the general chaos the coherence of the field, which had been an international literary movement up to that time, unfashionable, underground, and at best radical and new, lost much of its binding energy.

And the nature of the audience changed significantly. In spite of the enormous growth of group back-patting events, from workshops to festivals to conventions, the core audience for written science fiction began to feel alienated from much of it.

Any of the various "new waves" you wish to point to during that burst of creative energy in the mid-late-1960s were not popular successes. The

only popular fiction from that period was, and remains, that which incorporated new levels of stylistic ambition without denying the traditional science-fiction virtues of careful and surprising extrapolation. As far as the international audience for science fiction goes, the “new wavicles” were left stranded on their individual beachheads.

And yet two beguiling possibilities remained, leading authors away from the core audience toward a spurious literary respectability. I need to digress and clarify immediately: Ballard and Delany, Disch and Russ, to name four, developed unique and literary forms which evolved out of their thorough grounding in science fiction. What beguiled too many other writers, however, was the possibility which had opened to write literate very-near-future extrapolations, rich in imagery and characterization, but without much grounding in science or science fiction.

Some of this new fiction arose from the authentic need of each generation of writers to rethink and reinvent the literature, to redefine the tradition by choosing different role models from the earlier generations. But at worst it resulted, in the 1970s, in a deadly laziness: for some, it was easier to invent rubber science than to use real science, while for others it was easier to deny any value in tradition than to learn it and evolve beyond it. Both of these attitudes offended the traditional science-fiction audience.

As a result, a lot of nonsense was written and published in the 1970s, and perhaps the most pernicious fallout was the rapid growth of a serious distrust, in the audience, for new authors.

The solution promulgated successfully by Lester del Rey and Judy-Lynn del Rey, who controlled the most aggressive publishing line and the most widely-read review column of the decade, was: “Back to the good old-fashioned science fiction, with style that doesn’t call attention to itself.” And the traditional audience bought this solution in large numbers, and many still do.

All of the above leads me to several observations. For the most part, we no longer know what we are talking about when we discuss science fiction at the present time. I spoke before an audience of several hundred last year in New York at a convention, and when I asked for a show of hands, *three* had read Theodore Sturgeon’s *More than Human* (and could remember it when asked). It’s a whole new game out there, and I realized that I was in a room full of science-fiction fans with whom I had little or nothing in common. Chilling. After all, I do this for a living.

We know a good bit about where science fiction was, but not where it is now. So what we are left with is a scattering of marketing philosophies which try to identify and reach audiences, and times are tough so the easy way out is to give them what they want, i.e. what they are used to and comfortable with, familiar names and familiar ideas with new twists. Yes, I compromise too.

Meanwhile, many of the best science-fiction writers are pursuing individual visions which may or may not be acceptable to an audience with whom they are increasingly less familiar. All of us who care for what is good in literature and in science fiction, and hope for both at once, had better be aware that we have lost a few battles lately. The Hugo Awards are an authentic indication of current tastes of science-fiction fans.

I can't say that the situation is desperate, when some writers are making more money than ever before from their science fiction, and some publishers, too; but the profits are down a bit for almost everyone. And that literary respectability which I mentioned a few paragraphs back has not turned out to be worth much – a few free trips for a few authors to a few conferences, and the status of “subject of publication credit” awarded to very miscellaneous works by upward-mobile academics at second- and third-rate colleges. Mostly. I was in the audience when Chip Delany spoke before the MLA in New York a few years back and referred to Wittgenstein; afterward, some teacher ingenuously asked for a list of Wittgenstein's science-fiction novels. The academics are as unsophisticated as that mass of new fans who haven't read Sturgeon.

My final point: before we start talking about where science fiction is going, we had better spend some time figuring out where we really are now.

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Telecommunion **Andrew Joron**

A voice of silver: a lunar tocsin
Calls down to the Anima of blasted villages
& ceremonies end
There in a boudoir
Or a hospital bed, she lies half-spent
Whose flesh
Is shadowed forth as Data

– very gentle hands flicker
Out of focus
They shall not bless, nor invisibly
Arrange her ruined features
... so blind in their searching
For a few coins
Tossed like spinning satellites into the void

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Greed, John Smith suggests, is the root cause of most of the depressing trends in science fiction today.

Vile Dross John Smith

“Vile dross! What use art thou to me?” Robinson Crusoe reflected, returning to his shipwreck and reviewing the abundance of artifacts and material wealth available to him. He had no use for gold coins or finery; however, such was his inherent conditioning that on second thoughts he took them. He could not envisage doing without them, regardless of their superfluity.

So it is with science fiction, from the viewpoint of the marooned, emaciated reader.

The plain fact is that the market has been over-stimulated and over-supplied. The nature of science fiction is such that it lacks an appeal to the general market, and not even stimuli such as *Star Wars* or the space-shuttle program can lift it out of the “genre” market.

At the low end of this market, “genrification” will itself ensure a certain per cent sale, regardless of quality. Above this level the dearth of well-prepared work is telling. The modern status of science fiction as a merchandisable commodity is reflected in the scramble to publish, in the record advances made to authors (now exceeding \$1 million, for Clarke’s sequel to *2001*), and in escalating auction values which bought all Conan for Ace and all Elric for Berkley. Of course, it would be naive to expect altruism, but exploitative mass-marketing of literature is intrinsically detrimental to standards, as manifested by deteriorating editorial performance, story quality, and even proof reading. The machinery is now set up to churn out material in

a magnificent new golden age of Hack, where house authors sweat beneath their deadlines in an ignominious retreat from their moral standards.

This is exacerbated by our veneration of tired old men. The myth that “he who did it first, did it best”, coupled with the mileage to be had from the “famous” name, nourishes a mudslide of series and sequels. Frank Herbert is reportedly at work on a sixth *Dune* novel. Frederik Pohl has recently keel-hauled us with a weary succession of formula nose-divers, from *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon* to *The Cool War*, *Syzygy*, and now *Starburst*. Superhack M. Moorcock, king of the querulous quill, arises from the grave with a precipitation of orthographical diarrhea, though he retains our sympathy with his fitting disclaimer in *The Steel Tsar*. Earl Dumarest plods wearily into his twenty-sixth space-pap rerun; Heinlein delivers another stale old fart upon the cringeing auditorium; and Robert Silverberg, amid rumors that he only wrote *LVC* to pay his bills, adds more stodge by the moment to the unpalatable Majipoor menu. Trilogies are superseded by tetralogies and “prequels”; Gene Wolfe is adding a fifth, extraneous volume to his *Book of the New Sun* – is he building an extension to his garage, or perhaps a strong-room for his accumulated loot?

Publishers trying to take less chances by sticking with the winners deluge us not only in sequels and series but endless reprints. Even good old Ace Books, with editor “my hands are tied” Susan Allison, has on its schedule almost fifty per cent reprint material. Meanwhile, elsewhere, the trend toward commercial thinking leads to pornographic fantasies. Playboy Press are proud that their sex-in-science-fiction novels have done extremely well, so now they introduce “John Cleve”’s new erections-in-space series. A whole new ball-game? And Don Wollheim gleefully reveals that the print run on the Gor series has reached a quarter-million. Imagine all those people standing naked in their bedrooms, dressed in leather, holding their whips, and *still* waiting for John Norman to deliver.

The purpose of science fiction should be to create viable solutions for the future from within the limits of current expectations, and to produce a set of theorems to deal with real-life problems. This, as James Gunn has put it, is more or less what the 1960s “new wave” set out to do, though it was subsequently repudiated because it “wasn’t sf” and there “wasn’t enough ACTION”. Its introspective approach, however, was probably the nearest we’ve come to effective characterization in the field.

What we have now is an often ill-researched escapism, a far cry from the

more acceptable prophets of gloom of the 1950s. I shudder in disbelief before the new-releases section of my local bookstore, and risk insolvency to get my hands on mail-order British imports, of which there are not enough in this neck of the woods. I have always disliked the British for several obscure reasons, but I'm obliged to respect the relative quality of their published fiction and their book editors, from whom our own hawks could perhaps draw a lesson or two.

Anyway, this constant, deleterious reworking of old themes, mindless sword-and-sorcery (most people in medieval times had pretty hideous diseases), and tunnel-vision space-opera future-history (the great unexplained metamorphosis of human society) is dogmatic, and precludes the more pressingly painful social traumas which will result from high tech and society in melange. A study carried out by linguists a few years ago concluded that by the end of this century the average adult vocabulary will be comparable to that of a fourteen-year-old Chicago cheerleader. Some of our writers already seem to have reached this stage, twenty years ahead of schedule. It is in some way disturbing that the only recent science-fiction novel of standing that deals with societal problems perceives them from the opposite end of the sociopolitical spectrum to that which will be valid for most of us joes. I refer to *Oath of Fealty*, which establishes a stock paranoid-insular-materialist view of future real estate – They're Out There and They're Trying to Get In! – which is extrapolated as a development of urban decline. It takes no imagination to realize that the immediate future has need of much more astute analysis than this enmired melodrama can hope to offer. A much clearer vision has been previously aired in Ballard's *Concrete Island*. Such is the nature of the cult, however, that the blind are permitted to lead the blind.

The cult is at once the lifeblood and the prey of the industry. Science fiction, promoted as the extended family, feeds on itself in the ultimate form of vampirism. The existence of an elitist, collector's market ensures sales as well as providing a standard of identification. By appealing to the anally retentive among us (myself, unfortunately, included) the questionable success of small-press/first-edition merchants is cemented. The glut of special editions and collectibles is not born out of service to diehard science-fiction fans alone, and often "collectibility" can only be affirmed in cases where the price of toilet paper outstrips that of the regular paperback.

And here's the rub, because essentially it's the buying public that makes that final sale. It seems most appropriate to note that some of the most

respected science-fiction authors are those who also publish outside the genre. Philip K. Dick, Michael Moorcock, J.G. Ballard, Colin Wilson, Kingsley Amis, Anthony Burgess, Samuel Delany, Thomas M. Disch, Harlan Ellison ... at least Crusoe should be congratulated for having had the perceptiveness to recognize dross when he saw it.

Thomas M. Disch declined to reply to the following article. He feels it is representative of how he is generally regarded in the science-fiction field – and he wouldn't have it any other way.

Misplaced Elitism

Joel Rosenberg

The second issue of *The Patchin Review* published a piece entitled “Science Fiction vs. Literature / Thomas M. Disch: The Prosecution’s Case”.

Nice of Disch to cloak his own opinions with such an officialistic wrapping – nice to himself, that is. It clouds the basic flaw in his case ... of hubris, that is. Disch’s thesis can be fairly summarized thus: “I am a truly wonderful writer, producing works that are in an objective sense far better than the likes of militaristic hacks like Heinlein. A sound and wise audience would, therefore, appreciate me and my work more than those of such a hack. They don’t. Conclusion: I have been slighted, and am justified in feeling angry and resentful toward science-fiction readers who fail to accord me the status that my genius has earned, instead preferring to read certain types of brightly colored trash.”

Actually, on reflection, Disch’s argument isn’t *quite* the insipid whimper of a failed writer (yes, *failed* – despite several awards, some critical praise, and whatever money he has earned in the field, Disch clearly regards himself as a failure; it would be impolite to disagree with such a self-assessment). If his major premise was true – that there is some such thing as objective excellence and that his work, in a very platonic sense, does approach that form more than others’ writings – then there would be some justice, some truth in Disch’s grumblings.

I’m not qualified to comment on the second half of that premise; my only contacts with his work consist of a few tens of short stories and the critically acclaimed and reader-cheating *On Wings of Song* (the latter being the best demonstration of how to run a literary version of the Ponzi game that

I've ever seen).

But the first part, the question of absolute literary standards ... ah, there's pay dirt.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century the critics of (ahem) the Serious Novel were entranced by writers such as James Fenimore Cooper and Wilkie Collins. The works of these two men were attributed great absolute literary value, and expected to last forever.

Nowadays, they are read almost solely by academics and masochists.

There were a few others, who were seen somewhat as song-and-dance men, hacks, writers writing to make a fast buck, but producing works that would, undoubtedly, slip into well-deserved obscurity. Folks like Sam Clemens, Chuck Dickens, and Art Conan Doyle. (Conan Doyle, it should be noted, did expect some share of literary immortality – but not from Sherlock Holmes. Which is why he tried to throw Holmes off the Reichenbach falls. Conan Doyle only returned to the writing of Holmes stories after a) failing miserably to support himself with his “great works” and b) being caned by a little old lady who wanted Holmes back.)

Well, it didn't work out that way. If there is such a thing as objective greatness in literature, a quality which will immortalize a given work, then the critics of that era didn't know what it was. Neither do present ones.

(Note: I am *not* claiming that the greatness of a book is directly related to the number of copies sold; that would make Grace Metalious, Mickey Spillane, Lester Dent, and Jaqueline Susann immortal – a fate to be avoided at all costs. What I am claiming is that there is, beyond a few basics, no objective standard by which a work of fiction can be measured.)

Consider: a few years ago, a book I enjoyed quite a lot, *The Dispossessed*, beat out a book that I enjoyed quite a lot more, *The Mote in God's Eye*, for the Hugo. This was echoed by the critics of the day, who – almost unanimously – felt that this was justice. Unfortunately for the critics, *Mote* is still a very popular book with readers, Le Guin's book much less so.

This can lead to two possible conclusions. The first, that readers don't know good from bad, is Disch's argument. “Why am I, like Ursula, casting pearls before swine?” he moans.

But there is another possibility, that literary standards are subjective, that, as Disch would have it, the “academics ... at the borders of Literature, establishing the canon of what is and what is not to be accounted worthy of serious ... attention....” are not policing the preserve of Literature, that

objectively demonstrable body of writing that is good and proper. Rather, they are holding fast to the territory of their own domain of privilege like a bunch of shallow-sleeping Afrikaners, dreading the day when the populace discovers that they do *not* have divinely inspired wisdom, handed down from Olympus.

Or, to put it simply and more bluntly, thus: Disch and the rest of his pseudo-elitist friends may well not be trading knowledge and insight among their fellow elect, trying in vain to dispense their wisdom to the *ignorami* below.

They may – just may – simply be jerking off.

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NOTE: Letters relating to The Patchin Review are considered publishable, including writer's name and location, unless the writer states otherwise. Letters may be abridged. We will not interfere with correspondents' grammar or spelling.

Letters

From Forrest J. Ackerman, Hollywood, California

Responding to the allegation by Sam Lundwall (or alleged allegation: he denied it to my face) that a thousanddollars was paid to buy a Hugo for the PERRY RHODAN series when I was editing said magabook: «See *The Patchin Review* #3 – Ed.» When I was in Stockholm prior to the Brighton Worldcon I was approached by two earnest young sci-fi fans & fanzine publishers with an incredible story that Sam Lundwall had told them in an interview that I, a “damned fool”, had blabbed about buying a Hugo for Perry and so the “sale” was stopped. My first comment was, “Who did I give the money to and how do I get my \$1000 back?” The whole thing is so patently absurd that it leaves me speechless. Nevertheless, I will speak. For publication.

In the mid-30s I was deemed to be either “daft, an imbecile, a notoriety-seeking clown or a knave.” Or. If Sam Lundwall ever made any such statements about me buying Hugos, manipulating Nebulas, etc, he must be *all 4!* The boys (Swedish fans) assured me he had made these wild, illogical allegations and that they had his declarations on tape. They were anxious for me to hear his interview with my own ears. Of course (1) I don't understand

Swedish, altho I have a local friend who cd interpret it for me; (2) I wdn't know if it was actually Sam Lundwall's voice. All I can say is, the boys seemed completely earnest, insulted on my behalf and anxious for me to be vindicated.

I met Sam Lundwall at Brighton. My wife was with me. I stopped him in a hall. I told him I had been told he had said I had bought a Hugo for the Perry Rhodan series for \$1000 but had not received it because I made the mistake of letting my action be known. My wife agrees that he reacted like an individual completely innocent and having no knowledge of what I was talking about.

The conclusion is that somebody is lying. Some mischievous (even malicious) troublemakers have created a hoax to stir up trouble, possibly out of enmity for Lundwall. (I have gotten the impression he is not the most popular pro in Sweden.) Or: Sam was drunk or stoned and said those things but, cold sober, honestly has no recollection of them. Still – there should be the Tape. The damnable, damning tape – if it exists.

Anyway, I guess it's all a teatempstpot (a tempest in a teapot). At the first meeting of the Science Fiction Writers of America that I attended after Brighton, I reported what I had been told Lundwall had said about the manipulation of Hugos & Nebulas and I recall scarcely a ripple of indignation among the SFWA members present....

On my honor as the recipient of the *first* Hugo (and subsequent Hugoids from Germany, Japan & Italy) I totally deny that I ever tried to buy a Hugo, dreamed of buying a Hugo, believe it cd be done as allegedly outlined by Lundwall (suppose half a dozen publishers all wanted a Hugo for one of their novels, wdn't their couple hundred bought votes cancel each other out?) or contemplate purchasing a Hugo now that my eyes have been opened (?) to the methodology by which (it is said) it can be done. My motto is: Award to the wise is sufficient.

«Sam Lundwall's own denial appeared last issue. Mr. Ackerman's letter arrived too late to be included then.»

From Alfred Bester, Ottsville, Pennsylvania

A footnote to "Jane Doe's" engaging L.D.V./R.I.P. piece «Estimating death rates of *Last Dangerous Visions* contributors; see *The Patchin Review* #3 – Ed.»

A mutual friend at the Seattle convention told me that on a trip south

he'd visited Nelson Bond.

"My God!" I broke in. "Is he still alive?"

Our mutual burst out laughing. "When I told him I'd be seeing Alfie Bester in Seattle, he said exactly the same thing about you."

From Sharon Jarvis, Editor, Playboy Paperbacks. New York

For weeks I've been thinking of how to respond to your editorial on women in publishing. I'm also trying to decide if I'm busy building an empire.

I have decided that there is, as you say, a difference between male and female sf editors; in that I will agree. There is more rivalry, more of a distance between the male editors, whereas I am much more friendly with the women editors. Perhaps we do not consider each other a mortal threat. Our priorities are more sensible. But we don't say to each other, "Hard science is so boring, let's go out and buy lots of fantasy instead." We weigh each book on its merits, each author for his or her ability, rather than consider if the book will add to our reputations. It's not a matter of whimsy, although it might be a search for diversity.

And that old saw about editing sf by accident is misleading and cruel. I wasn't sitting around the editorial table twiddling my thumbs when the editor-in-chief said, "You, the dumb brunette on the end, you're only doing nurse novels, why don't you do sci-fi too!" Maybe that happened twenty years ago, but nowadays publishers would have to be cracked to trust their money to an ignoramus. I've been editing science fiction because I know the field, because I've been reading the stuff for twenty-five years. And I learned to edit it at Don Wollheim's knee. (While I'm at it, I'm incensed that he hasn't received proper respect for what he's done.) A woman editor's commitment is no less than a man's and, I think, no different. We really do want the same things.

You also have the chicken and egg reversed. The hard sf field isn't declining because of evil females but because the readership is changing. What was once an exclusive male bastion is now co-ed....

I've been in book publishing for thirteen years, ever since I started out as Don Wollheim's copyeditor at Ace Books. As I worked my way up the "ladder of success" I noticed some interesting facts. The people in charge were always men: the presidents, the VPs, the editors-in-chief. Everybody else was usually female. The women had to work their way up from secretary or some other lowly position. The men usually came in sideways from sales

and marketing or magazines. There were exceptions, of course, as there are exceptions to any rule. But on the whole, I occasionally wondered if I should have been a salesperson first. I'd also like to point out that women, being in greater numbers and in lower positions, always were paid less.

Okay, so here I am thirteen years later, near the top of the ladder. I still have no empire. It's been difficult to build one (especially in science fiction) since I also spent my time editing romances, westerns, mysteries, non-fiction, and other assorted books....

I have not been and never will be part of the old-boy network. I don't go drinking with my authors (I don't drink). I don't have them stay over at my house. And I certainly have never been part of the California mafia. Thus my power has been limited to what I can do within the framework of whatever company I work for at the time. My so-called power is also limited by the invisibility of book editors in general. If you ever note the Hugo Award nominations, the names belong to magazine editors and anthology editors. But you will also notice that the names are always male.

Now we come to time. Many of the men who have built empires in science fiction have done so by keeping within the field exclusively. Only once did I edit absolutely nothing but science fiction, for about a year and a half at Doubleday – until they decided I should also edit romances at the same time. Currently I am editing about 55 assorted titles for this year's Playboy list, with only one assistant, and I shall be reduced to a quivering mass of insensate cells before my empire has a firm footing. Nor do I have the time nor my company's expense account to promote myself within the field, the way certain male editors do. I don't rent suites at conventions, nor throw all-night parties. (Perhaps my recognition factor would be higher if I did, but I'm just not in that position.)

... So I guess my conclusion is that I've lasted this long because of dedication, sheer will power, and a continuing search for creativity. I admit that I didn't buy books to build an empire. But I would have liked one.

From Ted Klein, Editor, Twilight Zone magazine. New York

I have been accused (by Edward Bryant) of being thin-skinned because I described as “sneering” and “sophomoric” his references to me in his column. «See Edward Bryant's piece in *The Patchin Review* #2, and letters from Ted Klein and Alice Turner in *The Patchin Review* #3 – Ed.» I plead guilty; I was annoyed – perhaps more than I should have been – by Bryant's sniping, especially after I'd gone out of my way, in the rejection letters, to

say something nice about his work. But since Bryant seems to like collecting adjectives, I've got a couple more for him: "fawning" and "hypocritical", to judge from his latest letters to me – one a letter of apology, the other a self-described "fan" letter-cum-Christmas card. I guess I'm just not used to being tweaked in print and stroked in private.

Finally, I have been accused (by Charles Platt) of a "bullying restraint of free speech" because I wrote a letter to this journal – as did Alice Turner of *Playboy* – taking issue with Bryant's remarks.

Now, it's always risky to criticize an editor in his own magazine, since he has the right of immediate reply; and it's clear, from past issues, that Platt dearly loves having the last word. Still, his charges demand a response. He notes darkly that Alice's letter and my letter to him were written "with mutual consultation" (whatever that is; why doesn't he just come out and call it a conspiracy?), and he claims they constitute "a coordinated, intimidating message: Any writers out there who think poking fun at editors is fair game should think again, if they want to sell their work in future...." Here Platt is making provocative statements which he knows to be untrue. I never suggested, anywhere, that I'd frown on future submissions from Bryant or anyone else, and Alice's letter in *The Patchin Review* says clearly: "Mr. Bryant's next rejection from *Playboy* (should his next offering fail to appeal) will be a NQRFU", i.e. "not quite right for us". Hardly as hopeless as Platt's visions of bankruptcy. Furthermore, as far back as November, Alice assured Ed Bryant (by letter) and Charles Platt (in person, at a SFWA gathering) that she's perfectly willing to consider Bryant's work. Platt *knew* all this, yet chose to ignore it and pose as Champion of Free Speech. I'm not sure whether to blame it on paranoia, sheer maliciousness, or (as I suspect) his desire to be, at all costs, "controversial".

«Ted and Alice did indeed assure me privately that they were open to future submissions from Ed Bryant, but they included no such assurances publicly in their letters to *The Patchin Review*, and thus seemed to create what I felt was a slightly threatening impression. My reply was intended not only on behalf of Ed but of other "writers out there" who might feel intimidated; I now regret that I overstated my case.»

From Karl Hansen, Cortez, Colorado

In regard to Gabby Snitch's column in #3: The correct gossip is that I

have signed a contract to do a trilogy (The Hybrid Trilogy) for Playboy Press, which can only loosely be considered as a sequel to *War Games*. ... I resent the assumption that my next contracted work would be in the same ilk as my previously published work. That is not to say I don't plan to continue writing sicko sex-'n'-violence SF, for I certainly do; however, I am still in the process of negotiating a contract for a true, linear sequel to *War Games*.

I trust that in the future you will more thoroughly research and verify such vicious gossip before printing it ... you are herewith placed on probation, so watch your step around tough guys such as myself. Ask Nick Yermakov how I handled a gang of motorcycle hoodlums who became angry after we hustled them at billiards and took their wagers.

«Gabby Snitch reports from her patio in Miami: “Listen, Karl, you dummy, Sharon Jarvis (your editor, remember?) told me your trilogy was a ‘sequel’, so who’s kidding who, hmm? And by the way, my boyfriend Boris was trained in the Marines to kill people with his bare hands, and he says he could take on you and Yermakov without even looking up from his copy of *Soldier of Fortune*. So you better watch your step!!”»

From Barry Malzberg, *Teaneck, New Jersey*

(In response to the review of *The Engines of the Night* on [Page 15](#) of this issue.)

It's your publication and your review and you have every right to run it. I don't know exactly what my reaction is – in order to give it to you I'd have to participate in more of that self-anatomization which you apparently find so distasteful and I'm sick of it myself – so I'll settle for one point maybe as symptomatic of the whole and quit: I'm proud of *Tactics of Conquest*. «The book which is mentioned in *The Engines of the Night* as having been written in four days – Ed.» I think it's a fine novel and wouldn't have been any better if I had spent 40 days on it (or four years). I'm proud of my work. Its flaws (of which there are many; who's perfect?) are honest and come from the right reasons. I didn't express contempt for the copyeditor or feel it; what she said made me sick because I knew that this book which we both knew was good was doomed to oblivion even as it was being processed. (The genre writer feels that he is writing in invisible ink.) I tried; on every goddamned fucking page I tried to be the best writer I could be.

«This letter was not intended for publication, but I suggested it

should be printed and Barry Malzberg gave his consent.»

From R.S. Harding, Shoals, Indiana

Most of the time, us poor boys of nature are tagged as empty silos, standing tall, lean, waiting for the noble governor of literature to full our ethereal spirits.

Sure, you remember those old ghost tales of men who read nothing but SF and drink Port, and beat off to \$10 fuck books.

Yes, and we remember the illicit days of vagabond censorship careening about the wayward highways of Herbert Spencer and William Sumner – like a hesitant afternoon with a blond-haired child of wonder.

The wonderful spring of courthouse youth rolled out onto the lawn like a corpse folding four of a kind. And the nickel plated janitor gave petrified lectures of silence while the patron of the arts bought beer and cigarettes for the little girls of the neighborhood.

Who says this SF prostitute has no streetcar named desire.

If the vibrant sideroads of this midwestern Duckburg could howl. We would fold up the tables at the Saturday morning Lion Club's pancake fry and retreat to the Nu-Tap for V/O and 7Up and bean soup and crackers.

To the winding pratfalls of modern music:

A tune by The Cars

Cheez Wiz from Quarterflash

REO and Journey.

The girls at the bar laff and wipe their noses. Jimi Hendrix sits at a picnic table, staring at a burned hot dog and a Dixie cup of watery Kool-Aid. And the high school librarian removes the word PENIS from a text book on dream psychology with a laundry marker. And the home team loses.

And the rebels are silently executed, finding work in the furniture factory at \$3.25 an hour.

And we think the dread grip of depression has settled in at the breakfast table. Where dad chases 99-cents-a-dozen eggs with Dark Eyes vodka, and mom lines up a row of Valium soldiers, and the mutant punk waxes over the current *Amazing*.

Ah yes, the lone nites in the water closet – reading Malzberg and butt-fucking the radiant squalor of social depravity. I limp away and reject the optimist scope of cheerleader revenge. Varley's "The Persistence of Vision" was a popcorn read of little note (tho, I did enjoy it: much superior to that noxious, pseudo crime effort "The Barbie Murders").

Hey, gimmie Wolfe's "Seven American Nights". Or a '57 Chevy, Nancy Drew, and a liter of Beefeater.
Hell, we ain't difficult to please.

The End of the Road **R.S. Harding**

Captain Razor felt his own way.
Or so it was told
That butch haircuts were the last nails
On the broken white crosses.

The shopkeeper floats face down
In the pool of the flood.
Mother bakes sweet cherry pies
And Father mends the talking shutters
Of our crooked house.

The end of the road.
In sight of the heartbreakers.
Propane dreams from little Penny's rusted saxophone
Onward crazy men in the streets of pain.

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No crank mail this time; establishing a special section for it last issue seemed to discourage it. So maybe if we now start a section for complaints, that'll discourage them, too.

Complaints Dept.

Among the various assorted complaints that we received about our third issue....

Norman Spinrad telephoned to complain that by printing "irresponsible" items such as the gossip column, the magazine devalued itself and its serious items such as Gregory Benford's article. Norman also objected that our gossip column implied drug use might have occurred at a recent Spinrad

party. No such implication was intended, of course; on the contrary, Gabby Snitch was expressing regret that rumors of drugs turned out to be false.

Shawna McCarthy telephoned to complain that our editorial characterized her as a female editor who is not committed to science fiction as a career. In fact, she said, her intention is to remain a science-fiction editor for the foreseeable future. We apologize to Shawna for the inaccuracy.

Sharon Jarvis wrote pointing out that her new sex-'n'-sci-fi series is called "Spaceways" and the name on the books is John Cleve, not Andy Offutt, as last issue's gossip column suggested.

Lydia Marano, who runs Dangerous Visions bookstore in Sherman Oaks, California, sent back her order of 30 copies of the magazine in a package without any postage on it. Someone had told Lydia about our "L.D.V./R.I.P." article, in which we estimated death rates of contributors to Harlan Ellison's *Last Dangerous Visions* collection. Lydia hadn't read the piece herself, but the mere idea of it was enough to make her decide not to sully her bookstore with *The Patchin Review*. She says her action was purely a matter of taste, and was in no way influenced by close financial and other ties between her business and Harlan Ellison.

Spider Robinson was so dismayed by the gossip column and the inclusion of unsigned criticism that he wrote asking us to return a review that he'd previously sold to us. He even enclosed an international reply coupon. Said he thought there was enough pain in the world already, without us adding to it. Naturally, we consented to his wishes, not wanting to cause Spider any further distress.

Jay Kay Klein pointed out that, prior to its being defaced, the picture of John Varley which we used last issue is one of Klein's which he sold to Berkley for book-jacket use only. We thought it was a publicity photo without copyright restrictions, and have now paid Jay Kay a small sum for the publication of his work. All illustrative matter in *The Patchin Review* is either free from copyright, or used with payment to and permission from the owner.

Competition Results

For readers who felt dissatisfied with science-fiction publishing, this was their chance to tell editors what they wanted – in *The Patchin Review* competition and opinion poll. We announced it in our second issue. We also

publicized it in the *Analog* letters column, and in the current-events column in *Omni*. To add a small incentive, we promised a prize of \$25 and a five-year subscription to the writer of the most eloquent letter, to be chosen by Susan Allison (Editor at Ace) and Norman Spinrad (President of the Science Fiction Writers of America).

Based on their prior experience, the people at *Omni* told us to expect two or three thousand responses from among their more-than-a-million readers. We alerted our mailman.

We needn't have bothered. All in all, precisely *four* letters arrived from *Omni* readers. We received nine more from *Analog*, and four from readers of *The Patchin Review* itself. This, incidentally, was far fewer than the usual letters of comment that come in from *Patchin Review* readers – many of them praising our various articles critical of the publishing industry. So it seems our readers would rather praise other people's opinions than express their own.

However, of the few entries we did receive, many were literate and interesting. Herewith the winning entry, followed by excerpts from some of the others. To those who sent us their opinions, we thank you; Norman Spinrad and Susan Allison read every word. To those of you who didn't bother to write in: if publishers aren't giving you what you want, you have only yourselves to blame.

From Zoë Landale, Wakefield, B.C., Canada

The saddest characteristic of the science-fiction/fantasy field is the furious rate at which authors recycle worn-out ideas. The motto of the publishers who buy these re-creations, stale before they've even been released, appears to be "If it sold once, it will sell again." Cutesy dragons, swords wielded by morons of little charm, noble elves, and worlds within ships, are of perennial interest only to those who can fatten their bank accounts upon them. Fantasy especially is liable to such ideational theft. (How many demi- Ring Lord books are in print?) "Hard" science fiction, while often hideously dull, can be more original because of the constraints imposed on it by the material itself. For a reader, the gross amount of derivative material being passed off as new is infuriating.

Two things can redeem a work of fiction; without them, no matter how well written, a work will be irredeemably dull. These necessities are good characterization and a fast-paced plot. The device of the latter is often used as a cover-up for the fact that character delineation and development is on a par

with that of comics. (Sword and sorcery commonly suffers from this defect.) Sloppy writing is a favorite target of sf writers who, quite rightly, want to raise the level of craftsmanship in their genre. The subject of originality, sad to say, is never mentioned. How long will publishers continue to buy such pseudo-plagiastic drivel? Ultimately, they are undercutting their own markets by lessening the power of the images in which they deal. It is an all too frequent experience to start a book and put it down after the first few pages with the queasy feeling of having read it all before.

What would I like to see on the shelves of book stores? Less pandering to supposedly cretinous adolescent taste. Even dreadful books sell if they are promoted enough. So do Macdonald's hamburgers. Feeding people literary junk food will produce either intellectual pygmies or bored, dissatisfied customers. Take note, publishers, such people do not read. This means that they don't graduate to being adult book buyers – at least not in the sf field.

With wearisome frequency, people say to me, "I used to read science fiction when I was a kid, but I got bored with it." As teenagers, they liked sf because it was fun and presented them with new ideas. They stopped when, after reading a number of books, the plots became interchangeable and the writing banal. This is why science fiction has managed to retain its uniquely juvenile status for so long, because it is literature that the bulk of its readers outgrow.

At its best, sf/fantasy is wildly inventive. Why aren't we offered more of the real thing?

From *James W. Milburn, Hollywood, California*

I like action-adventure science fiction. I like lots of machines and spaceships and starships. I don't much like human interest stories above the "fight for survival" level. The hero can cry all he wants to as long as he can shoot straight through his tears. I like things cold and mechanical and computer-like.

I like the characters to be two-dimensional. The more you detail them the less likely they are to seem to be like me. I can use my imagination to fill in all the details with exactly what I want them to be.

I like stories with mystery and suspense: why the colonists are dying or the starships blowing up right and left.

I like stories with lots of advanced powerful personal weapons (blasters, needlers, slicers) I can dream of myself carrying and using.

From Eugenie Menten, Bellingham, Washington

I want literature by *women* and *men* about *women* and *women and men*, literature that depicts women as the vital, intelligent human beings that we are! And I especially like literature that shows women travelling and fighting and being free and good.

From Linda Austin, New York City

It's happening all over – in the visual arts, in dance, in schools, in social programs – so it's no surprise that it should happen in science fiction. The name of the disease is Retrenchment, Reaction, Regression; the symptoms are multiple. In the arts we see increasing commodification, marketing strategies, and careerism, resulting in predictability, blandness, and return to old values; artistic styles and subject matter are lifted from their original historic moment, repackaged, and thus stripped of contextual significance – or rather, the context becomes one of “taste” or of nostalgia for the artifacts (modes of signification) of a bygone era, minus the experiential discomforts of said era. The notion of “classical values” rears its comforting head, values that have less to do with structural requirements of a given form than with a longing for eternal verities.

Science fiction often neglects to exploit the advantages it has over other forms. It need not opt for the same kind of verisimilitude demanded by the realistic novel... (but) ...seems to be grounded, if not in *reality*, then in *plausibility*.... The plausibility factor makes possible, in a more functional way than modernist fiction, new rhetorical, narrative, and linguistic structures. Unbound by fetters to realism, yet not reduced to purely formal invention, science fiction can have its cake and eat it too!

That it so often doesn't is a cause for sorrow. I have a feeling that there are still quite a few stops to be pulled.

From W.F. Hilander, Ames, Iowa

So you want to know what I most want and value in Sci Fi. OK, I'll tell you: in a word, ESCAPE! Like most adults, I've got myself trapped on a treadmill. Sure, it's a “good job” and my boss is reasonable. But I get bored with the routine – almost never any excitement or challenge to the imagination. I'd look for a different field of employment but after 40 that isn't so easy, and my wife frowns on my “taking risks”, especially with the house not paid for and the kids in high school.

In my occasional spare hours after taking care of the bills and other

mail, or the PTA, or taking out the cat's box, I read science fiction. Strictly escape, to forget or get away from my mundane milieu. Sure, I could just as well read a mystery or *Reader's Digest*, and I've been known to do that too, but Sci Fi can take you further away, give a greater sense of freedom.

Good luck with your project, but I really don't think you will be able to change things much. Readers like me just don't cut much ice compared with the pressures of economics and fads. But it was nice of you to ask.

From Lee Burwasser, Hyattsville, Maryland

Preferences in fantasy and science fiction:

Better a good space opera than bad SF. The "Berserker" series was a collection of good puzzle stories and space opera. Then Saberhagen discovered he was a Serious Writer; *Berserker Man* is pretentious trash. Same goes for fantasy: better good sword& sorcery than bad Epics.

Stop pestering writers for sequels. Especially to *Silverlock/D&D* stories like *Titan*, *Ringworld*, or the Riverworld; the same party in the same wilderness seldom makes as good a story.

If an SF story can be about real people in situations shaped by science and technology, and if fantasy can be about real people in archetypal and preternatural situations, so much the better.

From Kenneth S. Edgett, Rochester, New York

Science fiction should be entertaining, should contain new ideas, should be scientifically correct, and should have well-developed characters that can successfully solve their problems.

Too much science fiction continues to dwell on worn-out themes, like time travel, alien invasions, mythology of Europe and Southwest Asia, and good-vs.-evil stories involving young men and beautiful women. Over-emphasis of recurring themes tends to turn people off science fiction. If every new science fiction story really was new, presenting different ideas and characters, more people would buy and read science fiction.

From Kevin F. Orens, Arlington, Virginia

Science fiction used to be terrific. We all remember the prehistoric jungles of Venus, and the skinny desert people of Mars. Too bad that science caught up with us. The Moon is lifeless, Venus is too hot for organic molecules to form, and the icy breezes of Mars whisper with no ears to hear. Science fiction has lost the romance of exotic civilizations on our neighboring worlds.

But we could adjust to the new reality. How about the Jules Verne approach of *20,000 Leagues* for these worlds, where the stories are of men against the environment? How about stories of the Moon and Mars the way we know them now? There are some in the magazines, but book editors seem not to like this idea. What we get are remakes of the jungles of Venus, the desert civilizations of Mars, and so on, moved to imaginary worlds in some galaxy far, far away. There are no novels of a gold rush on the Moon, or a homestead on Mars. Editors seem to feel that nobody is still interested in the Moon or Mars. We're supposed to be more interested in a fantasy world that exists nowhere.

From Bob Yeakle, Hagerstown, Maryland

By catering to every imaginable taste, S.F. editors are making money at the expense of coherence within their field. The remedy is urgent; how can Washington's policy-makers take seriously the allotment of money for extra-earthly enterprises when the writing which should persuade them is so diffused among questionable works such as borderline fantasies, fairy tales which pose as S.F., barbaric battles set in a neo-medievalistic future, etc., that even the plausibility of local space stations becomes suspect?

Sheila Finch-Rayner, a school teacher in California, was one of the various readers who objected to Gregory Benford's article on fantasy last issue.

Fantasy as Super-Vitamin Sheila Finch-Rayner

It's becoming popular for science-fiction writers, particularly the high-tech type, to bemoan the low state of the art of fantasy, and its intrusions (perish the thought!) into the exalted realms of science fiction. I suspect that this complaint reflects two things: a chauvinistic horror at the rising popularity of all fantasy, poor varieties as well as superior, and a misunderstanding of the true nature of the genre. Greg Benford's recent chastisement of fantasy as "pollution" is symptomatic of this.

It doesn't seem particularly helpful to argue that it's somehow easier to write fantasy than SF. Writing good fantasy is as rigorous a discipline as writing good SF. The problem doesn't lie with *good* fantasy, whose aims and methods we'll consider later, but with the commercial success of the other

type, the mindless, simplistic, dungeons-and-dragons variety. The real question here is why is this low level fantasy flourishing? In answer, Benford refers to Bettelheim's findings about the effects of fairy-tale deprivation in childhood, but I think he misses the real significance of this fact.

Let's leave out of the discussion the influence on the publishing world of the Madison Avenue syndrome of catering to the lowest common denominator. For once, this cynical philosophy might be right, but for the wrong reason. The kid in the street is certainly reading poor fantasy, *because he needs to right now*, not because he's incapable of appreciating something better in the future. The black-and-white simplifications of what he's reading should give us a clue to what's going on.

If much of fantasy today seems to resemble the fairy tales of our childhood, the reading of which occupies an important place in our psychic development, it's because that's the role it's playing.

"The fairy tale's concern is not useful information about the external world," Bettelheim says, "but the inner processes taking place in an individual." The mysterious, often frightening rumblings of our immature psyches find their expression here, in tales of enchanted princesses and evil stepmothers, magical quests and supernatural helpers. These tales are as often full of gruesome violence as they are of pretty fancies. But then so are the impulses of our unconscious minds. Through them, the unconscious is translated into the conscious, and the unacceptable is defused of its power to harm us. "In myths and fairy tales, as in dreams," Jung wrote, "the psyche tells its own story."

In the normal run of things, we outgrow the need for the allegories of fairy tales with their polarizations and their archetypes. We outgrow the need, that is, if we're allowed to indulge it in the crucial years of childhood.

But what has happened to this source of emotional nutrition? If we glance at any of the reading books supplied to grade-school children in the last few decades we find the answer. "Kiddy Lit" (the label betrays the contempt felt by its users) has banished the bloody but basically honest fairy tale, in favor of Dick and Jane and the boring, antiseptic world they inhabit. Those fairy tales that survive are bowdlerized. Cinderella's stepsisters no longer take kitchen knives to slice off their toes when the prince offers a tiny glass slipper; instead, it seems they're glad she has an equal opportunity at the prize. The woodsman no longer carves up the wolf's belly to rescue Red Riding Hood's granny; he lectures the beast on the dangers of overeating.

Dream deprivation, the researchers tell us, causes neurosis in otherwise healthy humans. Where else can the beleaguered, dreamless adult reader go to get his psychic vitamins but to fantasy? Should we be surprised, therefore, that so much popular fantasy reads like juvenile fairy tales? The Gor-men and their slaves spring full-blown from the adolescent unconscious, and it's no accident that *Star Wars* begins "a long time ago in a galaxy far away", a fairy-tale formula we all recognize.

If we're lucky enough, we go on from these unpromising, slightly disreputable beginnings, where the juxtaposition of good and evil allows the reader to make a clear choice, to a more mature universe of complexity and ambiguity. This is the territory good fantasy tries to map, though its language is coded and symbolic, like the language of poetry, no more straightforward and realistic than the convolutions of the inner landscape it describes. "It is not antirational," Le Guin says of fantasy in *The Language of the Night*, "but pararational; not realistic but surrealistic, super-realistic, a heightening of reality." Good science fiction may concern itself with our present situation and our future possibilities, but good fantasy mirrors an inner, psychological reality. "One may understand the cosmos, but never the ego," G.K. Chesterton wrote; "the self is more distant than any star."

No, it's not healthy to be addicted to poor fantasy, any more than a steady diet of B.E.M.s and deathrays is beneficial to your science-fiction health. What we need is a superior version of both. The reader who graduates to the highland of fantasy becomes secure in the knowledge of himself. That's the reader who's ready to face, in Benford's words, "a future which is urban, diverse, technology-driven and packed with ambiguities."

Aren't we all, fantasy and science-fiction writers alike, hoping for that reader?

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Gregory Benford replies:

Ms. Rainer's argument is essentially Bettelheim's. As I said in my essay, this has some validity, but certainly cannot explain the spread and popularity of fantasy in countries where there has been no bowdlerization of fairy tales. Something else is afoot here.

The Patchin Review has been accused of causing trouble for its own sake. Rather, we feel there should be a forum where debates can be staged freely – even when they were sparked originally elsewhere.

The Case for Intelligent Criticism Nicholas Yermakov

As a result of the growth of science fiction in the past few years, many of its practitioners, including yours truly, can now actually make a living writing the stuff. In other words, dare I make the scandalous suggestion, we are becoming more “commercial”.

This seems to bother some people – among them, John Clute. In his column in the February issue of *Fantasy & Science Fiction* Clute writes, “Now there’s no one to defend our rear. A genre too big to read is a genre you can’t see the boundaries of. As readers and writers and editors and reviewers we become at last classic victims of the dehumanizing scale of the twentieth century. Ultimately, there’s no *we* left at all. And in the new environment of media packaging that treats fans as consumers ... it’s become increasingly difficult to get the feel of new books, which more and more take on the aspect of products assembled for consumption.”

I find this an especially revelatory statement. Mr. Clute takes me to task for, as he puts it, betraying both myself and my ideas and writing what he terms “a potted package tour of the space opera market”. And as if that were not enough, he also takes it upon himself to review my title, my dedication (!) and my afterword. Mr. Clute, it would appear, is nothing if not thorough.

In her introduction to Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Language of the Night* the late Susan Wood spoke of the field as offering “...the most challenging freedom of all: the freedom to set one’s own boundaries.” Mr. Clute’s statements imply that this sort of thing disturbs him. The genre has become so big that it’s a victim of the “dehumanizing scale” of this century. Given Mr. Clute’s feelings in this regard, I wonder at his abilities to cope with the next one. He seems intimidated by an environment that treats fans as consumers (as if they weren’t) and he seems to think that books should be something other, or at the very least, something more than “products assembled for consumption”. What should they be, then?

Oscar Wilde said that “Art should never try to be popular. The public should try to make itself artistic.” A nice thought, and one with which I agree in principle. However, any artist who works in a vacuum is going to starve, and he’s never going to communicate with anyone.

Throughout his column, Clute returns again and again to harp on commercial considerations, as though it were a sin for writers to aspire to

making money. In making his point Clute exploits, rather than reviews, the work of Stephen Goldin, Paul Preuss, Orson Scott Card, yours truly, and Gene Wolfe, who “when he’s being as straightforward as he’s capable of, is at best competent....” Like Merv Griffin doing a theme show, Clute runs his own number throughout all these so-called reviews, slipping in sly remarks, fey observations, and doing everything short of what a critic is supposed to do: namely, addressing himself to the i. Underlying all this is an absurd lament for the old days. It seems the genre has outgrown Mr. Clute’s grasp, “...we knew that a genre still small enough to read was a genre small enough to understand. You couldn’t be snuck up on from behind.” Poor, confused John Clute. Oh, for memories of the way we were! Let’s hear it for science fiction’s clubby atmosphere and the days of starvation royalty advances and fans being the keepers of the flame. It is to puke.

Amazingly enough, Clute has high praise for *The Hitch-Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, and one of the very reasons why he seems to like it is that it appears to be a contrived marketing package. Ah, but it’s got enough “rude knowingness about media hype versions of science fiction” to make it a “joy”. He’s making fun of us all, you see, and it’s so bad that it’s good. Or something like that.

What can one say about a reviewer who ignores all academic considerations in his criticism, who attempts to address himself to the framework of the plot (but gets it wrong), and ignores completely all characterization and *story*; who, by implication, accuses me of ulterior motives in selecting the people to whom I dedicate my work – well, *this*, at least, cannot be allowed to pass. Mr. Clute writes: “...with his dedication made not only to personal friends but to public friends Norman Spinrad *and* Harlan Ellison as well....” I’m not sure what Mr. Clute means by “public friends” but the inference seems clear and it leaves a very bad taste in my mouth. My relationship with each of those gentlemen has always been personal and is frankly none of Mr. Clute’s business. To set the record straight: Harlan gave me a great deal of encouragement and showed me not a few kindnesses when I was just barely starting out. Norman was instrumental, along with Harlan, in helping me to overcome some difficulties regarding payment for the short story which was to become the basis of the novel in question, and he introduced me to the agent who sold it for me. If these aren’t sufficient grounds for acknowledging indebtedness in a dedication, I don’t know what are.

As for this sophomoric attitude which seems to long for the ghetto days of science fiction when we were small and untouched by the dreaded tentacles of the commercial octopus, it is here that Mr. Clute reveals his true colors. He is a *fan* and the place for a fan to review my work is in a fanzine, not in a professional publication. It is unfortunate that there is an element in fandom which professes to hold a proprietary *droit du seigneur* over the genre. This is ridiculous. The genre does not belong to fandom. If science fiction belonged to anyone, it would belong to those of us who write it.

It is my fondest hope that as many people read me as is possible. If my books sell well, that makes me a “commercial” writer and if consumer oriented packaging results in my telling my stories to a greater audience, then I’m all for it.

Sure, I write for myself, but I also write for my readers, for a market, if you will. I’m a pro, not a literary onanist. I tell stories because I want to communicate with people, and whatever my other motives might be, whatever exertions I make in striving for artistic merit, if my sole purpose was to make money, believe me, there are easier ways to do it.

Mr. Clute wisely avoids directly accusing anyone of literary whoring, but he implies it with almost every word. He uses misdirection. In my case, he cites a passage early in the book, in which I consciously chose not to reveal certain things about one of my characters. Clute uses this to suggest that I reveal *nothing* about that character anywhere in the book, “beyond what Doc Smith could have told anyone in his sleep,” a classic example of selecting the evidence to fit the facts.

Mr. Clute seems to see cynical, commercial ambition lurking between the lines of my novel. However, if such was my sole concern, I would not have a reputation among editors as a pain in the ass: one who has defended his conception of his work against sales personnel and art directors and others whose concepts did not gibe with mine. Yes, I hope to get as wide a readership for my work as is possible, and I fully intend to make money doing so, but I will also fight for the integrity of my work. And I am just as committed to defending myself against self-appointed authorities frantically reaffirming their own prejudices and insecurities. Incest is not any more appealing than rape.

I’m young, I’m very new at this, I screw up, I am perhaps a bit too loud and I still have a lot to learn. I will write a *Journey from Flesh* with whatever flaws it has, and look forward to intelligent criticism, some of which I get in

the mail from my readers, which I welcome. I will undertake to novelize two *Battlestar Galactica* scripts because I am, to use Algis Budrys's phrase, a "marginal writer", and I don't get paid much. When you're starting out, you don't get the Sistine Chapel all the time, you occasionally get called in to paint a bathroom wall, but if you have any integrity, you try to give it as good a paint job as that particular bathroom will allow. Admittedly, this can be an exercise in heartbreak and frustration, but it is not ignoble. If you try to do your best, honestly, as I do whether I am novelizing someone else's work or writing my own, you have a right to take umbrage at anyone who pretends to know your motives and intent, and addresses these rather than the work.

In *Locus*, Norman Spinrad wrote that favorable reviews "have no correlation with either the Hugo results or the bestseller list anymore. Except maybe a negative one." This condition could very well be the result of the fact that an increasing number of critics have started acting as though they were the collective conscience of the writers and have taken to using their forums to promote themselves at the expense of the writers whom they are reviewing.

Intelligent criticism has value to both the reader and the writer, but criticism which serves only as a showcase for the wit and acerbity of the reviewer serves no one and deserves only a lowbrow salutation from the Bronx.

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Reply from John Clute

Few of Mr. Yermakov's protestations stray out of the category of fair though dunderhead comment, and the best rejoinder to his remarkable rendering of what I had to say is probably just to refer the interested reader back to the *Fantasy & Science Fiction* column (February 1982) in question. All the same, I'd like to make a couple of apologies.

In trying to get at the fatal powder-pigeon inflatedness of Mr. Yermakov's space opera, I made an implicit (and perhaps unclear) comparison between the emptiness of the text and the elaborateness of the apparatus that surrounded it fore and aft. I felt (and continue to feel) that there was something aesthetically offensive about this disproportion, nor has anything in Mr. Yermakov's response in any sense modified this feeling. The

book is otiose, and it is surrounded by boasts. In describing the boasting apparatus, I did refer to dedications made “not only to personal friends but to public friends Norman Spinrad *and* Harlan Ellison as well.” If my phrasing seemed to claim that either Spinrad or Ellison enjoyed platform rather than personal friendships with Mr. Yermakov, then I’m very sorry, of course. The nature of his relationships with them should be none of my business. Which is precisely the point. By dedicating his science-fiction novel to senior writers extremely well known within the science-fiction field, Mr. Yermakov was necessarily (and very clearly) putting the fact of his relationships with Ellison and Spinrad into the public domain. Which made his use of their names precisely my business. And I thought (and I continue to think) that Mr. Yermakov’s use of public names in this fashion was a kind of boasting.

But maybe a kind of search as well. I thought (and I continue to think) that Mr. Yermakov is probably “a good writer thoroughly lost,” so far as the evidence of *Journey from Flesh* goes, and that he’s probably innocent of any forebodings about the effect of the noise he makes, which may be an attempt at echo-location in a publishing and reading world that many others than myself have begun to find a touch nightmarish. But I’m afraid it was not very illuminating of Mr. Yermakov to read my gestures at describing some of this nightmare, from which irony was not perhaps completely absent, as a fan’s lament. It strikes me that anyone who loves genre literatures, as I do, must feel some regret when one of them, like science fiction at the present time, seems to be losing the feedback systems that structured its products, which one could call commercial (with caveats) in a fashion one could never call *Journey from Flesh* commercial. So far as I’m concerned, a good commercial novel exists in a knowing feedback relation to its audience; a good commercial novel always somehow feels canny. So I regret the loss of canniness. In its place. That much I’ll admit, Mr. Yermakov. I just don’t think *Journey from Flesh* is very canny.

Many people asked us not to drop the Survey, so we have retained it. To reduce the labor of its compilation, we’ll be leaving out the pictures in future and typesetting it in a single column. The reviews were editorially written in the past. They are now mostly written by Richard McEnroe.

The Patchin Review Survey

Ace Books

Trevor Hoyle *Seeking the Mythical Future*. Visually powerful, obsessional quest of a deranged volunteer through a vividly evoked surreal alternate universes. Detailed, perceptive, highly evocative, and enigmatic. \$2.25 PB.

William Tuning *Fuzzy Bones*. Gruff Pappy Jack Holloway and newly-cutesified Little Fuzzy are back, with a hooker who doesn't hook, a marine gunnery sergeant who talks like a priest, and a priest who talks like a marine gunnery sergeant. Can they stop villainous attorney Hugo Ingermann and his unemployed rabble from looting the Fuzzy reservation of its valuable Sunstones? Not if they keep stopping every ten pages for a cocktail hour. Cloying, alcoholic, ouija-board science fiction. \$2.50 PB.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson *The Golden Naginata*. Further occult adventures of Tomoe Gozen, woman samurai, fighting beside her husband for the Shogunate. Vivid and unusually authentic, the brusque declarative pacing of feudal Japanese overlays English prose. \$2.75 PB.

David Bischoff, Dennis Bailey *Tin Woodman*. Via persecuted espers, humanity meets a gestalt alien race, learns the espers are our next evolutionary step toward the gestalt level. Enthusiastic mix of genre modes, generates nothing terribly interesting of its own. Fannish/SLANnish revenge fantasy. \$2.50 PB.

Dean Ing *High Tension*. Eight stories of shrewd technical extrapolation, competent characterization. Two articles on nuclear survival; a third on future weapons. \$2.50 PB.

Robert Silverberg *The Time Hoppers*. Future cop pursues time-hopping refugees from overpopulated future who threaten to disrupt the past; finds he too is lured by yesteryear. Transitional Silverberg bridging book-a-month period and modern effete-decadent period. \$2.25 PB.

Gene Wolfe *The Devil in a Forest*. Young Mark of Dark Ages Europe defends his village from roguish highwayman manipulated by supposed witch, whose mystic powers (and, hence, this book's "fantasy" classification) are eventually debunked. Authentic, evocative story of maturation in perilous times. \$2.25 PB.

Robert A. Heinlein *Expanded Universe*. Most of the "new" fiction is about as minor as professionally published work can get, but the prophetic work

“Solution Unsatisfactory” is still here. Most of the nonfiction is dated (especially pieces concerning nuclear war and armaments) but Heinlein’s trip through Russia is informative, as are pieces on E.E. Smith and Paul Dirac. Interesting view of evolving attitudes in a likeable reactionary. \$3.50 PB.

Andre Norton *Voorloper*. Bart, a young wandering peddler, and Illo, a Healer, quest for ancient origins of the prehistoric plant terror that has shattered the young colony world of Voor. Typical, solid Norton Juvenile. \$2.75 PB.

David C. Smith and Richard Tierney *Red Sonja: The Ring of Ikribu*. Red Sonja, fiery Hyrkanian wench raped into swordswomanhood, battles ancient, evil sorcerer for the mighty Ring of Ikribu. Comic-book character cribbed from forgotten Howard story and transcribed into blood-oozing, foul-mouthed mock-heroics. \$2.25 PB.

Cynthia Felice and Connie Willis *Water Witch*. A girl and her goat can’t go wrong. Deza resists princess’s greedy plan to trade her desert planet’s scant wealth for weapons. \$2.50 PB.

Greg Bear *Strength of Stones*. Three linked novellae on the world God-Does-Battle, where self-aware cities have banished their citizens, descendants of religious colonists, for their sins. \$2.50 PB.

Andrew J. Offutt *The Undying Wizard*. Two-fisted, half-witted sword & sorcery strangled by affected prose. Celtic Reaver faces a sorcerous menace from Howard’s Atlantean prehistory. Not “mightier than Conan”; dumber. \$2.25 PB.

Michael de Larrabeiti *The Borribles Go for Broke*. Borribles, eternal children whose subculture exists under the noses of contemporary London folk, confront anal-retentive police inspector who abuses horses and lovable old tramps, and Bad Borribles corrupted by adulthood’s mercenary ways. Honestly written, if you can tolerate the whimsy. \$2.50 PB.

Robert Hughes *School Days*. Splatter-movie bloodshed as sadistic college professor tests mind-control formula in a mid-West murder spree. Can the likeable cop whose wife died in the Professor’s earlier experiments stop him? \$3.25 PB.

Gordon R. Dickson *In Iron Years*. Reprint of a minor Doubleday collection. Slick and readable. \$2.50 PB.

Arbor House

Robert Silverberg *The Majipoor Chronicles*. Solidly crafted stories of Lord Valentine's world; "solid" being the most that Silverberg thinks we deserve. Linking device of a young man viewing these stories as history tapes serves solely to placate sales department wary of anthologies' saleability. \$5.95 TP.

Atheneum

Brian W. Aldiss *Helliconia Spring*. First volume in massive epic trilogy. A young orphan's odyssey on a primitive planet whose binary star system imposes a 1500-year cycle of intolerable heat and cold. A vividly detailed, subtle, human, mature examination of civilized aspirations and arduous survival, in Aldiss's words a "scientific romance", superficially identifiable as fantasy. \$15.95 HC.

Avon Books

Arthur C. Clarke & George W. Proctor *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame Volume III*. The Nebula-winning novellas, novelettes, and shorts from 1965 through 1969. A good intro to the field, but it hardly needed one "editor", let alone two. \$3.95 PB.

James Blish *The Star Dwellers*. Precocious adolescent technocrats force xenophobic, materialistic grownups to make friends with alien race. Classic adolescent power fantasy. \$1.95 PB.

Stanislaw Lem *Mortal Engines*. Stripped of self-satisfied academic stodge, Lem can be rewarding. But these coy vignettes suggest fairy tales should be left to kids who understand them. \$2.95 PB.

Bantam Books

Elizabeth Scarborough *Song of Sorcery*. Maggie the hearth-witch searches for a sister lured by a heartless gypsy serving an evil wizard. Lightweight but modestly entertaining. \$2.25 PB.

Kevin O'Donnell, Jr. *War of Omission*. Decently middle-class revolutionaries fight near-future bureaucracy with ultimate weapon reassuringly free of unsightly torn bodies and property damage. Rebels then come to terms with bloody realities and lack of social services they thought they didn't want. Serious study of social consequences. \$2.75 PB.

Guy Gregory *Heroes of Zara Keep*. Five adolescents saved from certain death by Wise Old Mage to rescue an alternate world from evil sorcery. Peculiar prose (“His feet were sure, but they could not see.”) further hampers mundane treatment of stock plot. \$2.50 PB.

Samuel R. Delany *Babel-17*. Two-fisted poet-semanticist battles life-threatening grammar from beyond space. Finely crafted texture cannot compensate for absence of substantial subject matter. \$2.50 PB.

Mike McQuay *Matthew Swain: The Deadliest Show in Town*. “...dedicated to the memory of Raymond Chandler, who understood.” – and who never wrote this badly. More action-packed thrills in the decadent future. McQuay teaches a college course in writing science fiction. *Matthew Swain* is a *Locus* bestseller. \$2.25 PB.

Berkley Books

Philip José Farmer *The Book of Philip José Farmer*. The last Neanderthal eking out his days in a human junkyard; beautiful scientists and mad daughters; Kilgore Trout and sexual implications of the Charge of the Light Brigade – important stories which broke the ground we now cultivate. \$2.50 PB.

A.E. van Vogt *The World of Null-A*. Sometimes clumsy, but vibrantly powerful interplanetary odyssey loaded with dream imagery and drama. \$2.25 PB.

Janet Morris *Dream Dancer*. Reviewed in hardcover, *Patchin Review* #1. \$2.75 PB.

Frederik Pohl *Planets Three*. Three novellae from Pohl’s early days as a pseudonymous pulpist: “Figurehead”, “Red Moon of Danger”, and “Donovan Had a Dream”. Unpretentious space opera. \$2.50 PB.

Eric Van Lustbader *Beneath An Opal Moon*. Fourth in the Sunset Warrior Cycle. Quest of Moichi the Navigator to avenge his friend’s murder confronts him with ancient, mysterious martial art. Vivid imagery marred by self-indulgent stylistic affectations and grammatical lapses. \$2.50 PB.

Chopmen

Brian W. Aldiss *Foreign Bodies*. Six stories (four new, two obscurely published in England) in this new collection created especially and

exclusively for Singapore publishers. “Both author and publisher take pride in this innovation in author-publisher relations. Both hope to grow rich as a result.” Pleasing Asia-flavored tales of strangeness, somewhere between Somerset Maugham and *Twilight Zone*. \$5 PB, \$10 HC, from Chopmen Publishers, 428 Katong Shopping Center, Singapore 1543.

Crown

Douglas Adams *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*. Sequel to *Hitch-Hiker’s Guide* chattily lampoons genre conventions and reality in general. Earthman Arthur Dent finds the ultimate answer (“Forty-Two”), to Life and the Universe. \$7.95 HC.

DAW Books

C.J. Cherryh *The Pride of Chanur*. Original space opera, fast-paced and refreshingly non-anthropocentric. Discovery of humanity brings conflict between two starfaring races to a head. \$2.95 PB.

Tanith Lee *Vazkor, Son of Vazkor*. Sequel to *The Birthgrave*. Son of hated ruler tries to survive his father’s reviled memory. Literate heroic fantasy. \$2.50 PB.

Susan M. Schwartz *Hecate’s Cauldron*. A solid collection, if somewhat repetitious – perhaps an inevitable result of the narrow subject matter.

Ian Wallace *The Rape of the Sun*. Three astronauts in best Heinlein juvenile tradition set out to build a solar satellite but encounter Dhurk, a hyper-advanced, guilt-ridden alien come to steal the Sun. Good old-fashioned science fiction. \$2.95 PB.

Sharon Green *The Warrior Within*. Spirited female agent assigned to act slave-girl role on barbarian planet, rebels at being chained, spanked, but becomes nostalgic for bondage. Tepid John Norman imitation. Don’t bother thumbing for the “good bits” – there aren’t any. \$2.50 PB.

Ron Goulart *Upside/Downside*. Supercop investigates plot to kill off America’s cyborg owners by instant aging. Usual ho-ho / ho-hum lovably “wacky” Goulart. \$2.25 PB.

Neal Barrett, Jr. *Aldair: The Legion of Beasts*. Genetically tailored pig-men leave their enclave on forgotten Earth, seek humans who created and abandoned them, find hostile aliens instead. Fast-paced vaguely science-

flavored future-fantasy. \$2.25 PB.

Del Rey Books

H.P. Lovecraft *At the Mountains of Madness, The Tomb, The Case of Charles Dexter Ward, The Doom That Came to Sarnath, The Lurking Fear and Other Stories, The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*. Dark, twisted, florid, racist horror stories by an eccentric who translated what he saw as the lamentable mongrelization of the Northeast by Mediterranean immigrants into accounts by mind-blasted victims of encounters with surviving remnants of the antediluvian Cthulhu Mythos and its subhuman worshippers. Like Howard, Lovecraft possessed a feverish vigor his imitators lack, imparted by his crippling neuroses.

Michael McCollum *A Greater Infinity*. The old “average man is chosen to shape destiny” story. This time, he intercedes between Neanderthals and modern humans in ancient war across infinite parallel timelines. Stale mix of well-worn notions. Ultimately bland. \$2.50 PB.

Clifford D. Simak *[[title omitted]]* Inexplicably, instantaneously, most of humanity was spirited off Earth in an “experiment” staged by ancient aliens. The few remaining survivors, having restored a semblance of order, now must cope with the inexplicable return of the missing millions, who are no longer welcome. \$2.50 PB.

Jack L. Chalker *Cerberus: A Wolf in the Fold*. Second in Four Lords of The Diamond series. Multi-body assassin/agent goes to prison-planet to fight menace of humanoid robots infiltrating human federation. Awkward, clumsy prose. \$2.50 PB.

Robert Don Hughes *The Wizard in Waiting*. Sequel to *The Prophet of Lamath*. Pelmen the powershaper returns with Rosha the swordsman, a troupe of indigent players, and a sentient castle to rescue the throne of Queen Bronwynn from the usurper Ligne. Those who can tolerate this absurdity may appreciate defter-than-average character and exposition. \$2.75 PB.

Robert Don Hughes *The Prophet of Lamath* (reissued to coincide with the above). Pelmen the power shaper, mystic prophet, tries to oust a two-headed dragon menacing his kingdom, while merchants plot to take control. Hero is developed in some depth – not only controls power but is controlled by it – and dragon comes across as feisty homicidal psychopath. Light, wry,

entertaining. \$1.95 PB.

Donning / Starblaze

Robert Randall *The Dawning Light*. Characteristically slick Silverberg-Garrett collaboration depicts virtuous aliens fighting to preserve their planet and their ways from manipulative Earthmen. Includes entertaining Silverberg afterword and several mediocre illustrations. \$4.95 TP.

Qwert Yuiop *The New Adventures of Frankenstein. Volume I: Frankenstein Lives Again*. More derived from Hammer movies than from Mary Shelley. U.S. scientist is obsessed with locating and reviving the monster. Twisted hypnotist and hulking aide are obsessed with scientist's tasty fiancée. Transylvanian town suffers a re-run. \$4.95 TP.

Richard & Wendy Pini *Elfquest (Book 1)*. Contains five issues of the comic, in color greatly enhancing the original. Appealing style and mature story line (relatively speaking) raise this above cutesy-poo kiddie category. \$9.95 TP.

Doubleday

George W. Harper *Gypsy Earth*. Upon running into hostile alien invaders, mankind must perfect a hyperdrive and find a new star to retreat to. Technologically accurate (author has a science background) and snappy though unsurprising space-war adventure, afflicted, alas, by character speaking in relentless Scottish dialect. \$10.95 HC.

Gary Alan Ruse *The Gods of Cerus Major*. Rough, tough, white-bread space troopers scorn hidebound diplomats as they fight for survival after crashing on planet of nasty aliens. Fairly standard formula fiction. \$10.95. HC.

Houghton Mifflin

Julian May *The Golden Torc*. Sequel to *The Many-Colored Land*. Gifted, alienated humans contest with humanoid aliens for Earth's Pliocene epoch. Well crafted, classic science fiction that suffers only in comparison with the excessive hype shovelled upon it. \$13.95. HC.

Playboy Press

Robert E. Vardeman & Victor Milan *Demon of the Dark Ones*. Sixth War of the Powers book (we somehow missed reviewing #5). Fast Longstrider, the sadistic Prince Rann, and the sorceress-sisters face final battle with the

reptilians and their servant, dread demon Istu. Flippant moments, graphic gore, and slightly explicit sex distinguish this from most heroic fantasy. \$2.50 PB.

Random House

Michael Moorcock *Byzantium Endures*. Historical novel (first of a trilogy) set in Russia from 1900 through the revolution. Narrated as by a crazed, pompous, senile, anti-Semitic Russian Jew, Colonel Pyat, a spinoff character in the Jerry Cornelius mythology. The tone tends toward ponderous pomposity, inherent in the conception of this as Pyat's memoirs; but the division between his voice and Moorcock's is unclear, and author may be closer to antihero than he seems to imagine. Real strength of the book lies in its coherent conception of Pyat's whimsical, incoherent madness, and in the historical detail – someone could use this as source material for a great historical novel. \$14.50. HC.

Timescape Books

M. John Harrison *A Storm of Wings*. Alien insect race has descended upon weary, entropic Earth; fundamental disparity of human and insect consciousness is bringing madness and disease to both sides. The cast of characters from *The Pastel City*, grown old and weary, struggle impotently and with doubtful effect to achieve an irrelevant victory. Harrison debunks and destroys the simpler faiths of his earlier book with thorough satisfaction; his relish for disaster and defeat is entertainingly reminiscent of Disch's *The Genocides*. \$2.50 PB.

Gene Wolfe *The Sword of the Lictor*. Third volume of the Book of the New Sun tetralogy or pentalogy. Intricate, detailed, vivid, demanding prose cries out for one – just one – simple declarative sentence. \$15.50 HC.

Ian Watson *The Gardens of Delight*. Space explorers find alien planet's terrain precisely mimics Bosch's "The Garden of Earthly Delights". Landscape serves Watson's obsessions with internal vs. external reality, and dramatizes crewmembers' neuroses. Much vivid adventure, but the strange mix of myth figures (demons et al.) and high-tech cannot be rationally resolved, least of all by tired gimmick of omnipotent aliens experimenting on us. Still Watson remains one of the few true innovators emerging from the 1970s, with a tasty sense of the bizarre. \$2.50 PB.

Alexei Panshin *Rite of Passage*. Self-discovery of young woman attaining adult status via survival in primitive conditions of Earthlike planet. Compassionate and convincing; an overdue reissue. \$2.50 PB.

Lisa Goldstein *The Red Magician*. Odd mix of magic-fantasy and prelude to World War II: young Jewish woman is enmeshed in power-play between rabbi and wandering sorceress attempting to save her people from the Imminent holocaust. Written with simplicity and authority. \$2.25 PB.

Keith Laumer *Retief's War*. Retief, ever-resourceful red-tape-cutting interplanetary diplomat, fights aliens and his own superiors to save an amusingly improbable race of organometallic creatures from being broken up for spare parts. \$2.25 PB.

Robert Silverberg (Ed.) *The Best of Randall Garrett*. Stories from 1954-1979, plus amusing anecdotes from Farmer, McCaffrey, Asimov, Spinrad, Herbert, Anderson, Bradley, Niven, Bova, Herbert, Harrison, Dickson. \$2.95. PB.

Sondra Marshak & Myrna Culbreath *The Prometheus Design*. In this latest of the Star Trek series (the "I Love Lucy" of science fiction) Incredibly superior aliens with a crush on Kirk use the galaxy as their laboratory to find a cure for the Prometheus Flaw – linkage between aggression and greatness. \$2.50 PB.

Wilson Tucker *The Best of Wilson Tucker*. Solid, old-fashioned science fiction by one whom the contemporary audience would do well to rediscover. Sound storytelling of its period. \$2.75 PB.

Underwood-Miller

Daniel J.H. Levack *PKD: A Philip K. Dick Bibliography*. Sadly and unwittingly, this is a timely and complete book. Beautifully produced, with many halftone reproductions showing every detail of the awful covers that Dick suffered through most of his career. All books and stories listed alphabetically with concise plot summaries and details of foreign editions. All material cross-indexed by date. A fine though tragically premature memorial.

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Philip K. Dick

Phil had talked about writing an article for *The Patchin Review* criticizing publishers for being unreceptive to the work of new authors. He chose that topic because I'd asked him for an "impassioned" piece, and that was the only subject he felt angry about. Phil was not an angry or frustrated man; he was far too generous for that. I first met him in 1972, but I didn't begin to get to know him till I interviewed him for *Dream Makers* in 1979. I realized then how much I admired him and enjoyed his company, and after that I visited him in Santa Ana whenever I could. He made me feel welcome and well-liked, as I expect he made many people feel. He was gregarious and, quite apart from his wit and his warmth, he was one of the most impressively intelligent people I have ever met. And now he is dead, and I lose a man who had become a friend, and we all lose one of our very finest writers, just when his work seemed finally to have resolved all its early mystical strivings. I believe, in fact, he was beginning a whole new phase of his career.

But all that potential is lost, and in his absence the dull merchants continue glutting the field with their stupid Ideas and incompetent prose. I doubt that any of them will suffer the cruelly premature fate of Philip K. Dick, because, possessing less inspiration, they are less obsessed, less haunted by vision, less liable to exact a toll on themselves. How awful that there should be a correlation between divine Insight and mortality. The ones we need most, we lose first.

I last spoke to Phil a few days before his stroke. I'd never heard him sound so cheerful. He was very, very happy with his life, and mentioned his upcoming trip to New York and to Metz. He chided me for running a "scurrilous magazine" and joked that I could come sleep on his living-room floor when I'd succeeded in alienating all my other friends. I told him I'd been commissioned to write an article about him for *Horizon* magazine; we agreed that I should call him again a couple of weeks later, for some quotes to put in the piece.

But by that time, it was too late. There will never be any more quotes, or books, or strangely wonderful evenings in Santa Ana.

I will miss this man.

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October-December 1982

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Schedule

We regret that this issue is four months late, delayed by an unusual number of the usual things that delay little magazines. Obviously *The Patchin Review* is no longer on a quarterly schedule, or any other kind of regular schedule. There *will* be more issues in months to come, and subscribers will eventually receive the number of issues that they originally paid for. However, these issues will appear on an occasional basis in future. Those who distrust this arrangement may of course write for a refund of their remaining subscription money, if they so wish.

Policy

The Patchin Review exists to promote and publish frank opinions and arguments relating to the writing, editing, and marketing of science fiction and fantasy. Although this magazine is biased in favor of adventurousness and experimentation, space will be provided for all possible viewpoints. There are

no taboo topics.

The small, incestuous nature of the science fiction field often discourages writers from expressing frank opinions. In the interests of encouraging free speech, *The Patchin Review* allows any contributor to use the house pseudonym John Smith or Jane Doe. With the exception of these names and our columnists “Gabby Snitch” and “Cousin Clara”, no pseudonyms are knowingly permitted.

The Patchin Review is edited and designed by Charles Platt.

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John Boonstra, a journalist on The Hartford Advocate, conducted two long telephone interviews with Philip K. Dick last year and wrote them up in a piece for Twilight Zone magazine. When Boonstra suggested that we might be interested in the parts of his interviews that were not used in Twilight Zone, we readily agreed. He turned over to us the complete, verbatim tape transcripts, from which we have excerpted the following segments, with our own notes added.

Philip K. Dick Interviewed by John Boonstra

(When this interview was recorded, in June 1981, Philip K. Dick had recently refused to do a novelization of the *Blade Runner* movie, and had written *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* instead. He was waiting somewhat nervously to hear whether David Hartwell, his editor at Timescape Books, liked the novel. – Ed.)

“*Timothy Archer* is essentially the third novel in a trilogy of which *Valis* is the first and *The Divine Invasion* is the second; which is sort of interesting because each book is unique. It really was necessary for me to do the novel, as a projection of thematic material going back years and years and years in my writing, in stuff even as early as *Eye in the Sky* and *Time Out of Joint*. Those themes are constant preoccupations with me, they unfold by their own inner, organic drive, and I don’t really have the option of aborting that process and just suddenly going into a completely commercialized thing aimed at twelve-year-olds. *Literally* aimed at twelve-year-olds; we were told the cheapo novelization would have to appeal to the twelve-year-old audience. And it would be entirely derived from the screenplay, so there would be no room for me to do anything. I may find that I’ve turned down \$400,000 and wound up with nothing (if *Timothy Archer* had been rejected). But I never went into writing for money, anyway. And there is also the very real possibility that if I tried to do the cheapo novelization I would actually fail to do it, literally could not write a commercial novel that would be something that would sell millions of copies. I mean, they’re talking about projected sales of from two million to six million copies. And I could prove to be without that talent – because take talent, to do that kind of book. Then I would be in an ignominious and shameful situation where I’d debased myself fruitlessly; I wouldn’t have the money, and I would have failed. I kind of foresaw that as the ultimate bad scenario of all the possibilities.”

“I’ve managed to put into *Timothy Archer* two very good characters, the Bishop himself and the protagonist, a young woman, a lot more educated than I am, a lot smarter than I am, a lot more rational than I am. I was very much into a post-partum depression after I finished writing it, because I was so happy enjoying her company, listening to her dialogues. I really fell in love with her. She’s entirely fictional, as far as I know. An ad-hoc creation, like Pallas Athena from the brow of Zeus. Out of nothing.

“To present the Bishop, I needed a protagonist who was smart enough to understand him, and loving enough to forgive him. That’s a tall order, because the Bishop is a very mercurial, complex person, who does many things which are dubious, ethically. She intellectually understands what he’s doing, and she’s able to love him; in a sense she is more profoundly a wise person than the Bishop himself.

“The climax of the book is the effect on her of his death. She says that it turned her into a machine; when she heard that he was dead in Israel, she

devolved to the level of a machine and lost her own human nature, in a period where she is just tragically reified, and knows it. But at the end of the book, a Sufi scholar who is giving seminars in Sausalito is able to restore her to the state of a human being. So it is not a bumner ending; it is a very positive ending.”

(At this time, Dick was extremely depressed about the *Blade Runner* project, having seen only an interim script.)

“I was supposed to go up there (to the studio). They called me up and called me up, and I temporized and temporized. I thought – no, I’ll go up there and I’m on a diet, so I can’t eat the rich foods they’ll serve me, and what I’ll really hope for is a whole lot of free cocaine, and there won’t be any free cocaine, and I’ll be real pissed because of that. I’ll keep querulously, petulantly saying, ‘Where’s the cocaine?’ and they’ll say, ‘No, that’s a myth, you’ve been reading *TV Guide*.’

“I have been up there to another film project, the little Capitol Pictures one, called *Claw*. [Based on his short story ‘Second Variety’, with a screenplay by Dan O’Bannon, and subsequently retitled *Total Recall*.] They’re very nice. I really like them. Every change that’s made, they send me a copy to get my opinion. They just treat me like a human being. In other words, I am able to discriminate between essentially reputable people up there, and these high-pressure types. Shit, *Blade Runner* started yelling at me because, in an article that I wrote in the *Select TV Guide*, I mentioned androids. They said, ‘That’s very dangerous talk, mentioning androids in connection with this film. We’re not using the word *android*.’ Well, it seems hard to avoid a word that’s in the title of your own book. And they wanted to know how I’d gotten hold of a copy of the screenplay. ‘How did you get hold of it?’ they said, with the emphasis on the word ‘you’, you know?

“The sets, I’m sure, are marvellous. Russell (Russell Galen, Dick’s representative at the Scott Meredith agency) called me up and said, ‘You’ve got to go up there.’ Well, in a way it’s a Chinese finger-trap. If the sets are that good, maybe I’ll go up there and fall into the mode that exists now in science fiction, where the special effects and the sets are everything. And as an author I can’t afford, as a practical matter, to adopt that ideology, because it reduces the author to merely setting up a simple plot-outline in which special effects can be brought in. His job is very much a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

“Ridley Scott is a director who has a visual sense rather than a narrative

sense. This is not a matter of insulting Ridley Scott. He thinks visually, and of course this is why he's in movies. It is perhaps the way it should be. But I am an author, and I think in narrative terms, in terms of a story line."

.... (Much later in the same conversation, Dick talks about *The Man in the High Castle*, which leads him subsequently into some thoughts on modern U.S. politics.)

"Avram Davidson, at *F&SF*, did a lot to get that book promoted. Tony Boucher called it a failure; I heard him review it on the radio, and he said that it was not a science-fiction novel, it was actually just a mainstream novel, once you got past the alternate-world premise. Later he came up to me and said that he now felt that it was a breakthrough novel. Donald Wollheim said, 'It is sick, dated, and not science fiction.' But most of the criticism was very positive.

"There were something like eleven different things that would have had to happen, for the Germans to win the war. And they're not all in *The Man in the High Castle*. For example, there was almost no way they could have defeated Russia. I mean, it is just *not that easy* to defeat Russia. As certain people in history have found out! I hope we're not about to find that out ourselves; another campaign directed at taking Moscow in three weeks is going to wind up like all of the other campaigns. I can see Reagan and Haig, you know, sitting there and saying, "Well, hell, man, you know, we'll be in Moscow in three weeks.¹ And somebody says, 'You know, that expression "three weeks" rings a bell. I think I've heard that expression before. It has something to do with a long Russian novel by Tolstoy, and the French....' So Haig says, 'Well, all right, *four* weeks. But we'll definitely have NATO's tanks in Moscow within four weeks. That's assuming this nice weather holds out.'

"You know, it's almost worth writing a story about Haig and Reagan figuring if the bombing should just hold out another week, there'd be no problem.

"I was reading Deuteronomy last night, and some of the notes by Rabbi Hertz, who is the late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire. Deuteronomy goes back to pre-literate days among the Jews; it actually was formulated before they had a written language. I thought, My God, the injunctions in the Torah – in Deuteronomy – about caring for the needy, caring for the sick, caring for the poor, caring for the helpless, caring for the disadvantaged, are built into this thing which is maybe 3,000 years old, and has *worked* for 3,000 years.

And now we're hearing that kids don't get hot-lunch programs, and the elderly don't get social security, and everybody will have to get by on his own. We're not seeing the clock turned back to 1912, before the graduated income tax was enacted; we're seeing it turned back to Imperial Rome, where I think it was Seneca who said, 'There's no use giving food to the starving. It'll just prolong their miserable lives.' Rabbi Hertz quotes him. The Roman attitude was that being hungry, poor, and sick, you deserved to die anyway. Aristotle, Plato, Virgil, Seneca and all of these people, don't even include it as a virtue – they actually include it as a vice, that you would help the needy. We're now seeing a return to the old Imperial system of, 'Let the disadvantaged sink to the bottom, let 'em die.' This is so tragic and so inhumane.

“But I can't work up any animosity toward Reagan. I see him as caught up in historic trends that are so powerful, he was literally brought to power, the way Hitler was, which was legally and by a very large majority. And look what happened last week with Tip O'Neill's fight against Reagan's budget cuts. Did you see Tip O'Neill standing there at that microphone? The guy was *ruined*. His face was sagging, he was shaking. You didn't even have to have the sound on.

“I must admit that when I got into the Torah and discovered the humane elements of this ancient system of beliefs, for me it was probably one of the great moments of my life. And I still read it – I was reading it last night. There is one thing in Deuteronomy where he says, 'You must always pay the hired man before sunset. For he is poor and has his heart set on it.' And in the notes Rabbi Hertz has for that, there is: 'The workman is so poor that unless he is paid by sunset, he will not be able to buy food for his family.' I just lay there thinking about that, 'For he is poor and has his heart set on it.' It is so incredible that we have fallen away from something that was so basic to our civilization, for maybe as many as 2,000 years.

“We are in a time when there is a cruel spirit across the land, and it seems to be gathering momentum. I have some very close, personal friends who are showing symptoms of great cruelty, and interest only in their own individual welfare. These are people who at one time had been in the anti-war movement, very idealistic, and are now exhibiting a complete narcissism, a 'me-first' type of thing. When I gave some money to the Quakers for refugee relief in Cambodia, where the people there were starving in the camps a couple of years ago, my friends actually jeered at me for doing this. They

said, ‘Pol Pot will love all that rice you’re sending him. It’ll never get to the refugee camps.’

“Well, it did get to the refugee camps, and now Phnom Penh is a thriving city again. But I was made to feel as if I had done something that was so stupid as to be absurd, in trying to help this dying civilization. It looked like there would be no Cambodian civilization any more; even the customs would be gone.

“I don’t want to take credit for this, because I may not be able to do it, but I approached the Quakers recently, after having worked through them on some other projects, and proposed to them that they start a project working with the Hanoi hospital, which helps children who have birth defects from Agent Orange in Vietnam. They’re very tragic birth defects, so awful that I didn’t even know that half of them existed. I would like to see some of those children brought over here, like those Hiroshima babies, do you remember that? I really think this is something we’ve got to do.”

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(Note: In a subsequent interview with John Boonstra in September 1981, Dick was optimistic about *Blade Runner*, having seen a new draft of the script. Past differences between himself and the studio were repaired. However, he did not live to see the final version of the movie, with many character-developing scenes cut, first-person voice-over added, and an explicitly happy ending grafted on. It may be that his original perceptions of the project, and the people managing it, were more accurate in the long term. – Ed.)

We’ve already published several articles complaining about science-fiction awards. But the idle ravings of The Patchin Review are hardly likely to have any effect. So, in the face of yet another new award, in a field already glutted with them, here’s a more concrete plan of action.

The Lucky Dog Award by Charles Platt

It seems there’s no stopping the Philip K. Dick memorial award. Jurors Thomas M. Disch, Norman Spinrad, and Ursula Le Guin (she who once refused to communicate with Dick and told him he was crazy!) will soon be

bestowing it upon their choice of the year's "best" paperback original.

The intentions, of course, are good: to perpetuate the name of Philip K. Dick (ensuring that his books, too, will not be forgotten), and to draw attention to paperback originals, a form in which he published most of his work. But I hate the idea of the award. I think it's inappropriate and undesirable.

First of all, Phil himself was a relativist who felt it was "semantically meaningless" to compare pieces of fiction and say which is "best". Granted, he had no inhibitions about accepting awards himself, and seemed to value them as evidence that he was finally being appreciated by the science-fiction community. Granted, also, his opinions on almost any topic changed radically from one year, or hour, to the next.

Nevertheless, his belief that each of us lives in a separate world of unique values was central to his whole life, and was the source of his outlook that it is not possible to make objective judgments of comparative worth. Therefore, any "Philip K. Dick Award" simply has to be untrue to the beliefs of its namesake.

Secondly, it's axiomatic that all awards are imperfect, and most of them quickly become incestuous or corrupt. There have been attempts to reform awards, either by tinkering with voting procedures (for example, by establishing the Nebula Jury, which adds neglected entries to the final ballot), or by establishing completely new awards run on more ethical principles (for example, the Campbell award, voted by a jury with literary credentials). None of these attempts at reform has worked. The choices of the Nebula Jury seldom, if ever, have a hope of winning the membership vote which follows, and the Campbell Award, like others that are selected by jury, is tainted by elitism and is consequently so unpopular as to lack stature or influence.

Tom Disch has suggested that the answer to all these complaints is to create more awards, so that "every child can leave the party with a prize," and the importance of any single award is diminished. This is nothing more than an amusing sophistry. If there are more awards, there are not necessarily more prize-winners; already, several different prizes often go to one book. Moreover, each new award erodes the idea that literature is one infinitely varied continuum, and reinforces the notion that a select few books are *much, much better* than the rest. This outlook is almost indistinguishable from the best-seller mentality, which holds that some authors should receive 100 or 1000 times as much money as others. Few would defend this as being a fair

representation of reality. Both systems in fact distort reality.

We can all think of favorite books which earned the writer next to no money and were never nominated for any award whatsoever. Quite a few of these books (according to my scale of values) were written by Philip K. Dick himself. Perhaps the Philip K. Dick Award judges believe they can alleviate this kind of injustice in future; if so, I admire their aims, but their idea of “neglected books” will not necessarily be mine, and mine will not be yours, and Phil’s notions of relativism possess a modicum of truth: it is dubious to single out one book as being somehow worthier than all the rest.

Well, my complaints here won’t do any good. The only effective response that I can think of is to start my own award, honoring the memory of Philip K. Dick in a way which ridicules the “Official” award and, at the same time, avoids the failings I have listed above.

In his introduction to *The Golden Man* story collection, Phil dramatized the poverty of his early years by describing the Lucky Dog petfood store, where he went to purchase ground horsemeat for himself and his wife to eat. Very well; The Lucky Dog Award will recognize the miserable condition of struggling science-fiction writers. It will consist of 52 vouchers, each redeemable for 12 ounces of sirloin steak. (Arrangements will be made with a butcher shop suitably close to the home of the winner.) The Lucky Dog Award will be given, each year, to a writer whose new novel was sold for a total royalty advance, hardcover or paperback original, of \$2000 or less. Possibly this threshold level may have to be increased in years to come, to keep pace with inflation, but it’s worth noting that it has remained a typical figure for unknown writers during the past decade regardless of a near tripling in consumer prices.

To choose the winner of the Lucky Dog Award, no votes will be cast and no judges will be employed. The titles of all eligible books will be put in a hat, and one will be chosen at random. The randomness of good fortune is a theme which recurs in all of Phil’s work; frequently the biggest loser is the one to survive, and the quixotic nature of the universe is seen as one of its redeeming virtues. Hence the Lucky Dog Award selection procedure is a fair reflection of Phil’s values, so far as one can tell. The low-budget nature of the Award reflects the conditions under which he worked for much of his life; and its self-parodying nature also ties in with a recurring element in his books.

Thanks to its selection procedure, the Lucky Dog Award cannot possibly

become elitist or corrupt. Moreover, its title is sufficiently absurd that no publisher will ever want to splash it across a book cover.

All we need now is a small sum of money to finance this worthy project. Checks should be sent to *The Patchin Review*, made payable to “Lucky Dog”.

Neil Barron, editor of the excellent reference guide Anatomy of Wonder, is an activist in the cause of bringing science fiction to the attention of readers of modern literature. Few people come right out and condemn this idea; but many seem to resist it passively.

Bridges, Not Walls **by Neil Barron**

The Best American Short Stories is an annual anthology which began in 1915 and has been published for many years by Houghton Mifflin. With the death of Martha Foley several years ago, the editor has changed each year, although the basic policies remain the same. Stories must be written in English by North American citizens and must have been first published in nationally distributed American or Canadian periodicals.

I checked the last half-dozen annuals to see if any science-fiction or fantasy stories had been selected. Finding few of consequence, I examined the list of 155 to 160 magazines, made available on complimentary subscriptions, whose short stories were candidates for selection. Most of the “little” magazines, from the well-known to the obscure, were there, along with *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*. Larger circulation magazines included *Cosmopolitan*, *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Redbook*, and *Playboy*. The only category-fiction magazine listed was *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*. Why none of the science-fiction or fantasy magazines?

The jacket of the 1981 annual describes the magazines checked as those “currently publishing serious short fiction”. Perhaps, I thought, the operative word was “serious,” and the contents of science-fiction or fantasy magazines were in some sense tainted – “popular,” “escapist,” etc. – and were for that reason not checked.

To find out, I wrote to Shannon Ravenel, who has made the preliminary selection for the past few years. She reads 1200 to 1500 stories each year and selects about ten percent of them for reading by that year’s guest editor. In recent years, guest editors have included Hortense Calisher, Joyce Carol

Oates, Stanley Elkin, and Theodore Solotaroff. The 1982 editor is John Gardner.

When I asked her if there was a policy that precluded consideration of science-fiction or fantasy magazines from consideration (the cozy “conspiracy theory” espoused by many fans) her reply astonished me. No, there is no such policy. Instead, she suggested, “It may be that they themselves do not see our anthology as having any bearing on the work they publish.” Could the reason be this simple?

Last October I sent a letter summarizing my findings to the editors of *Amazing*, *Analog*, *Eternity SF*, *Asimov’s SF Magazine*, *F&SF*, *Omni*, *Twilight Zone*, and *Whispers*. I asked them to enter complimentary subscriptions and send back-issues with 1981 cover dates, and notify me of what action they took. The editors of *Analog*, *F&SF*, *Omni* and *Twilight Zone* cooperated promptly. Kathleen Moloney, recently appointed editor at *Asimov’s*, was approached in January, since her predecessor, George Scithers, hadn’t replied. She then entered a complimentary subscription. No replies were received from the three other magazines, despite follow-up letters.

Subsequently I asked the same list of magazines to enter complimentary subscriptions also for William Abrahams, editor of *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards*.

After reading the 1981 issues of four major magazines, Shannon Ravenel commented: “You will be disappointed to know that I did not select any stories from the magazines named above to send to John Gardner. I did not find any stories there which had gone beyond a too heavy reliance on situation and setting, a reliance which obscured the necessary literary development of character or language. There *are* such stories in the genre and I have found and selected them in past years ... and I have every hope of finding others in the year ahead.”

More science-fiction and fantasy stories will now be considered for the two major American best-short-fiction annuals. But the timing is somewhat ironic, since some of the most significant short science fiction is now being published in original anthologies, whose contents are not eligible for consideration. Still, it’s a beginning. Science-fiction fans have been building walls for more than five decades; it’s time we built a few bridges.

Note

This issue of *The Patchin Review* was prepared in haste, after work on *Dream Makers II* absorbed most of my summer. There was no time to write the capsule reviews in the Survey, no time to include all the illustrations I would have liked, and no time to do the titles in the usual Letraset typeface. Nor did I manage to do my part in a collaborative article titled *Le Guin the Authoritarian*, which should appear next issue. Also coming up, I hope, will be an article by Philip José Farmer in defense of fantasy, and a piece by Douglas Winter on the World Fantasy Award. And I expect to run a feature titled *Self-Evident Standards*, defining some basic literary qualities that *The Patchin Review* believes should be expected – demanded! – of any work of fiction, including science fiction.

– Charles Platt

Cousin Clara Advice to the Alienated



Drawing by Ariane Lenshoek

“Disgusted” of Austin, Texas writes:

“Dear Cousin Clara:

“I’m a fairly new writer with three books published so far. I’m trying to do good work, but it isn’t easy. Every month I get my copy of *Locus* and I read about all the new fantasy series, and the big bucks that publishers are paying for garbage by the ‘grand old men’ of science fiction, and it’s making me sick! Isn’t there anything we can do about the state of science fiction? Do I *have* to keep reading these depressing news items?”

No, my dear Disgusted, of course you don’t have to. Simply cancel your subscription to *Locus*, and suffer no more.

Perhaps you think that I am being facetious. Perhaps – silly boy! – you hoped I would tell you how to go out into the big, bad world of mass-marketed science fiction, and impose your idealism upon it. If that was at the back of your tiny mind, well, just remember the sorry fate of others who have set out upon such a pilgrimage. Remember Damon Knight, who conceived SFWA and writers’ workshops, to give science fiction a more literary luster. SFWA was soon full of fans and hustlers handing awards to each other, and the workshops turned out bright new talents whose stories wouldn’t fit the old science-fiction markets, and can’t even be printed in Damon’s own *Orbit* series any more – because no one will publish it. Remember, also, Michael Moorcock. His radical magazine went bankrupt, his “important” books are out of print, and it’s rumored that his real source of revenue remains his fantasy novels – which he says he despises.

You see, dear Disgusted, better men than you have tried to render science fiction respectable, and have failed – because there are too few adult intellectuals to support the literary stuff. Not in paperback, anyway. Most publishers have finally figured this out, after countless disappointments with “difficult” books that not enough people wanted to buy. And the sorry sequel to this sad saga is that, not only did the one-time revolutionaries fail to uplift the field, it finished in worse shape than before they started.

I admit that writing styles in the 1950s were kind of clunky. But at least the ideas, then, were exciting. Remember those old stories by Pohl, Budrys, Kornbluth, Bester, Dick, Farmer, even Anderson and Heinlein? Go re-read a few, and then tell me where you can find science fiction as original as that today. Who are the bright new hopes we turn to? John Varley? Barry Longyear?

So (you may ask), what went wrong? Well, Disgusted, as you probably know, until the mid-1960s, science-fiction writers were laughed at as lunatics and paid slightly less than janitors. To put up with these working conditions,

they had to *love* what they did. All their stories that turned us on, back when we were pimply teenage misfits, were written for love; because wealth and fame didn't exist back then.

In the 1970s something happened to change the field from a bohemian backwater into big business. *Star Wars* and Judy-Lynn and Lester del Rey; they, alas, were what happened. *Star Wars* reached a new mass audience. The del Reys merchandised books for that audience and made more money that way than science fiction had usually made before. Soon many writers were thinking more commercially, to satisfy the simpler tastes of the bigger audience and reap its royalties.

But this still doesn't help you, does it, Disgusted? You still want to know what to do. Well, I'll say it again: *stop reading Locus*.

Why do I pick on *Locus*? It's nothing personal, my dear, I assure you! We all know that *Locus* is useful, factual, and punctual. It promotes science fiction and helps it to prosper. But that's just the trouble; as science fiction has prospered – and innovation has declined – *Locus* has become drunk on the mood of the times, as if money and fame feel so good, no other motives matter.

Just look at Page One. When a famous author lands a new contract, the size of the advance is headlined; what the book will be about is a mere afterthought, and whether it's going to be creative, or readable, isn't even hinted at. *Locus* puts awards on the front page, too, and pictures of the winners, as if prizes are *the* most important way of measuring excellence and status. You'd never guess from reading *Locus* that the winners are those who are most adept at socializing and self promotion, and they are the ones who write the blandest, simplest fare. *Locus*'s own awards are no better; they inevitably foster personality cultism and mass taste, rather than thoughtful critical values.

I know, I know, it isn't *Locus*'s job to be critical. It's just a trade journal, like *Publishers Weekly*. But why does it restrict itself to such a role? Why imitate a magazine of the crass mass market, when that's not what science fiction should be? Why publish Norman Spinrad's advice on "Stayin' Alive" – i.e. getting rich by playing the publishing market as if it were the stock market? Why publish Richard Curtis's "Agent's Corner," inducing writers to obsess themselves with rights and litigation, instead of thinking of, and caring for, their creative work? Why print a best-seller list, demonstrating that the dumbest and the dullest usually net the biggest sales?

The answer is that *Locus* wants most of all to be “respectable” and “professional”. Like a nouveau-riche bride, it is ashamed of its own amateur origins and science fiction’s poverty-stricken past. So it apes every affectation of wealth and status; and by setting this example, it encourages us to do the same.

It does digress into a little lit. crit. here and there – but with disastrous results. Budrys’s columns “On Writing” were mechanistic and obscure, while the current reviews columns are written by nitwits dazzled by mediocrity.

So now you see what I’m getting at, Disgusted. If you really want to write the serious novel that you seem to have in mind, you must cease tormenting yourself by reading this monthly guide for business-oriented wordsmiths. Remember, the great books that we treasure were never conceived by smart young hustlers second-guessing the market and sneaking Hugo-nomination escalator clauses into their contracts. I’m not saying you must suffer poverty and penance to do great art. I do remind you, though, that getting obsessed with gold and glory is no way to aid the creative process.

Sever your link with *Locus*, dear Disgusted – and *SF Chronicle*, too. After the first few months of traumatic withdrawal, you will suddenly realize that none of that “news” really mattered. You will have more peace of mind, and much more time, to do what you should have been doing all along: the writing that is important to you.

Your faithful friend, Cousin Clara

Waiting for Meaning by Brian Aldiss

Every issue of *The Patchin Review* reveals a discord of opinions. During the break between one issue and the next, a new set of disputes is thrown into the arena, only to be dismissed by a new batch in the next round. Yet certain jagged rocks reveal themselves as ever-present below the swirling surface, and among them is the question of how far our commercialized field can afford to mean what it is saying. While appreciating that many readers read only for escape, we want to know: Dare we be serious?

The intellectuals are surviving, though not without the usual grumbles on all sides. Disch comes in for a lot of stick, I see; he has been elected science fiction’s token intellectual. Anti-intellectualism is a kind of racism. It seems, in science-fiction company, to be linked with suspicion of the New

Wave (“Not that old thing yet!” you cry. “Yes,” I cry back – “see current ish!”) Even the mighty Hartwell condescends to the term “new wavicles” and claims they were left stranded on their own beachheads. One of those stranded authors is Don Thomas, whose science-fiction poetry appeared in *New Worlds*; and one of his poems was the germ of his novel *The White Hotel*, of which Pocket Books have just issued forth a million copies. Some wavicle!

The particular sort of anti-intellectualism which is doing damage to the field, I believe, is the kind pinpointed by Greg Benford, in the best article in *The Patchin Review* so far. To wit, the booting out of science in favor of fantasy.

Benford’s comments deserve consideration. I believe that the reasons for the desertion of science by science-fiction writers are more complex than he cared to state in his article. The over-selling of science as a cure for all our ills, personal and societal, in earlier decades, must have something to do with present widespread disillusion with science.

It is part of Benford’s argument that fantasy is flooding out science. But the success of fantasy was perhaps inevitable, and not unearned. All those dark novels about overpopulation, which we suffered through in the 1960s and early 1970s, were, after all, condemnations of the failure of science to cure society’s ills. The next step is to turn to telepathic dragons.

But the point I would have liked to see Greg Benford make is this. Science is an integral part of our culture. At its base is a kind of balanced rationality which, despite all the madneses of the centuries, has survived since the days of Classical Greece. I say “balanced rationality” because mere “rationality” is not enough. Balanced rationality has been able to tolerate the outbursts of irrationality which characterize our civilization at this stage of development – and which provoke reprisals from mere rationality, as ego chastises self.

As soon as we abandon that rationality and believe that we can bend spoons by mind alone, or establish telepathic rapport with dragons and unicorns, or travel with impunity beyond the speed of light, then we are undermining the foundations upon which our culture is based; or, to put it more personally, we are going fucking nuts. That’s escapism, if you like.

Perhaps Benford will find me an uncomfortable ally. After all, I’m some kind of new-wave fantasy author, aren’t I? Well, no, I’m not, and I have spent many years saying firmly that, contrary to what most science-fiction

readers believe, telepathy and faster-than-light travel are horseshit – though I grant you they fall from two different kinds of horses.

It may be that many science-fiction writers have written of telepathy, and similar impossibilities, not from conviction but simply because of a failure of imagination – they could not dream up anything more novel. They served up what they knew their public liked. Such tactics are acceptable: science-fiction writers have plenty of rules, but no standards. But it is this readiness to deliver second-hand miracles which betrays us. We daren't be serious, we can't afford to aspire to mean what we are saying.

So we continue to chant the articles of our lack of faith. With no proof whatsoever, we declare that the universe is populated with modern versions of hobgoblins, et cetera.

Unfortunately, when science fiction was more in tune with science, more science-oriented, it was very mechanistic, and an enemy of the inward self. That is to say, it was in itself irrational, ego-oriented, as against the self-oriented literature of snow princesses and unicorns. I don't buy high-tech any more than I do Conan. Balanced rationality takes account of both sides of human nature.

Still believing in the potential of science fiction, I hope to see more of it becoming balanced in this way. It should be possible to write about wholeness without going broke. Doris Lessing seems to be managing it pretty well. Not to mention D.M. Thomas. But they have meaning on their side.

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Moments of Truth

“Come with us, O readers, to a world where gleaming cities raise silver spires against the stars, sorcerors cast spells from subterranean lairs, baleful spirits stalk crumbling ruins ... and the fate of kingdoms is balanced on the blades of broadswords brandished by heroes of preternatural might and valor. In this world men are mighty, women are beautiful, problems are simple, and life is adventurous, and nobody has ever heard of inflation, the petroleum shortage, or atmospheric pollution!”

(Louis Blair receives \$5 for submitting this gem, from L. Sprague de Camp's introduction to *Conan the Barbarian*.)

Andrew Weiner wanted to call his article, “If it’s Good, it Can’t be Science Fiction.” This seemed a bit dull, so, in the tradition of last issue’s “Vile Dross”

Corrosive Sludge **by Andrew Weiner**

If there is one phenomenon guaranteed to irritate the science-fiction community it is the sight of “mainstream” writers (terrible term, but I’ll use it for the sake of convention) manipulating science-fictional imagery and themes, and receiving acclaim from “mainstream” critics. Examples have included Orwell’s *1984*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange*, and Tevis’s *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.

Mainstream critics have consistently embraced such books as literature rather than as mere science fiction, while consistently overlooking, or savaging, or praising only faintly, the finest productions of genre science fiction, from *The Space Merchants* to *Timescape*.

These critics have been accused of assuming that “If it’s good, it can’t be science fiction,” and vice-versa. I don’t know if they ever really thought that. But if they did, I’m not sure they were entirely wrong. Personally, I have begun to suspect that “If it’s *very* good, it can’t be science fiction,” and vice-versa. I think there’s a reason why the titles I mentioned have been praised above the finest offerings within our genre. Simply, they *are* better.

No genre science-fiction writer ever came remotely close to depicting a totalitarian society as effectively or vividly as George Orwell. *Brave New World*, for all its flaws, is a much more powerful vision of the impact of technological progress than any equivalent genre production. *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (and no doubt I’m very much in a minority on this one) is a far more emotionally authentic exploration of human-alien contact than anything that ever appeared in *Astounding Science Fiction*. And so on.

I’m not suggesting merely that these mainstream writers are, on the whole, more technically proficient than their genre counterparts. That’s true to some degree; but much more important, I think, is the very fact of their detachment from, and freedom to rise above, genre traditions and conventions.

What finally brought this home to me was Russell Hoban’s *Riddley*

Walker, still another critically acclaimed venture by a mainstream writer into the territory of science fiction. On one level, the book is “about” one of the hoariest of all genre science fiction clichés: the post-holocaust world, even including old favorites such as mutants and telepathy. On another level, it not only transcends but also makes a complete mockery of all the genre productions that have worked the same ground. The word “good” is inadequate to describe what Hoban has done here. Robert Sheckley (in *Twilight Zone*) called it the best science-fiction novel since *A Clockwork Orange*. Except that maybe it isn’t science fiction – not modern American science fiction, anyway, by which I mean that clutter of conventions and assumptions and ideologies about the future, painstakingly assembled since Hugo Gernsback’s time.

There have been some genuine achievements within that genre, and there still are – although they appear to be fewer and farther between, these days, and to occur almost in spite of the genre that gave them birth, Philip K. Dick being one of the classic examples of this phenomenon.

On the whole, modern American science fiction has melted down into a kind of corrosive sludge – most vividly illustrated in the capsule summaries of new original paperbacks in the back of *The Patchin Review*. It eats away even at our best writers. Even a *Timescape* or an *On Wings of Song* finds it impossible, finally, to escape.

J.G. Ballard has been telling us for years that modern American science fiction is a detour, a blind alley, a “minor tributary of the great stream of imaginative fiction” that has done “an enormous disservice to the possibility of the emergence of ... a serious science fiction.” (These quotes from an interview with David Pringle in *Thrust* 14).

Reading *Riddley Walker* it is impossible to disagree with that assessment. Russell Hoban never had to escape the blind alley of modern American science fiction, because he was never inside it in the first place.

It may be too late for all the rest of us.

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Truth or Trivia **Jody Scott**

“There is nothing wrong with trivia,
except as used to destroy its opposite.”

– Thomas Justiano

Publishers tell me you are ignorant. You can't accept a new idea. You'll read only denatured pap. You need to be taken care of and then praised for your self-sufficiency. In short, you're a twinkie.

And this is the reason they give for suppressing my best novels. They tell me they can't publish my works, because I won't lie to you. And you love to be lied to, or so they say.

It's amazing how many people have read my science-fiction novel *Passing for Human* despite the fact that it was on the stands for about ten minutes before the usual flood of schlock swept it away. I'm told the book is a sleeper, a cult hit. That's fine; but the vast bulk of my work is dismissed as "unpublishable" for the simple reason that it tells the truth.

"The public doesn't want it" – that's the biggest lie in the world. Go out and really *talk* to the public, as I've done. Step up and meet a million very bored people who *do* want it; though many have no idea that "it" exists, because they're young, and certainly nothing like "it" has ever been put forth in their lifetime.

Why not, do you suppose? I say it's because suppressives, in the form of publishers, distributors, booksellers, and book burners, are keeping it from them.

This society, this culture, is a criminal. A murderer. It kills its artists. It puts hacks in their places, because it can control the hacks.

Let us examine the deadening effects of warping and limiting your vision in order to sell it at a few cents a word to publishing houses which are staffed by hysterical twenty-five-year-olds, panicked at the thought of getting a pink slip in their paycheck. Or by illiterates who change positions about as often as blowflies on yesterday's battlefield, driven by the fact that the publishing industry is now owned by conglomerates.

Have you ever seen an idiot stuff morsels of fat into the gleaming slit under his nose? That's a good description of the marketplace today.

"They" will tell you that if you write something good, it's bound to get published.

Don't believe it. It is a lie, and only a hack, or a swindler, or a fool, will insist it is true. It has never been true; least of all now.

Sometimes I have nightmares about the great works that have been lost to us through endemic human stupidity, smugness, and arrogance. I know it's considered in extreme "bad taste" to bring the subject up, but I have nothing

to read. Only the classics. Certainly nothing current.

Flashback: in the fifties I wrote a detective story with my friend and co-editor of *Circle* magazine, George Thurston Leite. The novel was titled *Cure It with Honey*, the byline was Thurston Scott, and the publisher was Harper's. This book enjoyed a lot of success, touched best-seller lists, got an MWA "special award," and a good review in *The New Yorker*, and was republished many times; and all because it was an agreeable pop thriller done in my best Raymond Chandler style. It stepped on no toes but the approved ones – in this case, prisons. People still think you're being extremely daring when you criticize prisons; actually, you're merely being trendy, as long as you don't go too far, and by that I mean get too real, which is known as being "in bad taste".

Otto Preminger flew up to talk about filming our book, but dropped the idea when his new wife made passes at my collaborator, an extremely handsome guy. Meanwhile I found myself on lots of TV shows and at lots of parties, none of which was in the least satisfying. I vowed to write only the truth, *my* truth, from then on; for what good is "position" and "prestige" in an anthill of lies? The excitement of being a great artist is in the creating, and communicating, of one's art. All else is absurdity.

And then what happened?

I wrote two million words, threw most of them away, refined the rest, and today I am a great literary artist, the only one left in the world (to my knowledge) and apparently the only one with the capacity to hang in there and produce monumental works in spite of all obstacles. I used to be Henry Miller's friend, he died, I knew Anais Nin and some of the Kerouac group, they died; I could go on and on with fascinating biog. but that's not the point, here.

As a master craftsman, certainly I can duplicate any literary style. I can turn out a Charles Dickens novel you'd swear had been written by Dickens in his own study. I can do a perfect Hawthorne, Hardy, Hemingway, or Judith Krantz, but exactly what is the point? Why do publishers insist on safe imitations? I'm an artist. The artist is the high priest, the sorcerer; the 100 percent gutsy out-in-front pioneer; not a copyist. And the years are flying by. I haven't time to play kissy with a cheap, throwaway market.

Our hacks are trained to imitate each other as closely as possible while loudly proclaiming how "individual" they are. Our hacks are trained to produce bland, flavorless pabulum, but "clever" and "well plotted" and

perhaps “techno-trendy” and maybe even with “sex,” or what passes for sex among shell-shock victims. Their readers, likewise trained in our abject schools, have never heard of style and (at least according to publishers) would fall apart if you served them up a real live character. Billions have been spent teaching people to not-read and not-understand. We are a nation of illiterates, and we revel in it.

And if there happens to be a Joyce or a Proust or even an F. Scott Fitzgerald or Virginia Woolf out there – tough luck. You’re out. Everything must fit the tight, narrow, petty little mode.

The greater the artist, the more any group will suppress him or her. After all, artists are public property, aren’t they? And if we want to neglect them during their lifetimes and rob them after their deaths, that’s perfectly all right, because we’re the Majority, and might is right. And this is so taken-for-granted that we never even think of it, let alone become aware that it’s murder and should be treated as such.

Do you think it’s an *accident* that you feel so guilty, so depressed...?

Personally, I’m thrillingly happy because I live in a world of magic, ethics, and literary art. Society tries to punish me for this; but society is a shrimp. And no, I’m not putting you down! Quite the opposite. I’m saying that if you will trust your true and holy instincts, instead of opening your jaws to be force-fed, life will begin to seem worthwhile.

Publishers tell me they can’t publish my novels, stories, plays (except for a few happy compromises) because the fat merchants, the B. Daltons, the Waldens, refuse to stock anything but commercial schlock. “There are no more private bookshops,” they mourn. “Big sellers say they can’t handle anything which isn’t tame and commercial,” and so on.

In other words, the market is psychotic. When no good literature can be produced *at all*, you’ve got a mad dog which must be put out of its misery.

But why settle for dull? You don’t need to put up with this situation. You don’t need to be dragged down to the lowest common denominator, or have your intelligence insulted and your future booby-trapped. We are characters in the greatest space-opera ever written. We create it as we go along. No one else is responsible; not B. Dalton, not Big Brother, not anybody else but you.

Now here’s one of my ideas that publishers insist will not sell. Why don’t we evolve? Just decide to do it, and go ahead and do it? What I’ve been talking about is just a barbarous system on a retarded planet. It has hardly any

survival value. The whole thing could change overnight.

We CAN evolve through conscious choice. This is the job at hand. Let's get to it. Every last one of your cherished "social ills" is caused by suppression. The unsuppressed human is ethical, powerful, sane, happy. In 500 years this will be common knowledge. Remember the scientific heresy of Galileo? It took centuries for the suppressives to acknowledge that he was right, and the Earth does go around the Sun.

Amazing!

The publishing business today is a Mafia. The enemy of the people. Suppressives will do or say anything to keep it that way. But this Mafia is weak; if confronted, with perseverance and honest intent, it will begin to collapse.

Again: This isn't some little tantrum that I decided to throw, after a year or two of pouting over "the market"'s rejection of me, one individual writer. I'm talking about thirty years of being suppressed as a literary artist. And more than that, I'm pointing out the obvious fact that *all* literary art is being suppressed, and only mediocrity is hawked in our bookstores.

Mediocrity is a non-survival condition. To cling to it so frantically makes for a boring, unsatisfying life, and a dangerous one, in which nobody feels fulfilled. Is your life worth living? Can you live in a whore culture and not be a whore? I've been accused of not being flattering enough. The truth is, every book in the library is overflowing with flattery, either overt or tacit. If it's not thoroughly flattering, it doesn't make it to the library. The "public" has turned into the tyrant of old, who must be flattered constantly, or heads roll. But don't you know that if someone is flattering you, you're being conned? It's a sales pitch. Your pocket is being picked. Someone is lying to you. Worst of all: when some real love trickles through to you, you have no idea what it is.

Are you not aware that fifty years of fawning, servile, cutesy-poo, moron-pampering commercials have turned your brains to mush? Advertising is a plot to make fools out of us; to cheapen our view of ourselves. After fifty years of soft soaps, here we are inside the disaster area. *No* deviation is allowed, as far as the printed word is concerned.

Is there something new? Could something new be imagined?

You send letters asking, "What can we do?" How can you get over being hooked on terror and crisis? How can you win your way out of a gopher hole and back into the big money? (Spiritually speaking, of course, as

befits a saint-novelist such as myself.)

You can begin by refusing to buy hackwork, no matter how hard it's shoved down your throat. Do not patronize twinkie bookstores. Don't believe the pompous booby or TV smoothie selling you junk in lieu of quality. Learn to know mediocrity for what it is, and you'll blow the whistle on our complacent, time-honored slaughter of the real artist. The night won't lift instantly, of course, but a start can be made.

We need a flood of divine inspiration, here. We need a probing, alive literature, free to explore what needs to be explored. We need an overview of life such as has never before been achieved.

It's a cold night, and our star map is smudged.

A race of cannibals drags its way out of the mud and blood, only to wind up in a swamp of costly, twinkie-pretty, misleading advertising.

Or to put it another way, crew: from this race of stupendously creative and inventive geniuses; from the wonderful folks who gave you the Sphinx, the pyramids, the Sistine ceiling, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, and my novel *Kiss the Whip* (which many profess to adore, but none will publish) – from these wildly creative high-rollers you will accept only shit? Then what the hell are you alive for? Why not just crawl in your grave now, instead of waiting a few more dull, miserable years?

This is a holy task, nothing less. The soul of art is *cognitions*. The artist must put across the Transcendent, must push the insight button and unveil the dazzlement of other dimensions. It is entirely possible to project a worthwhile universe existing outside of the anthill of technocrazy.

The underlying truth is, we are the genie in the bottle. We can break the moss-grown cement and roll forth as a colossus. You don't have to search far. A worthy life is within reach. It's been there since before you were born. Just open your eyes and look.

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We dropped Gabby Snitch from our last issue because so many people had complained about her first three columns. But even more complaints came in when we stopped publishing her, so....

Tales to Astonish by Gabby Snitch

Gabbacious greetings again from your glamorous globe-gallivanting go-getter of gossipdom! And thanx for all your kind kards and loving letters lamenting my leave of absence from the last *Patchin Review* – I mean, it’s always nice for a girl to feel WANTED! Not that I have any trouble in that respect, least of all at the sci-fi-fests, where a girl needs a *cattle-prod* to hold those sex-starved screwballs at arm’s length!! Like at the Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts in Florida last March, first thing I knew, KARL “Cuddly Cowboy” HANSEN was buying me bloody marys and mumbling his philosophy of life: “I always play the cards as they are dealt – and eat what’s set before me,” he said, staring at my *crotch*! But speaking of eating, I noticed he used his *dessert fork* on his *appetizer*, during the banquet. Maybe that kind of thing causes no comment in Colorado, but it’s certainly NOT the way to behave in BOCA RATON.

Also at the conference (for those whose memories stretch back that far): BRIAN ALDISS, who, when not being wined and dined by an entourage of eager academics, was shocked to find an audience of (count ’em!) *four people* waiting to hear erudite papers about his work. His shouting “roll up, roll up, ladies and gents!” in the hallway was to no avail – everyone went to hear a lengthy taped interview with ANDRE (yawn) NORTON, instead!

My-Thai SOMTOW SUCHARITKUL presented the conference’s musical events, which should have included a world premiere featuring “300 children blowing out candles to represent the heat-death of the universe”. But the hotel fire regulations wouldn’t allow it – so tapes of Somtow’s ultra-modern sounds were broadcast over the crackly, low-fi hotel PA system, as an alternative to Muzak....

“Bohemian Bob” SHECKLEY and JAY ROTHBELL brought their open-air life-style to the conference, set up picnic table and butane gas stove in their hotel room (I kid you not!) and “roughed it” indoors for a few days. They’ve since moved back to New York City; but Bob’s phone number is unlisted – unless you’re an editor looking for a lunch date! Incidentally – why is it *Omni* magazine has printed all those excerpts from BEN BOVA’s books, but wouldn’t publish a piece from ex-editor Bob’s new novel? Maybe now that Ben’s an ex-editor too, things will even up! When *Locus* printed Ben’s report that he’d *resigned*, many people were confused and surprised – not least, at *Omni* itself....

Life & Soul of the Boca Raton conference: artist VINCENT DI FATE. “What are you doing that’s new and exciting?” I asked. “Nothing,” he said.

“I’m just doing the same old boring stuff I’ve always done. Because I have nothing better to do.” Well, at least he’s *honest!*

While I was in Florida I dropped in on my old pal PIERS ANTHONY, who says he’s selling half-a-million words a year these days, mostly fantasy, which does better for him than the science fiction ever did; and KEITH LAUMER, now writing several new books despite his health problems, and renovating dozens of junked 1968 Mercury Cougars in his spare time; and JOE HALDEMAN, who’s working on the next volume in his *Worlds* trilogy, after a novelization of *Poltergeist* didn’t work out.

In April, I made it to *Lunacon*, the New York convention that’s so traditionally dull, they moved it to New Jersey. At the “That’s Disgusting!” panel I was horrified when senile delinquent JOHN SHIRLEY did slanderous impersonations of JERRY POURNELLE and DON WOLLHEIM. He insulted female sci-fi fans (“Being hugged by one is like being embraced by a water bed”), then kicked over a table, smashed a water pitcher, and ran out of the room!!! Why do conventions even tolerate such *riff-raff*, let alone admit them free of charge?

Then in the main hall I heard SHARON JARVIS claim that she personally enjoyed *every single book* she’d ever published. This was just too silly so I went outside and met JOHN “I got my job through the Patchin Review” SILBERSACK, currently completing a new space operetta in the “No Frills” tradition for Berkley/Jove/Playboy/Ace. “Ask me something smart,” he suggested. Sorry John, you got the wrong girl!!

Hot gossip at *Lunacon* identified a prominent NY ed. – nameless, since she/he paid me ten bucks to keep it quiet! – who had to rearrange the furniture in his/her office to conceal a blemish in the carpet. Seems she/he got drunk one afternoon, threw up, and found the stain wouldn’t wash out!!

Also at *Lunacon*, rock writer LOU STATHIS who’s taken over from BRAD BALFOUR at *Heavy Metal* magazine. How did it feel to hold the reins of power? “Len Mogel has the power, not me. I’m never happy in any job, anyway. It’s like asking Adolf Hitler about the Jewish question. I don’t like working.”

In the dealer’s room I talked to HANK STINE. Was he still editing for *Donning/Starblaze*? “Through to the end of this week for sure,” he said wryly. He added that he’ll be publishing a new R.A. Lafferty book which is “what *Time Enough for Love* was for Heinlein. It’s berserko and crazy. Two hundred thousand words.” Sounds a winner, Hank!

Another sci-fi social on my busy, busy calendar was the San Francisco Nebula fest, natch. I was pleased to see guests behaving like civilized adults for a change (even BOB SILVERBERG wore shoes!) but this “new respectability” meant there wasn’t much chitter-chatter. Even DAVID “Hospitality” HARTWELL turned in before 12.30!! The only *embarrassment* of the weekend was when ED “food stamps” BRYANT shocked SFWAnS by suggesting the new Philip K. Dick award should be called “The Dick” and shaped like a you-know-what. “The only question,” said Bryant, “is whether it should come with batteries.” Well, I don’t know how you feel about this kind of bad taste but I think Bryant should be *thrown out of SFWA immediately*.

Star of the award winners was LISA TUTTLE, for trying unsuccessfully to take her story off the final ballot. Since she’d never objected to being nominated in the past, some said she was acting under orders of anti-SFWA hubby CHRIS PRIEST. Migod, why can’t people credit a girl for thinking for herself?? If you want the “total Tuttle tittle-tattle” you should check the letters section this issue.

Just one week after the Nebulas was THE sci-fi event of the year, namely our very own *Patchin Review First Anniversary Party* in a luxury New York loft. Numerous notables, many of whom asked to remain anonymous, sipped champagne, danced to a seven-piece band, and nibbled canapés. Gourmet treats were further enhanced when newly-instated Berkley/Ace/Playboy editress SUSAN ALLISON brought along a stack of her famous home-made *popcorn balls*. Free video games and a door prize for every guest were provided, the whole lavish bash being a timely tax loss against the vast profits which accrued during the Review’s sensationally successful first year.

Even out-of-towners journeyed in, including Capitol critic DOUGLAS WINTER – I told him his column’s the ONLY thing that’s still worth reading in *Fantasy Newsletter* and he modestly agreed with me, although, he said, his stuff was even better before the new editor *hacked it up!*

Surprise of the party: lovely MICHELE LUNDGREN (business manager for husband-artist CARL) announced she’s turned vegetarian and joined a *Krishna temple*, because she felt like doing something constructive.

Now here’s a question for you. What do ADELE LEONE, JANET E. MORRIS, JOHN SILBERSACK, CHARLES PLATT, JOHN DOUGLAS, GINJER BUCHANAN, DAVID HARTWELL, and SHAWNA McCARTHY

all have in common? *Not much*, I agree – except that I hear ex-Berkley ed. VICTORIA SCHOCHET told all of them she'd be throwing a lavish after-the-wedding party with her bestseller beau ERIC VAN LUSTBADER ... but then informed them that they were not invited, after all! Highly *embarrassing!* Scribe Snitch snuck in, though, and I admired the couple's fine dress sense, with Eric in a white silk suit, Vicky in a white skirt and sequinned blouse. It was a fancy affair, all the more so 'cause there were NO RIFF-RAFF. Congrats on a *shrewd marital move*, Vicky!

Now some snippets from all over.... STEPHEN KING, currently collaborating via phone – linked word processors with PETER STRAUB, sold his latest book “for a buck” so reviewers won't be able to put him down for receiving million-dollar advances “Elegant Ellen” DATLOW spent three weeks touring the California coast in April/May, lodging with writers en route – “Strictly business!” and I guess it must've been, since *Omni* magazine picked up the travel tab ... HARRY HARRISON romped thru NYC in April peddling a portion & outline he says combines the best of *Dune* and *Lord of the Rings* ... Guess it must be a *short book!* ... “Slippery” SAMUEL DELANY, who told me lastish he was working on a fanzine, now says it won't be out for another three years. Sorry if my previous report got you all excited out there! ... ED FERMAN of *F&SF* says his latest poll shows a drastic drop in teen readers since 1970 – seems they're playing videogames instead of reading books. Now some British news. First issue of incisive, inimitable, incomprehensible *Interzone* magazine sold more than three thousand copies, says MALCOLM EDWARDS (who's now an editor at British publisher Gollancz – Congrats, Malcolm). *Interzone* already has 800 subscribers in Britain – hope *they* understood more of it than *I* did!! Copies to U.S. subscribers were delayed when a shipment from Britain was lost in transit.

Crusty Canadian critic JOHN CLUTE has sold a short piece to *Omni* explaining what the British “new wave” was and where it went. “Jovial JOHN” SLADEK did something for *Omni* too, vilifying Velikovsky, but says the mag won't print it even tho they paid for it – maybe they decided Manny V.'s too eminent an egg-head to be debunked ... One-time publisher of now-bankrupt Savoy Books, DAVID BRITTON, was jailed for 28 days for selling “naughty magazines” in his bookstore – the Manchester police are cracking down on “filth”! Meanwhile Savoy Books has returned from the grave as Savoy Editions ... J.G. BALLARD is writing a book about his childhood in

China ... BRIAN ALDISS is into the second draft of the second volume of *Helliconia* and says it's "Full of action and adventure" ... but the biggest British controversy centers on the so-called "Nicholls Decision," named after *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* co-editor PETER NICHOLLS. As middle-age brings its belly bulge, the Decision is whether to belt your pants UNDER or OVER the paunch! The "low slung" option allows you to go on buying smaller-waisted pants – but lets it all hang out. The belted-belly-button option usually requires aid from suspenders, but is felt by some to be more esthetically acceptable – especially with those *tight T-shirts!* Which do YOU prefer? Let's get some reader feedback on this vital question!

One last snippet of Great British Gossip: which famed British author's U.S. girlfriend allegedly threatened to subpoena his ex-wife AND her *two teenage daughters* to testify in court to the infidelity of his current wife in their divorce proceedings? Got that? Answers on a postcard, please!

The long gap between this *Patchin Review* and the last has left me with even MORE snippets to snitch. I'll try to keep it brief, but with six months' worth of gossip, I'm snowed under!

I hear the new Nebula Jury membership reads like a *New Dimensions* contents page ... ED BRYANT got a job as a Denver radio talk-show host nattering with notables via sci-fi-fone, till the station replaced him with one-time radical BOBBY SEALE, who's got a new book out: *Barbecuing with Bobby*. Seale will read recipes over the airwaves. It's *true!*

No further issues are planned of *Science Fiction Digest* ... JIM FRENKEL now renting a NY office for Blue Jay Books ... Now, this is complicated, so pay attention: in my last column, I said at a Norman Spinrad party, folk were expecting a legendary "Dr. Feelgood" to give out *pharmaceutical samples*. Norm objected this implied illicit drug use took place, so last issue we apologized and pointed out that actually there *wasn't* any drug use. But *now* Norm's complaining this gave the impression he throws *dull parties!* Needless to say, nothing could be further from the truth.

Turning to the Worldcon: most revolting spectacle was SF-fan Tim Sullivan kissing ELLEN DATLOW's *foot* and dubbing her "Queen of Punk Fiction". Worst faux-pas of the convention was overheard from a hotel room which must remain numberless: "No, no, you're using *ankle* restraints on her *wrists!*" John Norman, where were you when they needed you??

"Zap! You're impotent!" joked jovial JERRY POURNELLE, pointing a toy laser-gun at a male friend's crotch. "Remember last year's worldcon

weapons policy,” Jerry was reminded. “You shoot it, you eat it!!!”

Meanwhile in NYC, September saw a gala gallery opening at the Museum of the Surreal and Fantastique, of drawings by underground comix artist S. CLAY WILSON. I was shocked to find the Tunnel Crowd gawking at pictures of pure *pornographic filth* – and even more shocked to learn the exhibit was backed by wealthy eccentric literary agent KIRBY McCAULEY! “I’ve always been a big fan of Wilson’s work,” Kirby admitted, standing beside a nauseating sketch titled “Captain Pissgums gets his gums pissed on.” Thank goodness Kirby’s lovely sister Kay wasn’t present to suffer the shame and humiliation of associating with such *decadence*.

Speaking of which, I went to the *Omni* fourth anniversary party at the Guccione mansion – white marble floors, huge fireplaces, Old Master oil paintings, a swimming pool in the basement, and Penthouse Pets tottering on high heels and giving guests empty grins. I found ISAAC ASIMOV ogling one such centerfolder, a *Foundation’s Edge* promo button prominently pinned to his lapel. Ike told me Doubleday won’t let him stop writing fiction now – soon as he finishes his new *robot* novel, he has to start the fifth *Foundation* opus. Just what we’ve all been waiting to hear!

A week later I crashed Timescape Books ed. JOHN DOUGLAS’s birthday bash, where a select circle of publishing persons and hangers-on bestowed gifts reflecting the tenor of the times – i.e. *cheap!* Hot gossip here had it that *SF Chronicle* editor-publisher ANDREW PORTER was missing under suspicious circumstances: last seen at the Worldcon in *Chicago*, stocking up on his favorite headache medicine, *Extra-Strength Tylenol!!!*

I suppose I should print something about all the book-biz takeovers, and so forth. You know most of that stuff already, but did you know *why* Berkley-Jove absorbed Ace and Playboy? “I want to be as big as Judy-Lynn del Rey,” was how Berkley prez VICTOR TEMKIN explained it – so my sources say.

Loose Lips Sink Spaceships!

Love, Gabby

The Patchin Review was never intended solely as a place for writers and readers to complain about editors and publishers. That would be so one-sided as to be pointless. The trouble is that, with a few exceptions, writers feel much freer than editors to air their opinions in print. As owner of DAW Books, as well as its editor, Donald A. Wollheim can speak more freely than

most. He also has more experience than just about anyone else in the field today. Here is his frank assessment of science-fiction publishing.

Donald A. Wollheim by Charles Platt

The office is like something out of a TV series – *Dallas*, perhaps. It’s a Hollywood fantasy of how a New York executive’s lair should look.

The decor is muted beige. There are plants in tubs. Fluorescent lights gleam on the chrome trim of the swivel chairs. The only sound is a faint hiss of air conditioning, as the corporation president sits talking on the telephone, behind his large desk facing huge windows of tinted glass. It’s a corner office – naturally! – and from up here on the thirty-second floor, there’s a classic Manhattan panorama of skyscrapers reaching into the afternoon haze.

The man behind the desk is Donald A. Wollheim, editor-publisher of DAW Books; and for him, it hasn’t always been quite like this.

Think back, for a moment, almost to the dawn of life in science fiction as we know it. The year: 1934. The magazine: *Wonder Stories*. The editor: pseudoscience visionary Hugo Gernsback. The writer: Wollheim, then a naive nineteen-year-old, selling his first story for the mind-boggling sum of ten U.S. dollars.

The story is published. But the check never comes.

Wollheim grows suspicious. He locates other authors and learns Gernsback hasn’t paid them, either. He hires a lawyer on behalf of all the writers. Gernsback finally settles out of court for a lump sum of seventy-five dollars, of which Wollheim’s lawyer takes ten.

A low-budget beginning; with more to follow.

Wollheim becomes an editor himself at a succession of grubby, cheesy adventure magazines – the kind with ads at the back for muscle-building techniques, the Rosicrucians, and elevator shoes. One of these magazines is so cheap, its editorial budget is literally zero. But Wollheim perseveres.

He joins Avon Books, in the 1940s, when it’s a fledgling enterprise specializing in sexed-up detective novels and general low-grade sleaze – the type of books that have to be sold fast, before the paper turns brown and spontaneously disintegrates. As editor, Wollheim works for “The kind of man who boasts he’s never read a book in his life. He’d judge a book by riffling through the pages; if he didn’t see anything salacious, he wouldn’t buy it. He

thought that that was how people bought books at news stands.” Wollheim sticks it out at Avon for five miserable years.

Then he establishes Ace Books with publisher A.A. Wyn. Ace is never a high-class operation, but they put out more science fiction than anyone else, and give a lot of unknown writers their first chance in the field.

But – A.A. Wyn dies in 1968 and his estate sells Ace to a Wall Street conglomerate. They decide to expand the business; so with shrewd commercial acumen they hire a man whose entire experience has been in manufacturing pumps. Within three years, Ace is almost bankrupt.

Wollheim bails out. He starts DAW Books – as his own boss, this time. He signs with New American Library, one of the biggest established paperback houses, to use their printing and distribution. But he retains complete editorial and financial control of his business. He moves into that plush corner office on the thirty-second floor of the big black Paramount tower on Fifty-First Street and Broadway.

After forty years of low-budget operations, it looks as if Wollheim is safe at last. But as you might imagine, with a background like that, he is a considerably cautious man. He knows the cheap basis on which science fiction was run for so long. He knows how easy it is to make mistakes and lose all that you’ve gained.

And so he has run DAW Books for ten years, now, in a very conservative style.

“You don’t change a successful formula unless it stops being successful,” he tells me. “We do five titles a month, one of which is a reissue, sometimes two. Our sales are excellent. We don’t print the number of books that a firm like Pocket Books or New American Library would print, we don’t publish millions of copies, but we’re successful. We don’t engage in gambling; the royalty advances I pay are based upon known facts of the previous sales of the author. We operate very carefully.

“I have the option, if I wish, of going into hardcovers, or trade paperbacks,” (the large-size paperbacks which many publishers are turning to as hardcovers become unaffordable), “or I could expand our line. My co-publishers, New American Library, have always said that they’d be happy to see us do it. But I see no point to getting into a field in which I don’t have the figures. I don’t believe in changing a successful formula.”

I ask him if he can tell me exactly what this formula is.

“If you are an editor whose taste is equal to that of, let’s say, seventy-

five percent of your potential readers, then you're going to be successful. If you have a rather esoteric taste, and you only reach 20 percent of the possible public, you will not be successful.

"That is not to say whether that taste is right or wrong. But for better or for worse, I happen to have the kind of taste which is the lowest common denominator.

"I'm occasionally wrong; but when I buy a DAW book it represents the kind of book I probably like, and it's the kind of book that I think my readers will like.

"I myself do read other books – there are science fiction books that I have enjoyed immensely, which I wouldn't publish. Let my competitors do them! But generally speaking, when I publish a book, it's because I like it."

What qualities does he particularly look for?

"I honestly can't answer that. If I enjoy a book, I get into it. I escape into it. And if that happens to me, I feel it's going to happen to my readers.

"If I read a book which I find difficult, despite the fact that it may have bright ideas, then I keep thinking my readers are going to start fidgeting at the same time I start fidgeting."

Paradoxically, despite Wollheim's simple tastes, while he was at Ace Books he bought novels from new writers who went on to become some of the most progressive or even avant-garde in the field. I mention a few names: Samuel R. Delany, Philip K. Dick, Robert Silverberg, Ursula Le Guin, Thomas M. Disch, John Sladek, Michael Moorcock, Brian Aldiss.

"It's true that from the beginning, Delany tended to be very literary; his novels were never clean, straight hacked. So I edited him. But when he got a little famous, and got a little power over editors, he made them publish the books over again in the original versions, you may recall. He was always a writer who was firmly convinced of his own genius, and ended up ramming it down the throats of his editors. I acknowledge him as a fine litterateur; but he isn't writing what I want to read, now, and I have a feeling he isn't writing what my readers would want to read.

"There are some writers who can get away with experimenting, and Philip K. Dick is one of them. But I don't see him as being an avant-garde writer. At Ace Books, where we did a good many of his earliest works, people liked them. And Ace was a great company for putting out hack fiction, you know.

"As for Silverberg, in my opinion he has not really changed. He became

terribly introverted for a period and wrote very troubled work. He got over his 'hack' period, but he's still able to do that, and I think his present work shows a lot of it. I would still publish Silverberg, if he wanted to write for me. But he doesn't have to write for me, because now he commands very high rates and hard covers. Even so, I don't see him as changing that much."

I ask Wollheim for his overall perspective on science fiction today.

"I tend to be discouraged about the sheer quantity of books being done by other publishers. Some of these books are junk, and some of the writers are being hideously overpaid, which is distorting their view of the field.

"Some companies have been increasing their lines, but we're in a recession period, and money is tightening up, so I think it's a very strange risk to take. I'm pleased that DAW can simply maintain its line; we could go up to six books a month, but I have no plans to do it. I hesitate because I know that it's costing people an awful lot to buy books these days. They're not 35 cents or even 50 cents any more.

"So I think there are a lot of wild things being done by my dear competitors. They're paying some crazy prices to some of the authors; in the case of Frank Herbert or Robert Heinlein, that's obviously worthwhile, but if publishers pay equivalent money for unknown authors, that money is not going to be earned back, which is the sort of thing that causes accountants to say, 'We'll cut out science fiction for next year, it isn't doing well.'"

If it doesn't make good sense for publishers to pay out large sums, why do they do it?

"I've always said that any damn fool can spend money. As long as it's somebody else's money, believe me, it's no problem! The problem is, can an editor hold his job two years later, when the last of the sales figures come in?

"Everybody in this business tends to be working a little bit blind.

I have the figures to tell me which DAW Books authors are selling. We have stopped publishing some authors, because I discovered that they didn't have the audience. You'd be surprised at some of their names.

"Then I see these same authors being picked up and published extensively by other companies, and I say to myself, 'Do they know what they're doing? Are they successfully selling the author I can't sell, and, if so, how are they doing it?' I don't know. And the truth is that even the editors, who are only hirelings, usually don't know either. Only the publisher and his accountants know.

“The motivation for paying a lot for a novel should be, of course, to get a well-known, selling writer on your list. If the writer really does sell, then your gamble pays off. But, I’m not a gambler by nature.”

Does he think that Heinlein’s *The Number of the Beast*, for example, ever really earned back the \$500,000 that its publisher paid for it?

“Yes, I think it probably has. Apparently the readers who know Heinlein’s name are not critical. I think myself that the book is unreadable, but nobody discovers that till they buy it, and Heinlein’s gotten away with four or five books, now, which are equally unreadable. Evidently the public can always be stung once more. On a smaller scale, I don’t think you can get away with that, but on a larger scale, apparently, you can.

“Still, the history of capitalism is full of that sort of thing. Look how many years Detroit got away with making rotten cars, until the crunch came!

“But, again, an editor is spending somebody else’s money, and the ‘somebody else’ these days is often a giant corporation of which the entire publishing business is one small subsidiary. So if they lose half a million that year, what the hell, they write it off, they’re making money at something else. Remember why RCA decided to get rid of Random House, Ballantine, Knopf, Pantheon, you name it, some of the best publishing imprints in the field? Because it was penny-ante stuff – they could make more money making paper bags! Yes, there’s more money in paper-bag manufacture than book publishing. Check it out some day. Publishing is a tiny field compared with the billion-dollar corporate industries that dominate the world.”

How does he feel about the trend toward fantasy as a separate category?

“The increase in fantasy is attributable to the tremendous success of the Tolkien novels, which caused publishers to say to their editors, ‘Let’s do books like these.’ And it’s much easier to write outright fairy-tale fantasy than it is to write a story which is going to be credible to somebody who is even remotely science-oriented.”

What about the trend toward science fiction which doesn’t have any real science in it?

“We now say in physics that we are uncertain about the absoluteness of any scientific law. We discovered that everything is not beautifully mechanical, as it seemed in the 1920s, so that almost anything is now possible. This theory that there could be innumerable alternate parallel worlds, for instance. There is so much vagueness today in physics, that the basis of science fiction can be easily transferred into fantasy. And of course

we also have this general concept that humanity is going to go out into the universe and colonize ten thousand planets. Then if they somehow lose contact with each other we'll reach a situation where every planet is an island, so that any world can be a fairy-tale world. Middle Earth can be circling some other star. Who knows the difference? Why bother to explain it?"

I suggest that this is an invitation for authors to become lazy.

"I think you're right. Of course it is. You get a lot of people coming into the field today who are not deeply grounded in science and don't really care for it much. Science has become kind of difficult for the average person to follow too easily. So science fiction has its average-type works, its potboilers, its hacks, as well as its bright spots. But on the whole science fiction tends to have more bright spots than any other category fiction. Because every work is an attempt to do something unique. So even hack work comes out with an occasional bright idea or a new twist."

As an editor-publisher who used to be a writer himself, I ask Wollheim how he feels about writers who claim that publishers are ripping them off in various ways – by paying royalties late, drawing up scurrilous book-publishing contracts, and so on.

"The writer's viewpoint is completely divorced from some of the realities of the publishing field. One of the things that some of them have been stressing is that money earned on sales of an author's book is not paid to the author for many months. That is, if the book earned a lot of money in January, the author's not going to get it until September. The theory is that publishers are taking these millions of dollars and investing them to make eight months' solid interest.

"Well that sounds terrible, but from the publisher's end of the field, this just isn't so. The publishers just don't have that money. It comes in dribs and drabs, they never have it to sock away in the bank. Every time the royalty payment period comes around, twice a year, you'll find a lot of publishers running to the bank to *borrow* money, in order to pay authors their royalties."

Does Wollheim think that the Science Fiction Writers of America, as a kind of union group, has done anything constructive?

"I think it's a lot of hogwash, mostly. I think the Nebula Awards that they give are a lot of hokum. It has all the characteristics of a fan organization: backstabbing, internal rivalries, all this nonsense."

They have a "model contract" which they suggest should be adopted by

publishers, to give authors a fairer deal.

“I don’t like it. A contract is basically a partnership agreement in which the publisher says to the author, ‘Let us go hand in hand as partners on this. You have written a book, we will put up our money to print, distribute, and sell it, and we’ll divide the profits.’ To take the viewpoint that the publisher is only a commercial operation and the author is simply a character selling a product, and wants a guaranteed payment, is one-sided.

“But the thing that counts is this. In the seven or eight years since this model contract was produced, nobody that I have bought a book from has ever proposed or submitted it to me. So the model contract is just another figment of their imagination.

“Another point that writers never think about is that, at any particular time, a publisher is out a great amount of money on the books he has paid for. If he pays an author \$5,000 or \$20,000 or half a million, that’s money he’s loaned out to an author. It’s supposed to be earned back by the sales of the book, but that won’t happen for one, two, or three years.

“Right now – this is July – I’m scheduling the books I’ll be publishing in April next year. These books have been bought from the authors, who have been paid. Now if you figure four new books a month, on which money has been paid out, and keep adding that up, you realize there’s a great sum involved there. Plus the fact that I’ve actually committed myself to books a year or more *beyond* next April.

“This means that, at any one time, I have a tremendous amount of money invested in authors, which is not earning me one penny. It’s a free loan to authors! And sometimes the authors don’t produce – don’t even bother to write the book. And you’re never going to get it back from them; there’s no sense in suing, which is something publishers soon learn. What has an author got? He’s got the roof over his head, and he’s lucky if he has that. So you can’t collect your money back.

“If you’re a major paperback house doing twenty titles a month, you may be out at any one moment from five to ten million dollars. And as fast as you make it back, you have to keep buying new books. It isn’t a matter of scheming publishers riding around in their Rolls Royces. Forget it!”

I ask how much capital it would take these days, to start a totally new, independent paperback publishing company.

“You’d need at least a million or two million dollars, which you couldn’t raise, because of the present interest rates and things like that. It

would be almost impossible.

“My own intent when I started DAW Books was to be an entirely independent corporation, and raise our own capital, but you can’t even think of going into business without a distributor. So what we first did was go around and make contact with distributors and discuss it with them.

“We saw several without getting any acceptance. They usually had several paperback lines they were already handling. Then I tried New American Library, which had just created its own marketing and sales, distributing system. Their attitude was that I could come with them in any way I wanted. I could have been an employee of NAL, I could have created a division of NAL, or I was offered the possibility of co-publishing.

“Co-publishing turned out to be the most practical. I am an entirely independent company; they finance our production; our sales, marketing, and promotion are all handled by them; I buy my own books, my contract is my own and not theirs; the situation has worked out marvellously. The profits, after we pay off our debts for production, are split between us, and it’s been profitable for both sides.

“You’ll notice I have a corner office, here. One of the four. This is how NAL regards us – as one of the four pillars on which their organization rests. I’m serious!”

Did he ever imagine he’d wind up in such a comfortable position?

“I started out in the deep depression, when nobody had any money. I met a man who wanted me to put out a magazine, even though he hadn’t got any money for the editorial budget. We had a group of would-be writers that wanted to get into print so badly, they’d write even if they didn’t get paid for it.

“In those days science fiction was a very, very small field. Anybody who read science fiction was pretty hard up to find anybody else who did, unless you joined a club, and a club in those days would be ten or twelve people, no more. So there was always that embattled feeling: we were this little group of crackpots that ran around and believed that people were going to fly to the Moon.”

Wollheim’s New York science-fiction society, the Futurians, was formed in 1938. It included members such as Frederik Pohl and Damon Knight.

“We’ve never really gone our separate ways. There’s an affinity. A lot of us are competitors, now, and we’ve learned to be careful of each other, but

I guess we feel a sort of family relationship. You know, ‘Hello Cousin’, after all these years.

“I find that fans today still have pretty much the same approach as we did then. I can talk to somebody of eighteen or twenty-two and still feel that they’re thinking the way we used to think. Even though science fiction is a big business, these days, its fans still have a little bit of that defensive, in-group attitude – a superiority complex which probably comes out of feeling rejected from the everyday world.”

Unlike the other Futurians, Wollheim has never strayed from New York City.

“We live in Queens. I was born in New York, and my parents are native New Yorkers, too, so – this is the way it is. I’m familiar with the city. Sometimes it scares the hell out of me, but I’m familiar with it.”

He’s a cheerful, matter-of-fact businessman – more like the manager of a manufacturing company than most people’s image of a book editor. Nor does he have any affectations; in fact his casually frank manner doesn’t really match the office he’s in.

He looks younger than his sixty-seven years, but at the same time wears a perpetually harassed expression, as if he won’t be happy till all the chores are done and his desk has been cleared. In line with his conservatism about spending money and taking risks, he’s a hard worker. His wife handles some of the DAW Books publicity, and his daughter now reads unsolicited manuscripts that come in from unknown authors, but Wollheim still handles the rest of the tasks himself – unlike the president of any other publishing house that I can think of. I ask him if he ever plans to retire.

“When I worked at Ace, I was doing up to twenty titles a month, buying them, blurbing them, reading them, contracting for them, the whole bag. Here, I do only five titles a month, one of them a reissue, so this to me is a retirement job. We are able actually to take off one week a month, if I feel like it.

“I hope my daughter will take over, if I ever have to quit. But as far as I’m concerned, this is as much as I ever plan to retire.”

(Excerpted from *Dream Makers II*, to be published May 1983 by Berkley.)

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World Science Fiction Conventions already embarrass and humiliate professional writers by charging them admission, then making them wear

funny hats in public and eat lunch with hordes of grotesque fans. The Celebrity Talent Hunt would take this entertaining trend to its logical conclusion.

Celebrity Talent Hunt by Jane Doe

This is how it could have been.

The lights dim ... a hush falls over the packed auditorium ... the musicians of the Chicago Variety Orchestra raise their kazoos ... and blow a fanfare that signals the climax of the world science-fiction convention.

A homely maiden clad in John Normanesque “barbarian slave girl” fur bikini undulates to stage center. She snaps her gum and grins at the audience. “And now, to prove that science fiction folk are the talentedest, lovablest, wonderfulest creatures on this or any planet, it’s time for the *Celebrity Talent Hunt!* And here’s our host for this evening, your editor and mine, none other than – ” she squints at a 3 x 5 index card “ – *David Hartwell!*”

Hartwell trots on in authentic Chuck Harris white sequinned suit, red velvet bow tie, white shirt with ruffles, flared pants, and white suede shoes. “Thankyou, thankyou, you’re too kind,” he shouts above the noise of scattered handclaps and another fanfare from the kazoo orchestra. “We’re here tonight to honor the celebrities of sci-fi-dom. We’re going to award this year’s Colugo. And for those of you too ignorant or too lazy to check your dictionaries, the Colugo is – ” (He gestures theatrically to a gold-painted papier-maché model of a small, winged mammal, atop a plinth of unvarnished plywood.) “ – the rare and sought-after *flying lemur!* Can science-fiction writers sing and dance? Can a lemur fly? Of course they can! And we’re here to prove it. At this very moment our talent scouts are combing the hotel, tracking down celebrities, and, ah, inviting them to – why, here’s one now!”

A scuffle has broken out at the back. Three of the most obnoxious types of fan are dragging Norman Spinrad into the hall. Hartwell raises a powerful flashlight and uses it to spotlight Spinrad. “Let’s hear it for Norm!” (Another fanfare from the kazoos.)

Spinrad is dragged on stage. The bikini-clad slave-girl takes his arm and kisses him on the cheek, mollifying him fractionally. “What the fuck is this?” he demands.

“How about that! Reacting with his customary acerbic wit and ill temper, president of SFWA, author of *Bug Jack Barron*, *Songs from the Stars*, and many other fine novels that I myself have published – are you ready, Norman, to compete for the Colugo Award?”

“No!”

“Great, just great! Now, which would you rather do – an act of your own devising, or something from our Lucky Dip Barrel?” (The barrel is wheeled on. It’s full of folded pieces of paper.) “What should he do, audience?” (Sporadic cries of “Get off!” etc.)

Hartwell murmurs in Spinrad’s ear: “Look, just take a piece of paper out of the barrel. Make my life easy.”

With bad grace, Mr. Spinrad makes his lucky dip. The bikini girl reads the piece of paper he chose. “Norman Spinrad is going to sing ‘The Green Hills of Earth’ to kazoo accompaniment!”

“This is a fascist trip!” Spinrad exclaims, and tries to leave the stage. But the fan “talent scouts” bar his way and the audience starts slow-handclapping. Hartwell hands him a lyric sheet. The kazoo orchestra play another fanfare. Finally Spinrad snarls his way through one verse.

“How about that! What a great guy! let’s hear it for Norman!” Hartwell exclaims. “Remember, you, the audience, are the judge! Our applause meter here decides who’s going to be the lucky winner of the Colugo Award!”

And so on. As the event proceeds we see various celebrities press-ganged into picking routines from the Lucky Dip Barrel. Darrell Schweitzer is given the task of summarizing the plot of *Dhalgren* in 60 seconds ... Thomas M. Disch has to sing Heinlein’s “The Roads Must Roll” ... Barry Malzberg recounts the funniest experience he ever had as a science-fiction writer ... Gregory Benford is asked to name the three female fantasy authors whose work he most admires, and why ... Harlan Ellison is required to play “Toot-toot-tootsie, Goodbye” on a glockenspiel ...

It didn’t happen at Chicago. But there’s always next year ...

NOTE: Letters relating to The Patchin Review are considered publishable, including writer’s name and location, unless the writer states otherwise. Letters may be abridged. We will not interfere with correspondents’ grammar or spelling.

Letters

From Anonymous

On the final ballot for this year's Nebula Awards was a story that did not appear on the preliminary ballot, nor on any preceding Nebula Award Report. That is to say, it was put there solely by the Nebula Jury in the exercise of their discretionary powers, it was the only story so placed; all other contenders appeared somewhere on the first ballot. The odd thing is this – the story, “Swarmer, Skimmer,” is by Gregory Benford, the Chairman of the Nebula Jury. An additional peculiarity is that the piece is simply a chunk of a new novel by Benford (it appears in the first issue of *SF Digest*), which will be eligible (as a novel) for awards a year or two from now. Does the Chairman of the Nebula Jury feel it is one of his perks to throw in a sample to “test the waters”? Is this what the judges of the Nebula Jury are really for? Am I “paranoid” to see this as a gross appearance of impropriety? Doesn't it appear that Nebula Judges can simply put their own stories on the ballot (or that the chairman can)? A reading of the story tends to lay to rest as preposterous the notion that discriminating good taste on the part of the other judges led them to agree quite coincidentally that it deserved a place in the final roster. Isn't “discriminating good taste” supposed to be the reason for employing this jury? Does this show that it is working, I wonder?

«As a member of the Nebula Jury which put “Swarmer, Skimmer” on the final Nebula ballot, I realized at the time that someone might accuse us of bias. However, it is the function of the jury to nominate material which did not make the final ballot otherwise. Edward Bryant's novella made it without our help. There were very few other novellas published, and frankly I didn't enjoy any of them. Thus I voted for “Swarmer, Skimmer” despite, rather than because of, its being written by our Jury Chairman. Incidentally, *Worlds* by Joe Haldeman and *The Vampire Tapestry* by Suzy Charnas were eligible novels written by Jury members; the former was not recommended by the Jury and the latter made it with no help from us. Thus being a Jury member does not necessarily provide the “perks” our correspondent implies. However: It is true that I might not have read “Swarmer, Skimmer” had it not been brought to my attention. Obviously, it's very easy for Jury members to draw their work to each others' attention, since they are writing to each other about possible candidates anyway. On the other hand, the composition of the Jury is no secret, and since last

year it consisted only of five members, any writer could have sent us copies of his work at minimal expense. Thus the worst you can say of the Jury is that members do not have time to read everything, and are more likely to read that which is put in front of them; and this will come more from activist, award-seeking writers, or from fellow Jurors, than from those outside the social milieu of science fiction. To this extent the awards tend to be biased, despite good intentions of all concerned; which is why I would prefer to see no awards at all. However, when asked if I would serve on last year's Jury, I naturally valued the chance to exert an influence in the selection process. – Ed.»

Gregory Benford writes:

1. Actually it was Terry Carr who brought the story to the attention of the Jury.

2. It is significant that the letter-writer complains of a “gross appearance of impropriety” without taking the trouble to ask anyone who knew the facts of the matter – several of whom are in Manhattan. From his/her awkwardly worded objections, I gather he thinks the story is inadequate. Anyone who cares to check can read the story in Terry Carr's *Best of the Year* anthology. Its presence there is perhaps adequate refutation already.

3. I did indeed consider withdrawing the story after the voting of the Jury put it on the ballot. Norman Spinrad talked me out of it, saying “If we drop a Jury member's story because it would be unseemly to some, we set a precedent. Can you *imagine* how hard it's going to be getting people to serve on the Jury in the future?” The Jury members discussed this question, too, and as Carr put it, decided it would be a violation of the intention of the rules if we deliberately left a story off the ballot because of any consideration other than literary. (This was the sum of the telephone conversations.)

From Piers Anthony, Inverness, Florida

There is a general attitude around Patchin Place, as evinced by the two issues (1 and 3) I have seen, that fantasy is at best an imperfection and at worst a corruption, and that those who publish and promote it are blighting a once noble genre, and that those who write it, shouldn't. It is time someone with some experience in contemporary fantasy and at least one operative cranial hemisphere delivered a salutary swat to the single buttock of the ignorant; i.e. I've got half a mind to tell off the half-assed anti-fantasy snobs.

Gregory Benford says fantasy fearlessly faces the past. That the “writer of fantasy cannot afford to adopt a tone of epistemological mockery, or use ironic juxtapositions which call into question the whole meaning of literary action.” Evidently he has not been reading my own fantasy, that mocks everything, deliberately juxtaposes conventional SF with conventional F, and (in a future novel) treats Death as the protagonist. Perhaps Benford does not consider Anthony to be important enough to read, but at this writing an Anthony fantasy is number one on the *Locus* paperback list, after making several mainstream bestseller lists that no other genre novel made in that period. He also apparently does not read Donaldson, who sells even better. Benford wants to see what writers from the political left can do, but it seems he refuses to read those of us who answered his challenge before he thought to make it. I hold his attitude in contempt.

One who takes the trouble to read real contemporary fantasy can hardly chide it for lack of imagination or originality. One should not fault it for being entertaining or escapist; that is after all much of the point of all fiction. Does it lack significance? I suppose each author and publisher and reader and critic will have to speak for himself, as definitions differ widely. Speaking for myself, I have found fantasy to be as ready a forum for the expression of those things I deem to be significant or artistic or humorous as is science fiction. Perhaps this is because fantasy, unlike science fiction (according to Barry Malzberg’s claim) does have one editor with a comprehensive reading background in the genre, who has also written it: Lester del Rey. Is fantasy mostly heroic, as Benford claims? Maybe Lin Carter’s is, but upcoming fantasies of mine feature protagonists of an ogre and a female horse; I doubt these fit that mold.

The thing is, there are no limits in fantasy. Literally anything is possible. This, for the truly aspiring intellect, is the ultimate playground. It is true that some minds require limits in order to function – but those minds that have the power and discipline to accommodate complete freedom should be able to accomplish their fullest expression in fantasy. In this sense, the resurgence of fantasy is a positive signal for the genre, and should be welcomed, not chastised.

«This arrived too late for Gregory Benford to write a reply. However, since he based his article on ideas that he and I developed together, I will answer on his behalf.

It is ingenuous but inaccurate of Piers Anthony to imply that,

because his fantasy sells well, it is representative of the field. Most modern fantasy is limited by a strict, repetitive format, and is very rarely self-satirical. At least three-quarters of the new titles being published these days are simple sword-and-sorcery, and if Piers is unaware of this, perhaps it's because he does not read widely in the field – the same crime of which he accuses Gregory Benford. Since we specifically targeted modern category fantasy, i.e. sword-and-sorcery, this exempts most of Piers's work from the criticisms aired.

I personally dispute that “much of the point of all fiction” is to be entertaining or escapist. Most literary classics are treasured for enhancing our perceptions of reality, not anesthetizing them. To describe fantasy as “the ultimate playground” is to imply an area of fiction created for children, fenced off from the dangers and difficulties of the outside world. In this sense, Piers actually seems to be agreeing with our complaint that modern fantasy is innately circumscribed, juvenile, and *inapplicable* to modern life.»

From Lisa Tuttle, Devon, England

(Replying to rumors that she refused her Nebula Award this year because of promptings by her husband, Christopher Priest.)

It's true that in the past I've not made any objections to the Nebula – and stories of mine have been on the ballot. But then, I've never had an across-the-board negative reaction against the Nebula. In the old days, I used to read letters by Chris Priest and others in the SFWA mailings, and I'd think, hmm, yes, they're probably right – but then, all awards have their problems, and ours doesn't sound so bad – and I would be pleased when stories of mine were nominated – but basically the whole issue never had much importance in my mind. After I quit the SFWA (I don't remember exactly when that was, but it would have been around 1976, maybe 1977) I paid even less attention. My ideal was a kind of Olympian detachment – let them give their little awards to each other, it's nothing to me – which, although I still sigh after it, was simply impossible. Whether it matters to me or not, I *know* – I can't pretend ignorance. I go to conventions, I read *Locus*, and I have friends who take the Nebulas very seriously and write me air-mail letters letting me know my chances of making the ballot.

I learned in the smoky atmosphere of the One Tun, in March, that a story of mine had made the Nebula ballot – this was a surprise; according to

my concerned friends it hadn't had a chance. Well, a week later I got back to Huddispitt and found a letter from Ed Ferman which said:

"A George Guthridge story from *F&SF* has been nominated for a best short story Nebula, and George is mailing copies of the story to SFWA members. I agreed to supply a covering letter.

"When I first agreed to supply the letter, it looked as if his would be the only nomination from *F&SF*, but apparently 'The Bone Flute' has also been nominated.

"I guess all I can do even things out is to offer to supply a similar note, if you want to send out copies. In fact, I'll be glad to do it for you, if you like, and if you arrange to send me a list of SFWA members.

"Next time I will stay out of this sort of thing."

So much for my Olympian detachment; I was furious. I controlled myself, wrote Ed a short letter saying No, and complained to everyone in earshot. Then (recalling my detachment) decided it was nothing to do with *me* if people were tacky enough to try to campaign for awards. After all, they'd been doing it for years. In the past, I'd received stories from Ed Bryant, Charles Grant, and the Eisensteins, and shrugged them all off – it wasn't something *I* would do, but most people apparently found it perfectly acceptable. The only difference here (besides the fact that I didn't know who George Guthridge was, whereas Ed Bryant is a good friend) was that because Ed Ferman had written a covering letter, it looked as if *Ed*, rather than George, was sending the story out – and therefore that Ed considered Guthridge's story to be deserving of a Nebula ... but not either my story or John Varley's, which were both also published in *F&SF*.

But a couple of weeks later, as I was writing to George Martin, I started going on at greater length about how out of hand this "campaigning" had become, and why didn't the Nebula Committee Take Steps, etc etc. I worked up a good head of steam, and finally left my typewriter to discuss it with Chris. Yes, here's where his evil influence comes in – he said (after I'd raved for some minutes) Go Public. If you don't object, this will just continue. Write to the Nebula Committee. Write to *Locus*. Bring it out in the open.

I realized he was right. I don't think the Nebula is very important, but I couldn't pretend to be detached – I was involved. And to say nothing was to condone something I disapprove of. Rules have been made to improve the Nebula in the past – at one time, anthology editors could nominate the stories they'd bought themselves – and they can be still if enough people care. So

even though I'm not a member of SFWA, and don't intend to rejoin, I decided I had to protest. To avoid accusations of sour grapes (if I lost to Guthridge) and to add some weight to my protest, I withdrew my story from the ballot. This was done too late to affect the voting, but the intention was there, and I'm sticking to it, and therefore I've refused the award.

I told this to both Frank Catalano and Charlie Grant on the phone; I told Charlie that SFWA could handle it however they wanted, as long as my refusal and my reasons for refusing were made public (that is, they could announce "no award" or they could announce that I'd won and then explain that I'd withdrawn my story before I knew it had won, and read out my letter to explain why) and Charlie assured me that my reasons would be made public. I think it was ignoble of SFWA to get someone to "accept for me" when I'd refused it; but I have to blame myself for not carrying through and making sure that there was someone planted at the banquet with a prepared statement from me to read when the award was announced.

So that's the whole boring story. Oh, yes, another thing that annoys me about SFWA is that they don't even have the grace (or organization?) to inform the authors of works which have made the final ballot. Admittedly the fannish grapevine is an efficient one, and the Nebula is generally a very clubby award, but I wonder how (or even if) Russell Hoban ever found out?

From Joseph A. Ezzo, St. Petersburg, Florida

"Defeat new-forges the chosen among men: it sorts out the people: it winnows out those who are purest and strongest, and makes them purer and stronger. But it hastens the downfall of the rest, or cuts short their flight. In that way it separates the mass of the people, who slumber or fall by the way, from the chosen few who go marching on."

The above quote from Rolland echoes my own feeling about sci-fi and genre fiction in general. It is very curious that your publication has avoided the more direct issues – except by implication. Firstly, we know that with the advent of mass-market paperback publishing, the book business became Big Business. The last word is no longer that of management (i.e., editors or publishers) but the accountant. We also know these organizations have been largely swallowed up by the huge corporations which own the movie industry. Books now have a comparable failure rate – well over fifty percent. Quality is no longer the name of the game. Rather, there is a need to keep in touch with current trends in other areas of the media. Result: pander to the public, turn out shitty work, with an occasional diamond in the rough thrown

in as an afterthought.

Secondly, what about sci-fi readership? Well, with the amazing growth of functional illiteracy in our country; the utter failure of the educational system, which now serves to inculcate the student into current modes of acceptable behavior, rather than the contemplation of ideas; and our obsession with video-age gadgetry, can we seriously believe that our writers are writing for a discerning public? This has *never* been the case, in sci-fi or any other area of fiction.

Thirdly, what about the writer? What happens to a market when its quantity increases more rapidly than it can develop? Quality goes to hell. Let's own up: there just are not very many good writers around today, in sci-fi or anywhere else. Sure, there are the likes of Disch, Spinrad, Aldiss, Le Guin, Dick, et al., but how many people can write like them? This is a business, a job, for the vast majority of sci-fi writers, and no matter how conscientious many of them decide to get, no matter if they spend years instead of days on their books, they would do no better. But there are a few. I don't mean to sound as though the only sci-fi worth reading is the "literary" sort – there are terribly enjoyable works out there, not necessarily literary, which I'm very glad I've not missed (I'm thinking of people like Farmer, Lynn, Brunner, Stableford, etc.). What I am getting at is that there appears, in *The Patchin Review*, to be an attempt to steer clear of the issue of inferior writing quality by the vast majority of practitioners in the field. The only hint of this is in the "Survey" section.

This brings me to the Rolland quote. There are a few who march on, busting down the boundaries of baseless traditions and redundancy and exploring the tremendous potential of the field. They will, I fear, always be outcasts. This rings especially true today, where in this culture dominated by the other-directed social character (to borrow a term from David Reisman), we no longer operate in accord with our value systems, because they have ceased to exist, having been replaced by radar-like apparatus which allows us to home in on the wavelengths of the peer group, our main goal being to channel our behavior into currently acceptable modes, thus becoming "normal". So if Thomas Disch considers himself to be a failure in the sci-fi world, it is little wonder.

To sum up, is it really necessary to speculate when you *know* the facts?

«I'm surprised you feel *The Patchin Review* hasn't run direct comment on low literary standards in science fiction. Some people

seem to feel we've run too *many* pieces on this theme. Last issue there was "Vile Dross"; this issue, "Corrosive Sludge". (My titles, I confess, though not my articles.) What more could anyone ask?»

From Jay Rothbell, New York City

From its first issue, *The Patchin Review* has been so open to controversy and taboo-offing that it quickly became *the* forum in which practicing writers embarrass themselves. Oh, we writers went at it avidly, trying to neatly slice up our colleagues/antagonists. Puffed up with Purpose or in the throes of self defense, we were but pissing into the wind. Mr. Ellison's lengthy put-down of young novelist John Shirley, for example, actually served to increase Shirley's readership. Funniest jibes were "L.D.V./R.I.P". and Ted Klein's remark, "I'm not used to being tweaked in print and stroked in private." That last comment (a tweak, I believe) takes to task the stage we suddenly find ourselves playing on. Yes, we read Gabby Snitch, but let's pretend we don't.

Most commendable as brain food were Benford's essay on fantasy (though few writers could or should be as hard-science as him), Silverberg's letter on art versus commercialism, and Sharon Jarvis's statement, "I have not and never will be part of the old-boy network." These complemented the editorial thrust in favor of quality over schlock and – gasp! – unknown writers in preference to Big Name Drivel.

Most unusual was *The Patchin Review's* editorial undercurrent of bondage imagery in word and etching. This and the murky origins of certain impish copy suggest (at least to me) chronic frustration. The world is *The Patchin Review's* whipping boy. Still, don't leave me out. Enclosed is my check for yet another brawling year of the magazine.

From George Flynn, Somerville, Massachusetts

I am writing (rather late) in response to "John Smith's" article, "The Hugo Farce". His argument is severely weakened by a number of rather silly details.

There are a number of errors in the discussion of the Best Editor award. "Ben Bova ... went on winning it every year ... until he stopped being eligible." In fact Bova won in 1973-77 and 1979, but even the last of these was for a year most of which he spent at *Analog*; he has won no awards for his work at *Omni*.

"Terry Carr is best known to voters as the one-time editor of an amateur magazine." Nonsense: the Hugo voters' ignorance of contemporary fanzines

is a scandal in its own right, and they know practically nothing of past fanzines. Clearly Carr was nominated as one of the most prolific anthology editors.

“Hartwell, Schochet, Wollheim – the fans don’t acknowledge that these people exist.” It would be more accurate to say that the average reader doesn’t *know* they exist, since their names don’t appear on the books they edit (even Wollheim is listed on DAW books as “Publisher,” not editor).

The Hugos are a democratic institution, and share the basic flaw of democracy: uninformed voting. The trouble here, as elsewhere, is that truly informed voting takes heroic efforts. The Hugos were established out of a natural impulse by science-fiction readers to give public appreciation to work they thought was good. But even with the best of taste (which no audience has ever had), one can’t appreciate what one doesn’t know. The arguments that the Hugos do the field more harm than good are worthy of serious consideration (though I am not myself convinced by them), and may well eventually bring about a change. But it’s a safe bet that nobody will be persuaded by being called “shortsighted illiterates.”

The remarks attributed to Sam Lundwall are mostly too silly to require refutation. But for those who don’t know, it may be worth noting that the number of Hugo voters, rather than being “never ... more than 200 persons,” has in fact been over 1000 for about five years.

“John Smith” replies:

I don’t agree that the errors undermine my argument, and it’s silly to pretend that “truly informed voting requires heroic efforts”. If a thousand or so of the biggest (in more senses than one) science-fiction fanatics aren’t up-to-date with the subject of their own fanaticism, it must be because they like it that way. In which case they’re not just short-sighted illiterates, they’re *willfully* short-sighted illiterates. As for persuading them of my point of view, if I’d wanted to do that I would have rephrased my views in words of one syllable as a letter to *Starship*.

From Doug Fratz, Gaithersburg, Maryland

I read with interest Norman Spinrad’s kvetching about *A World Between’s* lack of critical response. I would first point out that I was one of the reviewers who did *not* ignore Norman’s book, and in fact reviewed it as the feature review in *Thrust* #13 (Fall 1979).

Although I agree with Norman in that I too expected his book to be the focus of an extensive debate which did not materialize, I am not at all surprised, in retrospect, that it didn't. The book totally failed to develop the type of concepts necessary to have it serve as the basis for discussion on male/female social issues. The choice of groups to represent the male-chauvinist and female-liberation archetypes was particularly inept. The "Femocrats" were blatantly fascist females who hated males and were portrayed to have no redeeming social values in their goals. The "Transcendental Scientists" were a group of highly intelligent scientists who, for no apparent reason, had a consciously hidden anti-female bias. These two straw-men (or straw-women as the case may be) were created with the sole purpose of trying to sway the electronic democracy cum rational capitalist anarchy of Pacifica. Not for one moment was there any fear that either group would succeed.

The legitimate and important questions that Norman says he had in mind when he wrote this novel simply did not get asked in a sensible way, and thus fell on deadened ears. I have no doubt that Norman Spinrad is capable of writing the novel that he obviously meant to write, the one that will serve as the starting point for an extensive debate on the social problems of differentiation.

I hope we see it someday.

From Paul Brazier, Walthamstow, England

Dear Norman Spinrad:

I read your *The Feminist Mistake* in *The Patchin Review*, and because I, too, am interested in feminism, I went out and found a copy of your book *A World Between* and read it. I offer some alternative reasons for the critical silence that greeted it.

Did it ever occur to you, Mr. Spinrad, that you might simply have written a bad book? Not an illogical book, or one where the science was unbelievable or the plot too fantastic, or even a book where the prose style itself was offensive; simply a book which didn't grab the reader, so that he or she never bothered to finish it.

I don't know what it's like in America, but here in England we get politics and political discussion (*not* the same thing) thrust at us constantly. Furthermore, the points discussed are rarely actual differences of opinion or belief, but merely differences of interpretation of opinion or belief – politics might almost be described as the art of interpretation. Most politicians dress

up emotional interpretations as rationally held standpoints, so there is very little room for actual discussion, and all we get is constant bickering with no real progress achieved. Sound familiar? Yes, that's right, it's the scenario for your novel.

Your scenario reflects American society, from the capital of Gotham, to the frozen city of Thule, the movie capital at Hollywood, and the archipelago that sounds like a cross between Hawaii and the Bahamas. The geography and mood is all American. Everything you depict, we already know. I found nothing invigorating or different.

Even the final solution is no more than yet another half-hearted democratic compromise made only vaguely plausible by the defection of a major character. Of course, you will claim that this defection is part of the character's growth; but her growth is not depicted. She is simply confused – we are told so, over and over again – until she makes up her mind to do something. She has no internal moral imperative driving her, nor any external political or emotional pressures, apart from a vague feeling that Transcendental Science should not have meddled in Pacifica. Thus her defection seems not so much the logical action of a person discovering a new maturity, as the capricious whim of a woman (how stereotypical) which acts as a deus-ex-machina device to save the world from sinking back to the status-quo of sexual rivalry, and thus gives the story some point.

This I would expect to have been greeted with howls of outrage from any feminist reviewer. But I doubt any of them got this far. The lack of proper character development extends to all the characters in the book and is daunting in the extreme – it's just like watching a soap opera on TV.

Moreover, Mr. Spinrad, the attitude adumbrated in your article does not appear to be honest, and reading the novel only confirmed this view.

The word “fuck” is a vulgar term that strips the sex act down to an animal function devoid of sensitivity or love. In the world of sexual politics, one must be particularly careful of what one says; so I was more than surprised to find in your article this word, with all its degrading and male-chauvinist overtones intact.

Is it possible in this day and age that you are unaware of the importance of finding the right word? The feminist insistence on linguistic rectitude (chairperson, etc.) must surely open your eyes to this point.

But in all fairness, it seems from your novel that you are not all that au-fait with linguistic usage, and therefore might not have been aware of the

blunder. For instance, ordinary usage contracts long and bulky names. Your own United States of America is known as America or the U.S.A.. Yet in your novel the Good Old Mountain Boys are always referred to in full, as is Godzillaland (what a mouthful).

What I'm driving at is that people are lazy in speech, but there are very specific meanings attached to what they say. As writers, we can't afford to be lazy, or else we will find that we are being misinterpreted. And if we leave ourselves open to misinterpretation, then where is the point in attempting to investigate politics through fiction? As I said above, politics is the art of misinterpretation, or at the least, reinterpretation.

For me, one word invalidated your whole argument in *The Patchin Review*, not because of the word itself but because of its ill-considered use. Likewise, in your novel, the use of words failed to convince, and thus unsuspended my disbelief. Words are a writer's tools, and we must be expert in their use, or else we shall fail. In James Joyce's novels there is never any doubt who is speaking, even though we are rarely told. In your book I was four pages past a change of character and scene, which I hadn't noticed due to domestic distraction, before I realized that it was someone else speaking.

Perhaps if we remember that Joyce was a trained singer, the lesson will become clear. Along with Wordsworth, we should "try it on the voice". Mr. Spinrad, your book does not bear reading aloud. If you try this, you will find the tone insincere and unconvincing.

You mentioned in passing that Charles Platt reviewed your novel in *Foundation*. No matter how many times your book might have been reviewed, you would not have received a wiser or fairer comment than his final sentence:

"The real Norman Spinrad surely has more subtlety and more intellect to embody in a novel than this."

Moments of Truth

"In another sense, Mr. Meyer was an appropriate choice for the [director of the *Star Trek*] movie; he had a reputation for intelligence, literacy, and imagination – the very qualities that won the *Star Trek* TV series its devoted following."

– From *Variety*. So *that* was the secret of the *Star Trek* series

success!

Song of the Obscure Science-Fiction Writer

(Contributed anonymously)

I wanna get flayed
In *The Patchin Review*
Accused of high crimes
(Innuendo will do).
Analyzed, victimized,
Taken to task –
A little attention
Is all that I ask.

I wanna get killed
In the Survey of books –
Raked over coals
And hung up on hooks.
Call my work bilge
That was penned by a lout
(Else no one will know
That it even came out) .

I wanna get walloped
Or even defamed –
Don't care what it is
Just as long as I'm named.
My books have not garnered
Great riches for me
(But could that all change
If Gabby snitches on me?).

So turn on the spotlights
And drag out the whips –
I'm ready to take it

With quotable quips.
I've practiced my answers
Both witty and surly
(With luck I might even
Trade insults with Shirley).

Then, wherever I go
(And I hope I go far)
The fans will all know me
And think I'm a star.
They'll say, "What a
Hatchet job they did on *you!*"
And not glance at my nametag
And frown, and say, "Who?"

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Editorial

Regular readers of *The Patchin Review* already know our outlook on Hugo

awards. The Best Novel Hugo is merely a measure of how personally popular a writer is among a small clique of science-fiction fans.

Unfortunately, outsiders assume that the Hugo really is a measure of what is “best” in science fiction. Their inevitable reaction: If this is the best, what can the worst be like? In this way, Hugos work against the acceptance of science fiction as literature. Moreover, by using “Hugo Winner” in their cover copy and advertising, publishers allow favoritism of the fans to determine an author’s wider audience and future income.

This year, L. Ron Hubbard has the potential to win an unpopular victory. Hubbard is no hero to the people who usually vote for Hugos. If he won, would it bring about a reformation of the Hugo system, or even its abolition? There’s only one way to find out.

I have already done my bit. I have written letters to the organization promoting *Battlefield Earth*, and to Mr. Hubbard himself, emphasizing that *anyone* may nominate and vote. All you have to do is become a supporting member of this year’s World Science Fiction Convention. You do not have to attend the convention itself.

If you too are unhappy with the Hugo system, it’s time to do your bit. Subscribers to *The Patchin Review* will find, enclosed, a Hugo nominations form. The rules for submitting this form are reproduced opposite. You only have until March 8, so don’t delay. Send the form to the address printed on the back of it, and enclose a check for \$15 made out to Constellation, if you’re not already a member of the World Science Fiction Convention.

Non-subscribers, or anyone who receives *The Patchin Review* past the nominations deadline, should still buy supporting memberships. Send \$15 to Constellation, Box 1046, Baltimore, MD 21203. Assuming Hubbard’s book gets onto the shortlist, you’ll still be able to vote in the final ballot.

Many people object that *Battlefield Earth* is merely 1930s magazine fiction. Certainly it has the old action-adventure flavor; but it also has some vitality. Need we compare it to Asimov, reiterating the tired old clichés of his 1940s “epic” in slow motion? Heinlein, belaboring his tiresome nostalgic prejudices, in a format straight out of *Astounding*? Clarke, rewriting, yet again, British boy-wonder stories c. 1950?

On literary grounds, Hubbard is at least the equal of his most likely rivals. You can vote for him without fear of beating out some worthier contender. And, at the same time, there is the interesting prospect of the fan clique seeing their nemesis win a democratic victory over those other “elder

statesmen”, and walk away with a prize that may never be quite the same again.

Hugo Nominations Ballot

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY BEFORE NOMINATING.

You must be a member of Constellation to nominate, or to vote on the final ballot. (Your membership number isn't required on the ballot, but including it will save us a little work; your name and address are required.) If you aren't a member already, just fill out the required information and enclose the applicable membership fee with your ballot. All nominations should be sent to **Bill Evans, 14100 Canterbury Lane, Rockville, MD 20853** and must be postmarked no later than **March 8, 1983** to be counted. Send the ballot earlier if you have any doubts about the speed of the mails; and if you're overseas, **please** use air mail.

We're distributing these ballots fairly early, so most of you should get them about two months before the nomination deadline. While we'd prefer that you not wait until the very last minute, we do hope that you'll take your time before voting. Don't nominate the first thing that comes to mind, but try to read as widely as possible. If you have a serious question about the interpretation of the rules, write to us and we'll try to answer it. (But do not ask us to count the words in a story for you; you can get a pretty good estimate by counting a typical page and multiplying.)

You may make up to five nominations in each category, but if you wish to nominate a smaller number, or to make no nominations in a given category, feel free to do so. (In fact, we recommend that you not nominate in any category with which you aren't familiar.) Please do not nominate “No Award,” which under the rules must automatically appear on the final ballot. We have included spaces for “source” under the fiction categories. Please indicate when and where published for shorter fiction; it's a good idea to look them up anyway to be sure you have the title right. PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE.

The following definitions of Hugo categories are based on the World Science Fiction Society Constitution.

Science Fiction Achievement Awards (Hugos)

BEST NOVEL: A science fiction or fantasy story of 40,000 words or more, appearing for the first time during the calendar year 1982. A work originally appearing in a language other than English is also eligible if it appeared in English translation in 1982. Publication date, or cover date in the case of a dated periodical, takes precedence over copyright date. A serial's date of appearance is taken to be the date of the last installment. Individual stories appearing as a series are eligible only as individual stories, and are not eligible taken together under the title of the series.

BEST NOVELLA: Same rules as for Best Novel, except that the length must be between 17,500 and 40,000 words.

BEST NOVELETTE: Same rules as for Best Novel, except that the length must be between 7,500 and 17,500 words.

BEST SHORT STORY: Same rules as for Best Novel, except that the length must be less than 7,500 words.

BEST NON-FICTION BOOK: Any non-fictional work relating to the field of science fiction or fantasy, first published in book form during the calendar year 1982.

BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION: Any production, in any medium, of dramatized science fiction or fantasy which was publicly presented for the first time in its present dramatic form during the calendar year 1982. Individual programs presented as a series are eligible, but the series as a whole is not eligible: however, a sequence of installments constituting a single dramatic unit may be considered as a single program (eligible in the year of the final installment). (If you do nominate an individual program in a series, you'd better include the name of the series for identification.)

BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST: An illustrator whose work has appeared in the field of professionally published science fiction or fantasy during the calendar year 1982.

BEST PROFESSIONAL EDITOR: The editor of any professional publication devoted primarily to science fiction or fantasy during the calendar year 1982.

BEST FANZINE: Any generally available fannish publication devoted to science fiction, fantasy, or related subjects which has published four or more issues, at least one of which appeared during the calendar year 1982. (The definition of the words "fanzine" and "fannish" is up to you.)

BEST FAN WRITER: Any person whose writing has appeared in

fanzines (as defined above) during the calendar year 1982.

BEST FAN ARTIST: An artist or cartoonist whose work has appeared in fanzines (as defined above) or through other public display during the calendar year 1982. Any person appearing on the final ballot in the Professional Artist category is ineligible for the Fan Artist award in the same year.

Non-Hugo Awards

JOHN W. CAMPBELL AWARD FOR BEST NEW WRITER (sponsored by Davis Publications): Any writer whose first professionally published science fiction or fantasy story appeared during the calendar years 1981 or 1982. (Date of appearance is defined in the same way as for the Hugo fiction awards.)

Editors' Secrets – Revealed!

Editors are usually reluctant to describe how they decide which books to publish and what to pay for them. The process is especially mysterious when a book that has appeared in hardcover is then sold by the hardcover publisher to a paperback publisher. How does the paperback editor decide to buy or not to buy, to pay a million or a mere thousand? And how does the hardcover publisher make the sales pitch? What would we hear if we could listen in on the negotiations?

Early in 1982, PEN American Center staged a symposium, in front of an audience mainly of writers, in which three paperback editors and a hardcover subsidiary rights director acted out the wheeling and dealing that normally is done in private. What follows is an abridged transcript of that symposium. Note that the editors are real, but the authors and book titles under discussion are imaginary, typifying broad areas of modern fiction and nonfiction.

IRENE SKOLNICK, director of subsidiary rights for Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, has the task of trying to sell to paperback editors the books that her company are publishing in hardcover. ROBERT WYATT, vice-president and editor of Avon books at the time this discussion was taped, SUSAN GINSBERG, executive editor of Pocket Books, and SAM MITNICK, publisher of Perigee Books, are the three paperback editors who decide whether they want what Irene Skolnick has to offer.

This transcript should enlighten any naive souls who may still imagine

that paperback editors are guided mainly by the content of a book when they decide whether to buy it. Note that Mitnick, as a publisher of trade paperbacks (the larger-sized ones that are distributed only through bookstores, as opposed to news stands and supermarkets) supposedly concentrates more on “quality” product than Wyatt or Ginsberg, who are primarily concerned with the mass market. However, both Wyatt and Ginsberg are reputedly editors of some taste and discretion, who claim to be concerned to some extent with literature well as with sales figures.

The implications for science fiction are dealt with after this transcript, in a symposium of comments from prominent writers, editors, and agents in the science-fiction field. Meanwhile, bear in mind that during the year since this discussion was taped, the publishing industry’s declining revenues have forced editors to become even more money-conscious, and less willing to take chances.

– Ed.

IRENE SKOLNICK: The first (imaginary) book we are going to talk about tonight is called *A Warmer Place*, by Matthew Green. It’s a first novel. It’s been getting fantastic reviews everywhere. The author is young. He’s twenty-eight. He’s going to be writing a lot of books. There’s a tremendous in-house commitment to establishing this author. The book is about a young man from the midwest who’s coming to terms with his relationship with his father. The reviews have been absolutely extraordinary, extravagant. He’s been reviewed in *Newsweek*, in the daily *New York Times* by John Leonard, in *The Washington Post* by Jonathan Yardley. He’s received rave reviews in East Coast newspapers and magazines: *The Village Voice*, *The Soho News*. We’ve gotten quotes from Bernard Malamud, from Joyce Carol Oates, from Donald Barthelme, from, well, you name it. We know we have a fabulous first novel. It’s clearly a literary book....

BOB WYATT: I guess we’ll be talking on the phone, because we don’t do any business at lunch. At lunch we only talk about who’s sleeping with whom, and movies we haven’t liked. So we’re talking on the phone about this first novel.... I can say that I’m fairly certain Avon Books does not want this book. ...you flooded me with all those quotes. You should know that in the paperback business, quotes don’t mean diddley-shit. Most of our readers have never heard of those people.... So names don’t mean very much, I’m afraid, unless you are talking about literary reputations. With *A Warmer Place*, we’d be taking a chance. I don’t know what twist would make me want to read this

book. We don't really like "coming of age" books.

SKOLNICK: Well, if I said to you that this book was like Mary Gordon's *Final Payments*, would that mean anything to you?

WYATT: Well, is your company behind Matthew Green like Random House is behind Mary Gordon? Okay, what did you print?

SKOLNICK: To be perfectly honest, we have 3,500 copies out on this book. But we have fabulous reviews. The reviews are extraordinary.

WYATT: Let me reiterate: reviews don't mean very much. Are you doing some advertising?

SKOLNICK: We're hoping to sell the book by the reviews, which are absolutely extraordinary. You just don't get quotes like that from Malamud, Oates, Barthelme. I mean, there must be something going on here, don't you think?

WYATT: Maybe he has a lot of friends.

SKOLNICK: Would you even be interested in *reading* the book?

WYATT: It would probably be a waste of my time. I cover ten (hardcover publishing) houses for my company. ...I probably get five or six books a day.... I also get about fifteen manuscripts a day; half our list is original publication. Reprint is certainly becoming less significant for our company. We publish a variety of books. We have leaders, we have mid-list titles, of which I'm told that the bookstore chains only want categories now.

SKOLNICK: Excuse me. It would be helpful if you described leaders and mid-list titles.

WYATT: Okay. A leader is a book that has some promotional money behind it and generally has a printing in excess of 150,000 to 200,000.

SKOLNICK: Is that a hardcover or paperback printing?

WYATT: Paperback. I think a figure as low as 150,000 wouldn't have been acceptable for a leader three or four years ago. Now it is acceptable. Books, of which we might have put out 1,500,000 copies, are now coming out at around 1,000,000 copies. This is what has happened to the business. ... Then there are the mid-list titles, which are becoming increasingly categorized. By not having categories at Avon, we are not able to do very many mid-list titles. ... *A Warmer Place* is the kind of book I would take home and, on a snowy day when I'm trapped, might read and like and try to buy for \$1,000, long after the excitement is over.

SKOLNICK: Okay. Thank you. Susan, you bought *The White Hotel*. Does *A Warmer Place* interest you? I should qualify that question by saying

that you bought *The White Hotel* very cannily and very early on.

SUSAN GINSBERG: Well, there are several differences, the first of which being the plans at your house for this novel. You plan to print 3,500 copies and you don't have any big plans for advertising and promotion, which are very important. If you told me about that same book, and your advertising plans were for \$50,000 or even \$35,000, and your first printing was going to be a really substantial number, then I would feel it might be worth taking a risk now, because there would be a chance that this book would catch on, with wonderful reviews. But, as Bob said, reviews really don't mean that much to us. So the reviews alone would not be enough. ... What I see happening in this scenario – and I see it happening again and again and again with a book like this – is that you'll print 3,500 copies, the book will get nice reviews, and it will disappear. This can be very nice for the person who writes the book: he's had it published and some people have read it. But if we bought that book, and nothing further happened, we would be lucky if we could bring out 25,000 copies in mass-market paperback. We would lose a tremendous amount of money.

SKOLNICK: Okay. Sam, can you further elaborate on my fabulous first novel, near and dear to my heart, *A Warmer Place*?

SAM MITNICK: Since I'm principally a trade paperback publisher, who is not concerned with mass-market and, thereby, supermarket and drug store distribution, this book might have a little more appeal to me. But I can say at the outset it does not.

SKOLNICK: Is that because of the subject matter, or because of our print run, or –

MITNICK: I think it's principally because of the subject matter. And, despite the fact that all of you people in-house are jumping up and down and saying you are making a commitment, 3,500 copies is not a commitment. Simply put, 3,500 copies would not be sufficient to pay for a classified ad to tell anybody that you've published the book. ... For me to take on this book at any price, I think, would be doing a great disservice to the author. I would be building up expectations for a book with which I simply could not do any more; I haven't brought it to any more people. I shouldn't be touching that book at all. ...is the author thinking about doing a second book?

SKOLNICK: Oh yes, definitely. That's why we're committed to him.

MITNICK: Is he going to deliver this in the next year? Is this a book on which I can get an option, as well as an early look to see?

SKOLNICK: Well, he's working on it. If you put your money where your mouth is, we might give you an option.

MITNICK: On 3,500 copies? A \$500 advance would be generous.

SKOLNICK: Moving right along – we're going to go to our next book, which is called *The Morenos* ... this is a book that has not been published yet. It is by Nunez Marshman. Three generations of a family of aristocratic Jews of Sephardic origin, set in Spain and America. This author has consistently sold 120,000 copies with her three previous novels. She is always on the bestseller list for an average of twelve weeks. She's never number one, but she's four, three. She hangs in there. She gives a good run. She's had an ongoing relationship with a large, mass-market paperback house that is now out of business. So, we feel that we're in a very attractive position. We have an author with a known track record. We have a book that is a Literary Guild dual selection, and that has an initial \$50,000 ad and promotion budget. Yes, she'll tour. She's very effective on talk shows. The book is an obvious blockbuster.

MITNICK: Irene, how many pages in this book?

SKOLNICK: Five hundred pages, and it's 6" by 9". What's my list price? \$15.95. No, maybe \$14.95.

WYATT: Does Donahue like her?

SKOLNICK: He loves her. In fact, she's going to be on "Donahue". She's going to be on "Good Morning America" also. I think the point I want to make is that this is a saga, that this is not the author's first book, that she has consistently sold well. Before *The Morenos* there was *New Spain* and whatever.

WYATT: Is there a strong female character in any generation?

SKOLNICK: There is a strong female character in each generation.

WYATT: Okay, that means a big woman's face here and a crowd scene over there. I've got that.

SKOLNICK: You mean you have your cover design already?

WYATT: Well, when we buy a book, we have to have a fairly good notion of what it will look like, even before we read it.

SKOLNICK: Well, it's very steamy, very romantic....

WYATT: I'm increasingly afraid of that. In this administration, anyway. ... We are having terrible censorship problems. We published Susan Isaac's very fine novel *Close Relations*, and we started getting trouble out of the South. ... It wasn't the sex, because there is no sex in the book. They just

didn't like the fact that it was Jewish....

SKOLNICK: You mean that with books like this, the demographics are important?

WYATT: Fortunately, the southeast is not one of the best reading areas, so we don't have to worry about it. But Texas is a problem.

SKOLNICK: But even with this pace and this rate of sale on all of Nunez Marshman's previous novels? We feel we're in a sublime position, because she has a good track record in hardcover.

WYATT: Are you casting about for a floor? I mean, would you like to show it?

GINSBERG: Don't waste any more time with him. He asks too many questions. Just send the book to me.

SKOLNICK: What is it about this book that interests you?

GINSBERG: Well, it's a big women's market. ... I'll put a floor on it. What kind of money are you looking for?

SKOLNICK: Would you like to explain a floor first, and what that might mean to me?

GINSBERG: A floor is when you put in a bid early, before an auction. You are saying, in effect, "I am guaranteeing you that I will pay such-and-such amount of money for this book" – let's say \$100,000. This book will then go to auction, where my bid will be the first bid for \$100,000. All the other bids have to start there. If nobody else comes to the auction, I've bought the book for my floor bid. In exchange for that floor bid, I customarily would be given a topping privilege (which is ordinarily ten percent, but ranges) by whoever is auctioning the book. That means that I don't have to participate in the auction. All the other houses go ahead and bid round by round. At the end of the auction – let's say it is now up to \$200,000 – Irene will call me up and say, "Well, everyone is done and we're up to \$200,000. Do you want to top?" That means that I have the exclusive privilege of buying that book for ten percent over the final bid, or for \$220,000. I think of this as an advantage, because I know that I can have the final say in this auction if I want that book. The advantage for the hardcover house, on the other hand, is knowing that, going into the auction, it is guaranteed a certain amount of money. A floor might also encourage other houses to bid or reconsider bidding on the book if they see that another publisher is enthusiastic enough to put in money. Of course, a floor might also discourage a publisher from bidding if he thinks the floor is too steep a

price for him to top.

SKOLNICK: In other words, this would interest you and you would want to give me a floor.

GINSBERG: I would like to tell you some of the problems I have with this book but, first, tell me how much you want as a floor.

SKOLNICK: We were thinking about \$250,000.

GINSBERG: Well, on principle I think that's too much. But let me be more specific. The book is 500 pages long. That means that my production costs are going to be enormously high. ... Also, every time a book would come back (returned unsold), I would take a bigger loss. If each book costs so much, I might not be able to go back to press. ... I should mention that I think every other reprinter (paperback publishing house) is going to have the same problems that I have with this book, which is why I'm going to offer you less money.

SKOLNICK: How much less is less? You know the author's track record.

GINSBERG: I want to know a few other things. I want to know what your first printing is going to be.

SKOLNICK: We're thinking about a first printing of 75,000 and a \$50,000 ad budget. Initial ad budget; we're confident that we'll go back and spend some more and print some more. And, as I told you, it is a dual selection of the Guild.

GINSBERG: I'll offer you a floor. Are you going to take \$100,000?

SKOLNICK: Do you want to talk some more?

GINSBERG: Do you have her signed up for another book? I want to know that I'm buying an author. I like the idea that I might be able to buy her three previous novels. We'll then have her backlist. We can promote her much more strongly that way. But I want to know that I'm making an investment in something that's going to continue. So, is she signed up with you for another book?

SKOLNICK: Yes, she is.

GINSBERG: All right, I'm offering you \$100,000. I don't want to get into other terms yet. I don't want to knock myself out unless I know we're in the same ballpark.

SKOLNICK: That sounds about right to me. I think we'll be able to do business. Let me speak with the author's agent.

MITNICK: Irene, I'm on your other line right now. I've been doing my

figures. ... Anticipating that all those rights (on the author's previous work) might be free, I am willing, for all four books and an airtight option with right of consultation on the next manuscript, to give you \$500,000 on the spot. If it's two o'clock now, I want your decision by five. It's a pre-emptive offer. We will discuss royalties.

GINSBERG: That's not a floor.

MITNICK: No, that's not a floor. That's pre-emptive. What I am trying to do in this case is, by not simply going in for this book, change the rules of the auction before it even starts, by saying that I am very interested in this author provided I can literally own everything of hers: this book, all the books that were in the past, and any book that's in the future. I have four books earning back that advance simultaneously. This is an interesting – I think the word we often use is – property.

AUDIENCE: Can you explain “pre-emptive”?

MITNICK: Pre-emptive meaning I don't want an auction to take place. Irene has my offer. It is good until five o'clock. Irene has the choice of accepting it and calling off the auction or not. There are certain trade-offs that Irene might get out of me by accepting. She might get a higher royalty out of me than she would out of someone else. That may be what I would have to trade off in order to make this deal come to a close immediately.

AUDIENCE: Why would he set that kind of deadline?

SKOLNICK: When people put in money pre-emptively, they don't want it shopped around. In other words, if Sam says he'll give me \$500,000, he doesn't want me picking up the phone and calling three, four, five of his competitors in the next hour, saying, “Look, you really want this book? I have \$500,000 and....” He doesn't want me to tell him “yes”, and use his money to up the ante. That's why these deadlines are set. It's very pressured. Depending on the kind of hardcover house that I work for, I might be more attracted to Sam's offer. We might have a cash-flow problem. I might take his offer right away. ...

The next book that we have is not agented. It's nonfiction. It's called *Times Square Trick*, by Marjorie Flowers. This is a first-person account by a teenage runaway about her experience on the streets of New York. (The author, incidentally, is now a student at an Ivy League college.) She's been on the “Today” show, the “Tomorrow” show, “What Next”. We have a big, sixty-city tour with very good radio call-in response. It's a fabulous subject and I think it's something that appeals to all of us. We all know about the

runaway problem. This is an interesting, shall we say, steamy inside look at the adventures of this young girl. Bob?

WYATT: We should try our hand at it, except that it makes me a little bit nervous.

SKOLNICK: Sounds like something you would love. What makes you nervous about it?

WYATT: Well, I love New York, but America doesn't. That is a real problem. We did a book called *People Versus Beatty* about ten years ago, which did okay. But that dealt with prostitution. What does Marjorie really do in Times Square? Tell me in excruciating detail.

SKOLNICK: Well, she does a little sex, a little drugs. She'll do anything. She turns tricks. ... She gets involved with a subculture. She'll do anything rather than go back to McAllister, Oklahoma.

WYATT: Thanks. I just got my reader's report on it. I'm sorry, the galleys don't have a cover. What is the cover?

SKOLNICK: Well, it's kind of an erotic picture of her. There's a lot of street action; it gives a sense of Forty-Second Street, that whole ambience.

WYATT: Naughty and gaudy.

SKOLNICK: Naughty and gaudy. Thank you, Bob. I knew you would bail me out. Is this something that you think might have less appeal today than it had five years ago? Or – you're interested, right?

WYATT: I?

GINSBERG: Your phone's still ringing.

SKOLNICK: Okay. I have to go to a cover design meeting. Bob. I'll be right back. Susan?

GINSBERG: Oh god. You make me wait and wait – well, I read *Times Square Trick*. I think Marjorie makes more money than I do, but that's not the point. How is Marjorie on these talk shows? You said she's been on all sorts, but is she any good? What has been the response?

SKOLNICK: Fantastic.

GINSBERG: Do you have a tape of one of the programs to show my publicity people?

SKOLNICK: Absolutely.

GINSBERG: The main thing with a book like this is that I can use the author. If I can't, forget it.

SKOLNICK: She's available.

GINSBERG: I would want a guarantee from you that she is good and

that she promises to tour for me. She would have to be available for at least four weeks of touring.

SKOLNICK: I think we can work that out. She still likes big cities.

GINSBERG: How are you backing this? How many copies of the book do you have out now?

SKOLNICK: We have 10,000 copies out, but –

GINSBERG: After being on the shows, the sales didn't go up?

SKOLNICK: That's what we have – 10,000 copies.

GINSBERG: Are you going back for a second printing, then?

SKOLNICK: Definitely; 75,000 copies.

GINSBERG: All right. I'm going to get my figures together and get back to you.

SKOLNICK: Just for the sake of it, I'm going to call Sam....

MITNICK: I hate the title. I think it's really negative.

SKOLNICK: Why is it negative?

MITNICK: I actually like this book, but I think your title is somewhat of a cheap shot. About two years ago we published a book called *Twilight Children*, which was also very much "in there". We were very, very surprised that this book unexpectedly wound up getting incredible course adoptions. If I were going to try to push *Times Square Trick* into an academic market, I wouldn't get it past the first censor with a title like that. And yet, this book, from the way it has been written, appears to be a lot more sensitive than its title suggests. If you would give me the chance to change the title and, if it's not too late, even to change yours, I might be very interested in doing this book at the right price. I might even be willing to throw in some money for promotion, if you agree to do it that way.

SKOLNICK: That would be a publishing decision. At this point, it's academic. Books are out and we've established a certain response with this title and cover design. You may not like it, but I have other people who think it's an absolutely fabulous package, so –

MITNICK: Yes, but I am thinking of buying this book from the point of view of long-lasting backlist sales. You may be talking about somebody who is going to bring it out in mass-market and give it its four days to live –

SKOLNICK: Ten days.

MITNICK: Ten days – whereas I am interested in and think I know a way of getting this book established so that, in the short run, I may not do as well, but over five years, it would still be in print.

SKOLNICK: Sam, my sweet, I really just called you because I want to give – This book is not for you.

MITNICK: What else do you have?

SKOLNICK: Let's have sushi on Columbus Avenue and I will tell you. ... We now have our last book, *Running Home*, by Ann MacGuire. This is a third novel by someone whose first two books have sold fairly well. She has a very good paperback track record. She's reviewed well everywhere: *Ms*, *Time*, all the newspapers. I guess you could say that she's a feminist writer. She's not radical. She's readable, interesting. I'll be very frank with you: we did have an auction three weeks before publication, and nobody came to my party. This woman's first two books sold for \$20,000 each. She has expectations. Now I want to know if somebody would like to make a small offer. It's twelve weeks after publication. Was it wrong to have held the auction before publication? What do you think, Sam?

MITNICK: Exactly how have you done, now, with the book, just in general sales?

SKOLNICK: The same kind of track record. It's decent. We've sold 12,000 copies. Her first two books sold between 10,000 and 15,000.

GINSBURG: I think you were right in trying to auction the book when you did. I'm not surprised that nobody bought it, though.

SKOLNICK: Why not?

GINSBURG: I'm not surprised because it's a mid-list book. We're not buying mid-list books. They don't fit a specific category, yet they're not big enough to be lead titles. We're not publishing mid-list fiction now, because we're taking them all back in returns.

SKOLNICK: I wish everybody would listen to this.

GINSBURG: Those are the cold, hard facts. Five years ago, it was different. Five years ago, if you called me up after your auction, I might have said, "Oh, I'll give you a couple of thousand dollars and we'll see what we can do." But now I would say, "No. No thanks," because we would take every book back.

AUDIENCE: Why do you take books back?

MITNICK: I can answer that very quickly. Five years ago, when a mass-market paperback cost \$1.95 or \$2.25, a person walked into a bookstore and came out with four books. Now you're lucky if that same person buys one.

AUDIENCE: What happened to the 9,000,000 people who bought *Jaws*? People just don't stop buying because of that price advantage.

MITNICK: Yes, they do.

SKOLNICK: But we're also not talking about *Jaws*. I think that when you have discretionary income and you have a depressed economy, things like buying books go out the window.

AUDIENCE: Several times the comment has been made that a book didn't work because it was not a category book. I would like to see you simulate a scenario for a book that is a category book – a how-to book that a major house says is the strongest book on its spring list.

WYATT: That's not really what I meant by a category book, though. By a category book, I mean something lower.

GINSBERG: Western or science fiction.

WYATT: The wholesaler says, "Give me your Westerns. Give me your science fiction." Or, if he knows the romance line, he'll say, "Give me your Silhouette for the month." He really would rather have the series number than the title or the other. Now, I'm not kidding.

AUDIENCE: ... What are the implications of what you've been discussing tonight, for the writer of what I realize is a mid-list novel? It's very depressing.

SKOLNICK: Well, Bob. Do you have thoughts about it?

WYATT: No. I'm depressed. I think it's terrible.

GINSBERG: There's not a lot we can do.

AUDIENCE: Does this mean that such writers should consider not writing books like that?

WYATT: No. A writer can only write what he can write. If a writer wants to become a hack, that's his business. But a real writer doesn't do that. I was invited here as a reprint editor, but I find that term quite disgusting. I don't think a reprinter is an editor, I think the village idiot could be a reprinter, because he just follows categories, looks at sales figures and movie deals, and all that. But I think that many houses are becoming more aggressive in publishing original paperbacks. That's some small hope. My house does a lot of literary, original fiction and translation, but we're somewhat unique that way. I think a lot more hardcover houses will be doing original paperbacks too, which might broaden the field. But it's really a very difficult time, right now.

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(Note: Wyatt left Avon later in 1982, when that company suddenly

abandoned the literary commitment he refers to here, and switched to a more commercial approach.)

Copies of the preceding transcript were sent out to thirty-five science-fiction writers, editors, and agents, with a covering letter asking for their reactions. This was the voluble and heartfelt response.

Science Fiction Comment

from RICHARD CURTIS (Richard Curtis Associates, literary agency)

My responses to the PEN Club transcript have taken about a week to evolve. They've finally matured, and I'd now like to share them with your readers.

My first reaction was shame. Although the transcript reads like a parody, alter the titles and authors to real ones and it could be a faithful recording of dialogues that take place every day in the publishing business, dialogues in which I clearly recognize myself. To see them in cold print is to realize in a way I had never done before just how completely dominated our industry has become by economic considerations. These considerations point to the bleak conclusion that there is no guarantee a book will get published, let alone succeed, simply because it is good.

How does a responsible agent or editor look a writer in the eye and say this? The answer is, I no longer look writers in the eye when I say it. I am too ashamed.

My second reaction was grave concern. The distressing, depressing formularization of editorial criteria filters down through the literary agents, who in turn have to impose it on writers. As a result, agents are turning down more and more first novels, midlist books, promising talent. The dues for entry into the writing profession have become discouragingly high. Too many new writers have concluded they cannot afford them.

After brooding over these feelings for a week or so, however, I've emerged with renewed determination, my final response. For better or worse I am in the publishing business, and to survive in it (if not to prosper) I have to play by the rules, and I would be rendering a disservice to my clients if I did not make them play by them as well. I have never balked at handling what some call trash, not merely because it's not trash to me (I have the highest respect for professional writing of every variety), but because I have

never counted on it to give me satisfaction. Once or twice or thrice a year I will accept for representation a work I consider great, perhaps even a masterpiece. It is these works that redeem me, redeem the editors who publish them, and ultimately redeem the reader.

These works are still being produced. But as we can see from the PEN Club transcripts, they're becoming harder to sell. And that's where my determination comes in. For, if I have to fight harder to sell them and see them through in order to continue finding satisfaction and redemption in this business, then hell, I will fight harder to sell them and see them through.

from FREDERIK POHL

The PEN symposium describes exactly the way major publishing decisions are made today, and illustrates the main reason I decided to cease being an editor several years ago. If an editor wants to rise high in his field he has to think as these people show themselves thinking (even if, as is true of these people, he really thinks there should be a different set of criteria for deciding what should be published).

By the same token, if a writer wants to make the big bucks, he needs to school himself to produce the kind of work that earns big bucks. That doesn't mean he can't write science fiction – last week four of the five top novels on the New York Times bestseller list were science fiction. But it means that what he writes has to have what we used to call “hooks”.

However, the key terms in what I have just said are “major”, “rise high”, and “big bucks”. There is now, and I believe always will be, room for editors who can find, encourage, and develop new writers with new things to say about the world. (They simply will never be the editors-in-chief, or probably even very close to that, of large publishing companies).

And there is also room for writers who have something new to say, even if it can be expected to appeal only to a quite limited audience – unless they are wedded to the idea of six-figure advances, or even to the expectation that writing should pay them a living wage.

The amount a money a book earns is a very poor measure of its quality. I wish there were not so much emphasis on dollars among publishing people – but I wish the same among writers.

from ADELE LEONE (The Adele Leone Literary Agency)

I really feel that these are the facts; this is how business is done. I used to be an editorial assistant with Susan Ginsberg. (One of the participants in

the PEN symposium – ed.) We started out together. And at Pocket Books, I was a reprint editor, a senior editor, not dealing only with science fiction. So I've been on both ends of the business.

These days I try to tell my clients that you have to look on this totally as a business, and when you're writing you have to keep in mind the guidelines of what publishers' needs are, and how publishers think.

If you feel that your readers will be made nervous by what you're showing about editors, you should print an interview with a sales rep. Hear about the two minutes the guy gets in the busy bookstore, trying to sell his books. It's unrealistic to think that what people are doing in the publishing offices does not reflect what's happening in the field out there. If the men can't sell it, we can't cry about how it's terrible that the literary book isn't going to get a chance.

from GREGORY BENFORD

Obviously, these people think of books as commodities – a natural outcome of their system of production. To some extent this is justifiable, since most books *are* written as yard goods. But lapsing into such habits of mind makes it harder to see books as potentially unique experiences. Such glib bookchat numbs the responses, like dining at McDonald's every day. Sad.

from ALFRED BESTER

I quote Samuel Johnson, "No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money."

I quote Charles Platt, "... science fiction, which must be innovative to be good..."

How to reconcile the two today? You can't. With a few rare exceptions, creative sf writing does not pay authors a decent income. It should be regarded by its artists as a luxury or, if you will, a safety valve which enables him/her to generate the innovative and arresting concepts which commercial markets dare not and will not accept.

Although he couldn't know it, of course, Picasso summed up the present state of sf when he said, "I do it first and the rest do it pretty."

Sf authors of the world, don't do it good, do it pretty and buy that vintage Triumph, pay off the alimony, and send your kids through college.

from NORMAN SPINRAD

The PEN symposium is, of course, appalling in the purity of the

cynicism displayed by the “editors” toward any parameters beyond those of the balance sheet (“editors” because these people, as Wyatt himself intimates, don’t edit anything and are really *publishing executives* who are exactly the same thing as “studio executives”, who also sometimes misname themselves “producers”, when, in fact, as the old saying goes, what they produce is dreck from gelt), but then, anyone reading *The Patchin Review* probably knows all that by now.

What may be a revelation to some is that, on a strictly *business* level, these people sound like the same sort of assholes who destroyed the American automobile industry, and they are pushing publishing in the same direction. When Detroit was flush – say 1945-1972 – they plowed their best efforts into hype, image mongering, three-year cycles of bullshit cosmetic changes in what were essentially the same shitty cars. “Quality” was not factored into the equation, just as “literary value” is now almost completely absent from the considerations of publishing executives.

When times got tough and inflation made all cars more expensive and better quality imports appeared (even at *higher* prices than Detroit iron), the consumer got more gimlet-eyed of necessity and no longer made impulse purchases on the basis of phallic identification and power fantasy imagery. Resulting in the current collapse of the auto industry in America.

Isn’t it interesting that the transmogrification of American publishing into corporate conglomeratized bottom-line cost-accounting computerized widget manufacturing has coincided not with the increased profits which are the only conceivable justification for such a decortication of literature but with economic hard times in the publishing industry? Not only does the current crop of publishing executives lack all literary commitment and any semblance of idealism, the bottom line fact is that, as cynical, hard-nosed, Philistine businessmen, they are abject failures as well.

from DAVID HARTWELL (Editor, Timescape Books)

Of course, the participants in this panel were intentionally trying to represent and perhaps even heighten the “business end” of being an editor. I assure you that discussions of the quality of the text invariably take place in editorial offices still today. But the quality of the text is only one of the factors involved in the decision to spend money acquiring and publishing a text. I have always believed that it is irresponsible to both one’s employer and one’s author to publish a book that is a financial failure. It does no one much good. Therefore I and every other editor I know take the finances into

consideration always, invariably, but especially when considering a work of high quality. Otherwise, I think that works of high quality would be published only by accident, or capriciously. This is not, I believe, the case.

The fact that there is in my experience no discernible audience within the science fiction readership for high quality work not written by a familiar name is a subject for another (and I think a possibly more interesting) discussion.

from JERRY POURNELLE

(The PEN symposium) is all TRUE, and I've been trying to tell people this for a long time, but no one listens anyway.

Do *what* about it? Force people (through taxes, I suppose) to pay for books they don't want to buy? No one ever promised writers an easy time. For a few years, times *were* easy for SF people. We got used to it. We shouldn't have.

from IAN WATSON

Maybe there's something a wee bit wrong with latterday Capitalism...?

What we're really talking about here is how the new Depression of the Eighties has exaggerated trends that were already present before, e.g. publishing becoming a fairly minor branch of big business, or modelling itself thereon; and maximization of profits as rapidly as possible through marketing strategies based on a mixture of guesswork (as Hollywood), aggressive guile (the hype), and repetition. As money is squeezed further, due to irrational economics, these symptoms become hectic, with the spectre looming (as in an economy which has gravely eroded its industrial base) of a future publishing industry which has fatally eroded its ethos and quality, and which is no longer in control of itself.

Remember, too, this Depression proceeds hand in hand with a new Cold War and the chance of a hot one, which might destroy what could be the only abode of publishing (and intelligent life) in the entire universe.

So essentially we're talking politics; and trying to ameliorate the symptoms without attacking the causes is unlikely to change much.

I prescribe a strong dose of disarmament; reflation; environmentally benign job creation programmes of public works, such as urban renewal; proper funding for real space science and fusion research out of the money squandered on weapons; proper third-world aid; an end to right-wing political and economic evangelism. Et cetera. Et cetera.

Then let's see publishing improve, as society improves.

Goodness, people might even want (and afford, and demand) to read good ole rational mind-expanding SF – and good new stuff in that vein – if they get the idea there *is* a future.

from RICHARD GEIS (editor, Science Fiction Review):

The editors in the PEN symposium are very aware of their markets and are honestly trying to make money for their publishers/owners and indirectly for themselves by satisfying those markets (readers).

I see that as honorable and proper. But to some writers it will be humiliating, reducing them, they think, to producers of narrowly defined, formula, pap fiction replete with calculated reader-appeal elements.

But it has ever been this way. The superior writer will use the formulas, the necessary structures and required elements, themes, etc. to his/her own ends, by weaving the unique essence he/she has to offer the reader into the commercial format. Shakespeare did it, for God's sake!

Writers with big egos masquerading as rebels against “the system” will always fill the air about the awfulness of materialism and crass commercialism, and how Literature is given the short, dirty end of the stick in New York publishing. It's a nice, satisfying pose which masks an unwillingness to accept discipline, hard work, and the real world.

from EDWARD FERMAN (editor, Fantasy and Science Fiction):

It is certainly depressing, but when times are bad any businessman gets more conservative, and book publishers are no exception. I would think that if the economy and the publishing business improve, then editors will be able to become more aggressive and be willing to take chances.

Meanwhile, this is obviously not a good time to sell a first novel or any book that is literary or offbeat in any way. Maybe it's a good time to write short stories.

from PAT LoBRUTTO (senior editor, Doubleday):

Everyone is going to read the PEN transcript and get depressed about the future of literature and publishing – and with good reason. We are between the proverbial rock and hard place, again.

But consider, “good” books are rare by definition and, one way or another, will out. It is unfortunate that literature is so closely tied to the commercial structure, but there doesn't seem to be too much alternative right now. If the mass of publishers publish pap, it's only because they can make

money doing so. They are, after all, giving the people what they want.

But, if this is to be the beginning of a Dark Age, we'll have to rely on those monkish editors and publishers willing to take a chance. Thank heaven they always seem to appear when we need them – bringing us what we want ... and what we should want.

from PIERS ANTHONY:

Welcome to the real world! Speaking as a writer whom the hardcover houses have generally disdained, so that I have had to make it as a novelist without them – yes, even to *The New York Times* mass-market bestseller list – I feel free to say that the hardcovers often don't seem to want or even know what is and is not either Literature or Commercial writing. Thus I have scant sympathy for their problems in remarketing what they do publish. They have indulged themselves in their whims and now, like grasshoppers, are ill-prepared for the winter of economic retrenchment.

Yet there is a problem. Let's assume that the hardcovers are publishing excellent material that is a genuine service to the literary world. For the paperback outfits, the cold equations remain: when the bottom line is money, they must publish what will pay, or they will go under. In such a situation, the small-circulation material is bound to suffer. I don't like seeing literature subverted to the taste of the lowest common denominator, but the present system makes that inevitable. Perhaps we need to break out of it entirely, so that the masses can have their fodder without squeezing out the fare of the literates. Would it be possible to subsidize quality writing, not expecting it to make a profit, just making it available for its own sake? But who then would pass judgment on the quality? When I think of seeing a fine novel with the cover bearing the legend: THIS BOOK IS SPONSORED BY POLLUTE PETROLEUM, INC., I quail. The Bottom Line is no place for the Arts – but there are pitfalls in subsidies, too.

Perhaps a more positive suggestion is for publishers to get out from under the onus of the huge advance. This would mean that publishers would have to start promoting their books by merit and potential, instead of by the size of the committed money. It might also be a good idea for hardcover houses to dispense with their greedy insistence on 50% of the author's paperback proceeds, so that writers with genuine sales potential would not be forced to bypass hardcover publication and hardcover publishers would not tend to resemble manuscript-marketing agencies. Reviewers could help; instead of deigning to notice only those books whose covers are hard – talk

about judging a book by its cover! – they could call out good books wherever they appear. They could also give up the sadistic luxury of killer reviews; just who is being served, there? Maybe, if publishing were less like a battlefield, both publishers and readers could profit.

But I have confidence in the industry: it will refuse to change, until many publishers progress to the true bottom line: bankruptcy. Lots of luck!

from CHRISTOPHER PRIEST:

Of course, it's all very depressing to read, but what I didn't like about it is that *it's meant to be depressing*.

The occasion is a group of paperback editors acting out their everyday "reality" for the benefit of an audience of writers; the assumption therefore seems to be that writers do not face up to realities, and it would be good for them to have to do so.

The trouble is that traditionally all the advice and education about publishing comes from one direction. I think it would be salutary for publishers to have to listen for a change to a seminar of writers talking about *their* problems. I have lost count of the number of times I have had to listen over an expensive lunch to the hard-luck stories of well-heeled publishing executives. Behind it all is a bullying instinct: because publishers feel threatened by economics they can do nothing about, they pick on writers, because they in turn can do nothing to resist.

Writers and publishers should indeed collaborate ... but they should not form a close partnership. When writers identify too much with the trade, they do so at some peril to their own independence. After all, what are we supposed to do by paying close attention? Should we all now write nothing but family sagas about aristocratic Jews? Clearly not. When a publisher describes the present "market", the best it can possibly be is a hindsight perception. The good writers – and in the end this will mean the top-earning writers – create their own markets by going where no one has been before.

Whatever the economic climate, publishers will always prefer their writers to make life easy for them and come up with material they can market effectively. It's just that at times of economic vulnerability what they say can be more persuasive to writers than at other times. Which is, of course, another reason why we should listen politely and sympathetically, but in the end not act.

from J.G. BALLARD:

I've always taken for granted that this was exactly what took place in the offices of New York publishers – for the past twenty years I've never had cause to think otherwise, and I'm surprised that you feel the PEN symposium is worth printing at all, any more than, say, the transcript of a sales conference at Colgate-Palmolive before the launch of a new deodorant – after all, American publishers are aiming their products at the mental equivalent of the armpit. More puzzling is that PEN felt it worth staging the symposium, or that the editors decided to take part. Presumably they felt they were helping to expose a hideous truth, and would thereby retain a vestige of intellectual integrity. All very strange, seen from this side of the Atlantic, and it occurs to me that the real point of the symposium is to express a subtle form of self-love. Perhaps these publishers secretly admire their ruthless philistinism, their mastery of the ugliest sales conference jargon, the lack of the faintest glimmer of literate sensibility. Sales are what counts, and the big seven-figure advance is the idol that really knocks the knees of the NY publishing executive. Why not celebrate it, and urge PEN to hold a Festival of Praise at which these too-coy publishers come out of the closet and dress each other in ermine. Wouldn't that, apart from anything else, be more American? You know that *E.T.* is a better film than *The Incredible Shrinking Man* because it sold more tickets, just as Asimov's latest novel must be a thousand times better than, say, Wolfe's *Limbo 90* because it had a thousand times bigger advance. After all, we're well informed on these figures, which are published so proudly in the so-called 'critical' sf journals. What else can one say except...help.

from BRIAN W. ALDISS:

I really can't muster up any moral indignation, because we've all been living with this gruesome version of reality for too long. Also in a way I think I prefer this sort of hard-nosed commercialism to the toffee-nosed non-commercialism of the guys at the Arts Council of Great Britain trying to decide if a certain novel is Great Literature or not, because if it is they are going to give the poor old sod a beggarly 1000 pounds toward the next novel he's working on.

What is most saddening is the way it is increasingly difficult for almost any author to retain continuity with one publisher and one editor. Shuttled from pillar to post, an author begins to see his career as so much cat's meat, hacked off in separate chunks and fed to the moggies. In that respect, publishing in the U.K. is less exasperating, and one can hope for a reasonable

and enduring relationship over a number of years.

I don't see any consolation in the situation. It is true that writers will go on writing whatever happens. But in many cases it's the bums who survive, serving up the slop the supermarkets demand.

from JOHN SLADEK:

At times the PEN symposium sounds like a cry for help from people who find themselves trapped inside a cynical and manipulative business. It can't be pleasant to go into publishing with any kind of ideals (as I'm sure many have) and end up juggling ad budgets, estimating authors' televisibility, counting pages and worrying about anti-Semitism in Texas – the end product being, say, a novel about a big shark.

Unfortunately, we writers are trapped right in there with them. There can't be many self-supporting authors today who still believe that literary quality sells books, that a good novel can always find a market, or that good reviews count.

I was grateful to see two of the editors refer to science fiction as category stuff, hence, beneath contempt. That's always been one of sf's strengths – that the I'm-talking-big-bucks people left it alone. No one minded when sf hacks did something adventurous with prose (like Alfred Bester) or wrestled with God (like Philip K. Dick). There was room for politics, satire, poetry, mysticism, greatness and dumbness.

Now, however, there's Hollywood interest in sf, and it's hitting the bestseller lists. Meanwhile most of the publishers of sf are being swallowed by conglomerates. How long before conglomerate thinking comes to focus on the despised genre, which can then be organized along the lines of general fiction so we can all worry about ad. budgets, TV appearances and censorship? Some people in sf may welcome the change to big bucks for big sharks – slum clearance was once seen as a boon, too – but I'm not so sure.

from MICHAEL MOORCOCK and LINDA STEELE:

Please stop fouling our post box with your drivel.

from KIT REED:

What I found most enlightening about the PEN symposium was the definition of midlist fiction. I used to think it just meant me. Now I see that it includes almost everybody. Unless your name is Irving (Wallace, Stone, or: John), or unless you write category fiction, you might as well hang it up.

This would argue that the implications for science fiction are good. I

gather from my friends that this is not the case. With this in mind, I think the challenge is not to the publishers, who are damned to cover their rears no matter what, but to the writers. How can we write what we want and still convince some editor it's going to fly? An interesting trick.

Since I am a chronic and incurable writer, I can't afford to look at this realistically. If I did, I'd have to deep-six my typewriter and start selling Tupperware, which I can't bring myself to do – at least not yet.

(Editor's note: In addition to two novels and two short-story collections in the science-fiction field. Kit Reed has published many serious novels in the "mid-list" classification that the PEN symposium participants tell us is now virtually impossible to sell.)

from HENRY MORRISON (of Henry Morrison Inc, literary agency):

I think what this symposium illustrates, in its own fictive way, is that everybody is concerned with how the marketplace will react to a given book. Is it possible to print and sell a million copies of *a*, or is this going to be the book that will be conceived and published as a category item, *b*.

Don't forget that if a book is aimed at a category market, the basic market is relatively small – and that book is going to have a small printing and small sales. Since the advent of *Star Wars*, science fiction sales went up – but so did advances. I would suspect that a great many more science fiction titles failed to be profitable since 1978 than at any other time in science fiction's history. The science fiction market is now on the downside of a cycle, and may very well come back in the next 6-18 months, as the economy improves (if it does) and in conjunction with the release of the third *Star Wars* movie, the third *Superman* movie, the third *Star Trek* movie, etc., etc., etc.

I may be rambling here, but the point I'm trying to make is that any time you have a genre, you have conservatism. A genre is basically of a small compass, and if you're talking about major publication and major sales, it will never happen. It seems to me that a science fiction author must have at least five years of pretty solid publication to begin to achieve some sort of reputation, and that means anywhere from 5-10 novels and short stories, novellas, etc. Yet one author with his or her first novel can become a bestseller. Look at *Eye of the Needle*. The reason for this is simply that the book is perceived as having a larger potential audience, and money is spent to get that audience. You just can't do that with a science fiction novel, or a western novel, or a detective novel.

In essence, we are all “victims” of the marketplace. You can’t get a million people to pay \$45,000 each for a Mercedes, you can get a million people to pay \$4.50 each for a new Robert Ludlum novel in paperback.

from SHAWNA McCARTHY (editor, Isaac Asimov’s SF Magazine):

I feel that those editors who are doing reprint science fiction are not the sort whom Robert Wyatt is referring to when he talks about reprinters. The SF editors also buy and publish new original SF in paperback; they’re not the village idiots without a modicum of taste that Wyatt feels reprinters to be. I think that the paperback SF editors, while of course constrained to some extent by sales figures and track records, do have a basic knowledge of and affection for this field. I don’t think that they are the lupine abusers of writers and fiction that it would seem we find in general fiction.

from JANET MORRIS:

The influx (into publishing) of Harvard Business School types who want to merchandise by homogenization is described better by William J. Taylor, Jr. in his article in the Winter ’83 *Washington Quarterly* on similar problems in the armed forces. He points out that the results of enforced uniformity in the services were a high turnover rate, loss of effectiveness and low esprit d’corps. Now, what does that have to do with science fiction’s peril in this reactionary period of whiplash conservatism and tight money, you’re asking? Plenty. The armed services fell into pathetic disrepair, a veritable sinking ship with rats jumping off willy-nilly. The new chief of staff has restored individual commands and initiative and unit pride, and this is turning things around: an end result which will be echoed in fiction once this trend bottoms out. And what are we losing? Literary novels? If you want to read a well-written book in which nothing happens, we’ve already got plenty of them; try Henry James. As for formula romance novels, I’d be glad to see them go; they smell funny and the pages stick together. ...

All fiction, if it’s worth reading, is formula fiction: for my money and, flying in the face of James Joyce’s infamous “All a novel has to be is interesting,” a novel *must* have three things: a beginning, middle, and an end. Literary self-consciousness is a real problem in so-called quality fiction. The paperback editor has to wade through the garbage these hardcover editors buy, to find something that might appeal to the less finely-honed sensibilities of us here in the great wad. I hardly ever buy a hardcover that hasn’t been picked up for paperback, any more. So, although I don’t like this tight money

situation, I welcome the weeding-out process among the publishers: the management types will go down because books are visceral creatures, and a good one, though hard to find, can easily defy categorization. The intelligent editors will buy the good books and the fools will buy and foist on other fools what fools will buy.

The sf and fantasy readership is on the whole more intelligent and certainly more technologically literate than even our current editors in the field; sf survives everything but mediocrity. I don't like "literary" sf; I like technologically literate sf. From the questions I've asked when behind the podium or your long, grubby table at cons, the readers want more stimulation – in *content*. I've never thought sf was the venue for social comment; I still don't think so. A good book handled by a good agent and a good editor will be published well and thus sell well. I can say this because right now I've got a great team behind my books.

from BARRY MALZBERG:

These people (in the PEN symposium) cleaned up their act because they were performing, like the Rockettes, before an audience of yahoos and tourists (that's how they regard writers, anyway). What we have is a highly sanitized, self-conscious paradigm of the way in which they actually work, the fashion in which they really do business. This transcript is an altered and expurgated version of a reality; it bears as much relationship to what really goes on as a Yom Kippur Israeli Bond appeal has to do with the actual mechanics of fund raising.

Science fiction, because it *is* a category (not a "mid-list"), and is mostly still published in paperback original (or is paperback-originated), is exempt or could be exempt from some of the worst pressures intimated in this transcript. As far as the wholesalers are concerned we can be as innovative, even as crazy as we want as long as the innovation does not interfere with the product label and packaging. This would be the good news except that most science fiction editors fear innovation on its own terms. I think they fear *science fiction* on its own terms, but since all of them will be gone within the next five years, to be replaced by even worse, why rail about this?

Patchin Review Comment:

Fifteen years ago, book sales were increasing annually, the paperback companies were not owned by conglomerates, bookstore chains were in their infancy, and editors didn't have to prove that every purchase made money.

Paperbacks were less rigorously categorized, and there was room for editorial whims.

Today, editorial purchases are closely scrutinized, editors have been forced to become sales-conscious, and science fiction has not escaped the impact of these trends. Science-fiction editors of the early 1980s are far less free than their counterparts of the late 1960s, to buy material simply because they happen to like it.

Perhaps in self-defense, or perhaps to prove their continuing acumen, editors such as those in the PEN transcript have begun thinking and talking more like salesmen than like people interested in books. And their message seems to be that, if writers want to survive, they must follow suit.

This sounds bad for books, but let's leave literature out of the equation for a moment, as the editors in the PEN transcript seem to think we should. Let's consider whether their outlook makes sense purely in their own terms of profit and loss.

Faced with rising costs and a diminishing market, publishers have reacted like many old-fashioned American industries. They have merged with their competitors and put all their effort into exploiting a smaller, simpler range of products which will earn the largest immediate return. The snag is that no one is equipped to decide, rationally, which products to focus on. Editors can't simply follow their own tastes; many of them openly admit that they don't like what the mass audience likes. Since there isn't any market research or other audience feedback, the only real yardstick is a writer's past performance, or "track record". So we have the ridiculous situation, dramatized in the transcript, where an editor refuses even to look at a book by a new writer, regardless of its outstanding reviews in hardcover, but will eagerly spend huge sums on an author whose old work happened to sell well. This is tantamount to exploiting old investments without making any new ones, and it is happening in science fiction right now, as Asimov and Clarke are literally bribed to write something (anything!) on the supposition that readers will buy it regardless of its actual content. In this way, dull books by has-beens are over-promoted, while new work is ignored.

To remain competitive, any business must offer new products, and must experiment in order to develop those new products. Naturally, some experiments will fail, but a few big successes will pay for many little failures, which is how innovative companies eventually drive conservative companies out of business.

Buying new kinds of books by new authors is not, then, a literary luxury that we should sacrifice in hard times. On the contrary, it can bring far bigger dividends than “playing safe” with established names and old formulas. To take a crass example, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* was a longshot, purchased by an editor against the judgment of her co-workers and superiors. In science fiction, there have been similar cases of offbeat books that became classics. Alfred Bester’s *The Demolished Man* was at first considered virtually unpublishable, but has stayed almost constantly in print. Pohl and Kornbluth had a lot of trouble selling *The Space Merchants*. Delany’s *Dhalgren* was turned down by many editors (including me, as it happens) before its eventual success.

Perhaps it seems unrealistic to expect publishers to take risks and remain flexible, now that they have been bought up by conglomerates. And yet, size need not imply conservatism. Some huge corporations remain competitive through a deliberate policy of risk-taking. IBM, or 3M, for example, encourage small groups of employees to dream up “crazy” ideas for new products, and test-market them on a small scale. (I quote from a recent issue of *The Economist*.) These corporations do not penalize employees whose projects fail; the failure of many projects is considered the natural price for success of a few.

There is no reason why publishers shouldn’t copy this model. We have already seen rare, fortuitous examples of it. For instance, when Donald Wollheim was editor at Ace Books in the 1960s, he and Terry Carr had the freedom to develop and “test-market” new authors very cheaply, without fear of personal loss or retribution. They invested in people who had no “track record” at all – Dick, Aldiss, Le Guin, Sladek, Russ, Disch, Silverberg, Moorcock, Delany, and others who seemed radical at the time but often became very profitable in the long term.

Most editors today are discouraged from this kind of risk-taking. They may even fear for their jobs if they should experiment and fail too often. Under pressure to make sure-fire short-term profits, they naturally end up acting as in the PEN transcript. And, in the short term, their new policy of only publishing predictable novels by known names has been moderately successful.

In the long term, however, readers really do become bored with the same old thing. We have already seen two categories wiped out by cynical, repetitive exploitation: gothics, and then historical romances, in the 1970s.

This could just as easily happen to, for instance, sword-and-sorcery novels.

As in ecology, so in publishing: a diverse range of fictional species is far stronger than a monoculture, which will be the first to suffer from any change in the literary climate. Purely for the sake of survival, we need a wide variety of books, with occasional mutations to enrich the “genre pool”. And yet, publishers, under their new corporate owners, are advocating exactly the opposite policy.

If conglomerate publishing ends up like modern rock music, totally restricted to formularized products, small presses will be the only refuge for those of us who are still interested in literature. Serious writers will be in a position comparable to that of modern composers, who subsist largely on grants and see their work rarely performed, for audiences made up mainly of other composers and musicians. A grim prospect, for anyone who remembers the old ideal of mass-market paperbacks that could be both entertaining and profound.

But perhaps this vision is too pessimistic. In *Yesterday's Tomorrows* (reviewed in our Survey section this issue) Frederik Pohl writes: “One of the observations that gives me some hope for the ultimate triumph of right and justice is that successful publishing people are book people. It has often happened that somebody with a million dollars to spare, looking for a hobby, has bought into the publishing business. It has seldom happened that they have stayed very long. Right now the experiment is being tried on a very large scale, as huge financial conglomerates acquire publishing companies right and left. Some of them obviously haven’t worked out; the new owners have sold off their properties and gone into some other diversification. In most cases the jury is still out, but I really don’t think the verdict will be happy. The people who do best at publishing books are people who like books.”

Let us hope that Mr. Pohl is correct.

Some people still seem to take the gossip column too seriously. Once again, Ms. Snitch has asked us to remind our readers: in this little field, we should be able to laugh at ourselves.

**Tales to Astonish
by Gabby Snitch**

There was SO MUCH GOSSIP lastime, it quite *wore me out!* So I stole a sabbatical from the Stateside sci-fi social scene and sojourned for a spell in *Limey Land*. And let me tell you, things over there aren't half as bad as people have made out. No – they're MUCH WORSE! With gangs of unemployed *skinheads*, *soccer hooligans*, *weirdo punk people*, and *militant Trotskyites* prowling the pavements, I started wishing I was someplace sane and safe – like the sidewalks of *New York City!*

But some quaint British traditions still survive – f'rinstance, the super-exclusive *Science Fiction Luncheon Club*, where me and a couple dozen sci-fi EURO-NOTABLES drank a toast to the Queen (for *real!* I almost *died!*) and then picked at plates of oxtail soup (ick!), roast pork roll, soggy cabbage, and decomposing boiled potatoes (yee-UCK!). Next came a couple dozen *speeches*, including one from visiting U.S. editor-publisher DON WOLLHEIM, who said that for DAW Books, “1981 was our best year ever, 1982 is shaping up just as good, we are doing wonderfully while everyone else is crying. They should pay more attention to the history of the science-fiction field.”

One-time founder-editor of deflowered Virgin Books, MAXIM JAKUBOWSKI, stood up and said he was starting another project: “Box Books,” in May. (Why “Box Books”? “That’s the name,” said Maxim, with a Gallic shrug.)

Then long-time Limey lit-agent LES FLOOD gave a rundown on the *morbid mood* he'd found at the Frankfurt Book Fair, where he'd said to Brit ed. NICK WEBB, re L. Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth*, “How'd you like to buy half-a-million words of rubbish?” To which Webb answered – “I just *did!!*”

Finally, special guest FRED POHL talked about – what else? – WORLD SF, claiming members *everywhere*, even one – one only! – in New Guinea. (“He ate all the others!” quipped Flood.)

After I paid my *nine pounds* fee for attending this genteel gathering of gentleman gourmets, I went with Fred to quintessentially quaint *Cambridge*, to hear him address the university sci-fi society.

To find if times had changed since *Brideshead Revisited*, I snuck into Pembroke College student dining hall for dinner – and got given a portion of *pizza with mashed potatoes!* Which reminds me – do you know why there are NO COCKROACHES in England?? Seems there used to be – but they all died from *vitamin deficiency*. Anyway, Fred was speaking in the Old Library.

I had a hard time finding it, but when I pushed open a creaky oak door, and got hit with a heavy wave of *stale under-arm sweat*, I knew I'd come to the right place. Seems sci-fi citizens smell the same the whole world over!!

Fred put on his usual pro performance, joking afterward, "I never object to speaking in public, just so long as I'm not required to say anything that I haven't said before."

I got a guest room and stayed over for *Fencon*, the first Cambridge mini-convention. The program promised eminent eggheads explaining everything from quarks to quasars – but THAT got scrubbed when attending fans demanded more time to play *sci-fi charades* ... which was a ROWDY EMBARRASSMENT, so I went and "hoisted a few warm pints" at the bar, with BRIAN ALDISS, JOHN SLADEK, LISA TUTTLE, and CHRIS PRIEST. Brian was pondering possibilities of having sold a short story to STANLEY KUBRICK, John had just delivered his new robot novel, rib-tickling *Tik-Tok*, to Corgi, and lovely "Mona" Lisa demurely declined to comment on the novel she's writing, while Chris said he'll start writing romances if the sci-fi scene doesn't pick up. "U.S. editors," he said, "know more about the field than British editors. Trouble is – everything they know is *wrong!*"

After this, I played a round of *Clench* (in which a circle of people open Thomas Covenant novels at random, and the first to find the word "clench" wins) but it didn't take long (it never *does!*) so I dropped in on a panel, just in time to hear one obnoxious fan ask Fred Pohl, "What was your most embarrassing experience in science fiction?" to which Fred said, "*Syzygy!*"

While at the con, I encountered *Ansible*, a bitchy broadsheet bestowed on his brethren by "Dangerous Dave" LANGFORD. (U.S. subscriptions: \$2 to Mary & Bill Burns, 23 Kensington Court, Hempstead, NY 11550, buys *four whole* issues.) The one he gave me reprinted a letter to a British literary mag from IAN WATSON's wife JUDY, trashing "right-wing" author Aldiss. (Everything's so *political* in England these days!) To which Brian's printed reply was, "Oh, the bile that runs in the Watson family! Here you see Mrs. Watson reduced to puffing her husband's unsuccessful books." Then there were some *snide snippets* about Ozzie ed PETER NICHOLLS (of *Nicholls Decision* fame – see my last column!) accused of hogging cover credits on a collaborative lit-crit book – just like he allegedly did on the cover of *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*. All in all, I wonder whatever happened to *British Reserve*. Maybe being FLAT BROKE makes you MILITANT!!

And speaking of “broke” – before I headed home, I wangled an exclusive interview with MICHAEL BUTTERWORTH, one-time co-publisher of SAVOY BOOKS, provocative provincial publishers who ran up dire debts totalling a quarter of a million (*pounds*, that is!) before going *bankrupt*. Savoy got started with profits from a bookstore selling sci-fi and soft-core sex mags. But Manchester’s moralistic men in blue raided this interplanetary porn parlor more than FIFTY TIMES, and finally cooked a deal to put Butterworth’s co-publisher DAVID BRITTON in jail for 28 days for selling “filth”. Butterworth was hit with the same rap, and may yet serve the same stretch in the slammer. Undaunted, he and Britton have started SAVOY EDITIONS, a book-packaging business, on a shoe string. They’ve opened another bookstore to capitalize the venture – and now *that’s* been raided.

Sales are sliding, anyway: “The recession hits our shops hard,” Butterworth told me. “The people who are unemployed seem to be exactly the sort who would be our customers. That is – people who like to *read science fiction and wank a lot.*”

Final demands for five years of bookstore income taxes could still kill Savoy – though Butterworth says, “We’re hoping the civil servants will go on strike this winter. That would give us some breathing space!”

When I said this sounded a helluva way to operate, he opined: “Actually, *most* businesses are run like us. They just cover it up. I mean, look at De Lorean.”

Today, Butterworth explains, “I’m writing most of the books we’re packaging, because it’s cheaper than paying authors.” Assuming he doesn’t wind up behind bars, he’ll complete “a Hunter Thomson kind of book, except not as well written” about new British rock band *The Cramps*. (Seems the name’s got something to do with That Time of the Month, tho’ I couldn’t find out *WHY*.) Butterworth terminated our titillating tete-a-tete to go touring with the band – meanwhile mailing in his weekly payments of 100 pounds, against a total debt of *fourteen thousand*, being his personal liability when Savoy Books turned belly-up. But he’s philosophical about it. “After all, we got away with a quarter of a million. Fourteen thousand isn’t so bad.”

Which all makes U.S. publishing smell like a *rose garden!!*

Soon as I got home it was time to travel again – to the World Fantasy Convention in Connecticut. This elite event (750 members max.) has a higher pro-to-fan ratio than most, so you get to see hordes of writers elbowing each

other for a share of the editorial expense accounts. *Embarrassing!*

I noticed “Tiny Tim” SULLIVAN, fetchingly outfitted in an old T-shirt, with a dime-store novelty eye stuck to his forehead, listening raptly as *Omni* editress ELLEN DATLOW declaimed that “*Dhalgren* was the first book since *Black Beauty* that I ever wanted *not* to stop reading.” So all you hopeful *Omni* contribs better start writing heavyweight experimental fiction about HORSES, right?!

I checked out a panel of editors and literary agents ... and found ex-editor turned agent SHARON JARVIS defending the Scott Meredith system of charging reading fees when they comment on work by unpublished authors. Sharon added, for the record, that renaming Berkley-Jove “Jerkley Books” was *her* idea, and she was sick and tired of other people getting the credit for her “words of wisdom”. The panel closed after agreeing unanimously that editorial lunches are indispensable as a business tool. Afterward, I asked panel chairman PAT LoBRUTTO if there was any chance of Doubleday increasing its sci-fi output again, after having chopped it from 48 to 14 titles a year. “There were some complaints from libraries when we cut the number of Westerns,” he said, “but no complaints about the science fiction.” So it seems if output goes back up, it’ll be *Westerns first*. Did Pat mind me quoting him in *The Patchin Review*? “Just don’t say anything about my mother or my family,” he warned me – in a distinctly Italian accent!

Other panels at Fantasycon included a futile CHARLIE BROWN meets ANDY PORTER session, in which Porter said his debt-ridden newszine is now being financed by his *printer*, and refused to tell Brown what his circulation is. In the audience, fellow small-press editor BOB COLLINS said *Fantasy Newsletter* has had hard times too ... but now his mag’s “stronger than ever.” (Word has it he’s convinced SOMTOW SUCHARITKUL’s column will carry the magazine – which explains a *lot*, I guess!)

Incidentally, on the subject of mini-mags, it’s a fact that *The Patchin Review* has never sold better ... but the *bookstores* seem in bad shape, to judge by how long it takes some of ’em to PAY THEIR BILLS these days. I won’t name any names – at least, not THIS time around!

Most interesting panel featured JACK CHALKER introducing Timescape’s DAVE HARTWELL, artist DON MAITZ, and Walden Books chief buyer JOE GONELLA, among others. Hartwell claimed cover art eats up ONE THIRD of book-production costs, and hinted at harder times ahead for artists. Maitz confessed that when he’s given a boring book, he sometimes

takes revenge by caricaturing the author on the cover. And Gonella described his job inspecting 450 paperback covers a month, to decide which books to buy for 800 Walden stores. He has to be sales-conscious: “The company I work for demands a certain degree of performance of the product. If I don’t give it to them, somebody else will.” On the other hand, seems he was a teenage sci-fi nut, used to run a literary magazine, and has been doing all kinds of experiments to prove to Walden that sci-fi can be profitable.

After this *serious stuff*, I took a breather in the corridor and eyed some BORIS VALLEJO posters – vended by vivacious DANIELLE ANJOU, who turned out to be Boris’s fave *model* for those pix of scanty-clad slave girls! “This one’s me,” she explained, pointing out a prurient print of a princess, wearing nothing but a black leather jacket, exposing her *plump naked buttocks*.

Blushing, I retreated to the *autograph room*, only to find MICHELE LUNDGREN in leather, leopard skin, and chains! Did this mean she had quit the Krishna Temple? “Oh no,” she said, “though they do think I dress funny.” Guess that’s because she hasn’t shaved off her *hair* yet.

After Fantasycon, there was breathing spell, ’cause there was no SFWA writers-editors bash this year. Eastern Regional Director BARRY MALZBERG said according to the bylaws, it wasn’t his responsibility; and stalwart CHARLIE GRANT didn’t have time to do it. But there’s no truth to rumors that the April Nebula ceremony has been cancelled too, on account of Barry wanting to poison all attending editors. There WILL be a Nebula Fest – of *some sort* or other!!

Meantime, *Asimov’s* magazine editress SHAWNA McCARTHY and artist beau WAYNE BARLOWE filled in with a housewarming at their new super-luxury location in a renovated townhouse. JOAN VINGE and JIM FRENKEL made the trip from Chappaqua with Vingelette Jessica, and other guests included MERRILEE HEIFETZ, SUSAN ALLISON, JOHN DOUGLAS, and GINJER BUCHANAN. But in case you think all I do is go to PARTIES, let’s talk about some *real news* for a moment. When I read in *The New York Post* about L. RON HUBBARD’s SON trying to prove his father is *either dead or a human vegetable*, I called an old pal of mine in the Hubbard public relations org. Well, *he* said the litigation had been dreamed up by an anti-Scientology lawyer who’d already brought more than fifty cases against the Church, wanted damages in some new action – but couldn’t locate L. Ron, to hit him with the suit; so, figuring if Mr. Scientology really

had kicked off, his kin would collect a bundle, I'm told the lawyer went to Hubbie Jr. with an offer he'd be a fool to refuse.

So why doesn't Ron come forward and prove he's *compos mentis*? What – and spoil all the *publicity*?! Migod, it's almost as if Ron and his son dreamed the whole thing up together, as a *promo-stunt*....

No one knows yet how it'll work out, but suppose Ron actually is six feet under – who really wrote *Battlefield Earth*?? My guess is, A.E. VAN VOGT! Think about it!

And while you're doing *that*, nominate and vote for *Battlefield Earth* for this year's HUGO AWARD. Send your \$15 to Constellation, if you're not already a member.

(You might vote for *Patchin Review* as “best fanzine,” while you're at it!) Don't delay – do it *TODAY!!*

Now here's some news from France. NORMAN SPINRAD, doing *Promo Parisienne* for *L'edition Francaise of Le Void Captain's Tale*, discovered a CIGARETTE AD on the bacover of his tome. Seems tobacco titan *Philip Morris* is sponsoring a whole line of books (imprint name: Super Lights!) and doing heavy P.R. and publicity, including lotsa author appearances, radio shows, and a banquet. Norm says he met MICK JAGGER at one of the parties, and was driven back to his hotel by ROMAN POLANSKI. “There was an air of idealism about it, at the same time as an air of crass commerciality. I guess this is French socialism!” Norm quipped to me.

Meanwhile, in Sweden, I hear SAM LUNDWALL has written a novel set at a U.S. SFWA meeting ... featuring a drunken author named HARRY, who lives in Ireland; a greedy New York editor/publisher named “Wyn”; a moody literary agent who is ex-wife of a late author named JIM – etc etc! Moves have been made to obtain U.S. serial rights to this masterpiece and publish an excerpt right here in *The Patchin Review*. *Stay tuned!*

Back home in NYC, I stopped by my fave bookstore, Forbidden Planet, and found talking *E.T. dolls* stealing bookshelf space. Seems to me, kiddies love E.T. 'cause he's all *wrinkled* and brown and *roly-poly* ... and what did Dr. Freud say kiddies secretly want to play with? In their “*anal stage*”?! It's a fact! Just *look* at those “dolls”! When will the moral majority wise up and stamp down – should I say, *stop up* – this outpouring of FILTH?

Speaking of Freud – who was it said *The Void Captain's Tale* is the best Freudian title since *The Crack in Space*?

And speaking of kiddies, I see del Rey are billing Piers Anthony's *Night Mare* as "A New Break-Out Bestseller" – good news for the Clearasil generation!

Funny to think Judy-Lynn useta work at Pocket Books – where (judging from all their ads) DAVE HARTWELL seems to have picked GENE WOLFE as his answer to Xanth – i.e. the bestseller Timescape needs. Dave's one of my fave friends (I mean, how can you not love a guy who knows all the words to *Teen Angel*?) but I have to say, mass-marketing "Elliptical Gene" makes as much sense to me as if Burger King started pushing *escargot*. Is the U.S. public ready for *snailburgers*? And can we *blame* them?!

But don't think I'm generally down on the SField. I mean look at all the GOOD news. Like, the people at St. Martin's Press, so knocked out by sales of *Battlefield Earth*, they've decided *science fiction sells*. (Guess no one told them *who to*, in this case.)

And now Dell's back in the game, under advice of JIM "Bullets" BAEN ("Better known as 'dum-dum' to some of us," one ed-asst quipped to me anonymously.) I called Jamie for some fast facts on his Dell deal – and got put on *permanent hold*. So I called again, and – same thing! *Third* time around, I quizzed the receptionist. She told me, "I announce who's calling, and if Jim wants to pick it up, he does, and if he doesn't want to, he doesn't." Gee, Jim, you sure know how to make a gal feel *unwanted*!

Now here's a roundup of late news. JOHN DOUGLAS, longtime second-in-command at Timescape, has accepted an offer from Avon, where he'll be editor not only of science fiction but of computer books and a whole lot more – congrats, John! ... TOM DISCH seems to have sold his *F&SF* story *The Brave Little Toaster* to Walt Disney Productions – even tho there's still no *book publisher* for this kiddie fable. Watch for cute "Toaster Dolls" when the movie premieres.... RICHARD McENROE, onetime Ace Books asst, says he's "signed with Bantam Books to publish a new novel for a solid four-figure advance, and no business of yours where the decimal point goes." Richard recently joined the NY National Guard as light weapons infantryman in the 71st Infantry Brigade – "Part of the famous 42nd 'Rainbow' Division." ... And here's a flash from ED BRYANT, who went for a walk in The Blizzard that Paralyzed Denver, fell down, and *cracked a rib*: "I would have told *Locus*, but I can't afford the postage stamps."

Last and least, the Philadelphia convention, mid-January, sharing hotel

space with a crowd of *tombstone builders* (please! Not, repeat not, MORTICIANS!). The SFWA suite ran out of booze, so GARDNER DOZOIS asked editors for donations – and MICHAEL SWANWICK brought along a couple of *graveyard paving bricks* he picked up from an exhibit in the lobby. (Maybe Mike could help Barry with the Nebula bash?) ... I miffed Timescape employees when I wedged the door open with one of their free books – Ben Bova’s *Colony*. I mean, it just happened to be *exactly the right thickness*. ... The only moment of excitement in this *totally boring* convention was when one young woman screamed “You slime ball!” at “Handy Andy” PORTER, for trying to take her picture. Isn’t it SICKENING, the persecution we people of the press have to put up with?

And on that note, I’ll leave you till nexttime – pausing only to add this little joke I just made up all by myself: How many people does it take to produce an *intelligent* science-fiction novel? Answer: Three. One person to write it, one person to edit it, one person to publish it ... and *no one to read it!* Ha ha ha!

Loose lips sink spaceships!

Love, Gabby

The Butchery of Algis Budrys

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.

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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:

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.

The Pompous Rose

The Pompous Rose by Gregory Benford and Charles Platt is a detailed reassessment of Ursula Le Guin's work. It should have appeared last issue, was rescheduled for this issue, and squeezed out yet again by the huge response to the PEN transcript (see *Editors' Secrets Revealed*, on page 4). Also held over until next issue, *Self-Evident Standards*, defining the things we have a right to expect of science fiction, or any fiction. Plus an engrossing argument in defense of fantasy, by K.V. Bailey ... opinion from John Shirley ... *The Rotting Futures* by Joseph Brenner ... short stories by A.A. Attanasio ... poetry by Bruce Boston and R.S. Harding ... it seems that, despite our small circulation and low budget, there are always more publishable, interesting items than there is space to print them. If your subscription runs out this issue (letter F on your mailing label), it really should be worth your while to resubscribe. You'll find the rates listed just below the Contents, on page 1.

Cousin Clara couldn't give us her usual Advice to the Alienated, this time around – but our special Texas correspondent volunteered to sit in, and tackle the heaviest topic in science fiction today.

Focus on Fat by M.M. Hall

Till I read about it in Gabby's column, I'd never really noticed ... but then I started paying closer attention at conventions in the Southwest, and it's TRUE! Some of our virilest, handsomest science-fiction scribes are having difficulties with YOU KNOW WHAT. Yes, the so-called "Nicholls Decision" (named after that Australian editor Peter Nicholls). As the belly bulge becomes bigger, should the belt be HIGH or LOW? And can clothes help to put off the whole problem?

Some of the approaches are novel. Some don't work at all. The shirt-tails-out approach, for instance, only works when the tummy bulge hasn't grown *too* big. Have you ever seen Orson Welles use this option? Well, it can be snazzy, when the choice is a bowling shirt or a wild Tom Selleck Hawaiian print. But a stretched t-shirt definitely doesn't work.

Then there's the vest-it solution. Some smart eccentrics have chosen this

(I won't name any names!). With the right elan and the “je ne sais *what?*” it can be a very stylish way of handling a weighty dilemma. But only if the waistcoat is not too tight!

Then there's the new-wave-it-all-out style. This is very tricky and only works if you are thin enough to clash. It's also important to remember that Valley Boys aren't really all that attractive, and vertical stripes are more slimming than horizontal ones. The same goes for large polka dots vs. small polka dots.

Lastly, in colder climes, I've seen the Aldiss-Sweaterboy-Look. But that only looks good if the sweater is *not* too tight.

But when the problem gets too big for these temporary measures, you have to face the question of belting across or below the paunch. And from a woman's point of view, bumping into one of those bulges that hang over the belt is more disconcerting, because the mozzarella softness is so vulnerable and tender to the touch.

Generally, I've found (and my friends agree!) that belting around the paunch is more agreeable to look at. To hold up the pants in this position, suspenders are often necessary, and are rather cute (sort of nostalgic – Robin Williams wears them well). But there's always the chance of a loose suspender clip allowing the pants to *fall down* – in which case, if it's in mixed company, let's hope it will be a company of two. If more than two, then perhaps you'll be moved to get more exercise, or, perish the thought, lose weight.

Of course, it isn't easy to lose weight! I'll be the first to admit I have my own tummy problems (Ahh – chocolate eclairs!) and even my pal Cousin Clara loves those midnight pizzas (goes to her thighs, she says) – and no one ever said party dolls should give up their Moosehead beer!

At a recent event down here in Texas, I saw dozens of writer fellows bumbling about with their tubby tummies and perplexed faces. One writer had to admit that since his wife had had her baby six months ago, he couldn't use the “sympathy bulge” excuse any longer. Opting for the shirt-tails-out approach, said mystery writer rated a raised eyebrow for this zonker, but at least he'd made up a pretty cute excuse.

I asked some other guys what their stories were – one muttered something obscene and practically knocked me down as he headed for another beer. Another witty “over-the-hill but still leering” fellow had the audacity to stare at *my* stomach and poke! Needless to say, I poked him right

back! (This can be fun, provided the person poking doesn't get too excited, and is somewhat attractive.)

As far as I'm concerned, publicity about the Nicholls Decision has come along none too soon, and I'm convinced that we should all wear our correct size belted *over* the bulge, instead of trying to pretend, with those old small-waisted pants that'll only fit *under* the tubby part.

Yes, I know, it isn't easy to be a virile and handsome science-fiction writer. You have to sit and sit, typing those stories and articles, and so much sitting does put on the pounds.

Still, you can at least do it neatly. And hang high instead of low.

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Who Is Arnold Klein? by Charles Platt

“Grownups are reluctant to take science fiction seriously, and with good reason: sci-fi is a hormonal activity, not a literary one. Its traditional concerns are all pubescent. Secondary sexual characteristics are everywhere, disguised. Aliens have tentacles. Telepathy allows you to have sex without the nasty inconvenience of touching. Womblike spaceships provide balanced meals. No one ever has to grow old – body parts are replaceable, like Job's daughters, and if you're lucky you can become a robot. As for the adult world, it's simply not there; political systems tend to be naively authoritarian (there are more lords in science fiction than on public television) and are often ruled by young boys on quests. The most popular sci-fi book in recent years, Frank Herbert's *Dune*, sold millions of copies by combining all these themes: it ends with its adolescent hero conquering the universe while straddling a giant worm.”

I'm quoting from December 1982 *Harper's* books column: a 4,000-word diatribe vilifying all of science fiction, by someone named Arnold Klein. Who is Arnold Klein? The brief bio note says he is “a poet who used to write book reviews and animal features for the *Soho Weekly News*” (a defunct New York City newspaper). But some people in science fiction don't believe this. They've accused *me* of being Arnold Klein.

Frankly, I'm insulted. Klein writes well, but he loathes science fiction so thoroughly, it seems he must also loathe himself for reading it. According to his column, *all* of science fiction is trash, and all writers, from Bester to Pohl,

are equally contemptible: “Their ideas are *stupid*,” is his blanket assertion.

He does manage a couple good epigrams, such as: “Definitions of science fiction are notoriously hard to frame – there is always the danger of including something too good.” Or: “This genre of glum fourteen-year-olds is out to take revenge on three rather intractable aspects of everyday life: the complexity of adult society, the limits of the mind, and the frailness of the body.”

But he loathes the science, as well as the fiction: “The first artists who wrote fiction about science hated it – they thought it presumptuous, unnatural, cruel, and sick. Contemporary sci-fi has abandoned this tradition of Hawthorne and Shelley and gone whole hog for modernist ambivalence or pulp paraphernalia. In her preface to her third sci-fi novel, the sputtering *Sirian Experiments*, Doris Lessing even wishes she were a physicist. Myself, I wish she were an artist, a job I consider at least an admirable as designing nuclear bombs or torturing laboratory animals.”

So who *is* Arnold Klein? When Charles Brown (editor of *Locus*) called me and asked this very question, I wearily explained that I knew nothing about Klein’s identity. I suggested that, as a journalist, it was Brown’s job to do a little detective work, to find the facts. But I guess he was too busy – *Locus* doesn’t exactly specialize in investigative journalism, does it? So I decided to track down Klein myself.

All I had to do was open the Manhattan white pages. Of three *Klein, Arnold* entries, one lived in an area appropriate to an ex-columnist for the *Soho News*. I dialled that number and got through immediately to a young man who cautiously admitted writing the *Harper’s* column – cautiously, because he had already suffered some backlash. “Sci-fi fans have been calling me up and saying obscene things to me,” he said, sounding vaguely puzzled that people should have taken him so seriously.

I asked him why he’d read so many science-fiction books, if he hated them all so much. “Because in the last two years I’ve been pretty miserable, using it as an escape, to avoid thinking. Sci-fi is essentially an adolescent literature, and that’s one of the reasons why I read it. It really is like junk food – we all know it’s bad, but we can’t stay away from it. I think most people who read a lot of genre fiction suffer from this condition.”

Had he ever tried writing it himself? Was his outlook soured by having received a lot of rejection slips? “No, I’m a poet, I’ve never written any science fiction. Not even a short story.”

And who thought up the article in the first place? Was it – as some have suggested – commissioned by *Harper's* as part of the New York literary establishment's conspiracy to discredit science fiction? "No, I had been writing a piece on science fiction for my own amusement, and taking notes on books I read. I mentioned this to some people, who knew some people at *Harper's*." And only at that point did they commission him to write the column.

I'm not surprised that fans have harassed Klein; his column is so unmitigatedly disparaging, even writers such as Spinrad and Malzberg, themselves critical of science fiction, were enraged by it.

Personally, I can only say that, if Klein is telling the truth and has written no science fiction himself, this is indeed a pity. If the field is as uniformly trashy as he contends, and if his own insight is so profound – clearly, he is equipped to produce a masterpiece.

Perhaps the problem is that he doubts his ability. He may need some encouragement; in which case, I'm sure that readers of *The Patchin Review* will be delighted to get in touch – and give it to him.

Anyone can publish a how-to-write guide, just as anyone can advertise sure-fire formulas to get rich quick. In either case, the test must surely be: has the system worked for the person who's pushing it?

How to Write Like Hugo Gernsback

Does George Scithers really matter? As editor of *Asimov's* magazine, he was not what you'd call a taste-maker of the field. Following his sudden departure from that post, and his subsequent employment in a magazine financed by a company that makes role-playing games, you might suppose we need no longer concern ourselves about him. Larger events in New York publishing seem much more relevant.

But Scithers, a fan at heart, is thus an activist. We may consider him and his team unimportant, but they consider themselves central to science fiction; and to prove it, they've published a pernicious 32-page pamphlet: *Constructing Scientifiction and Fantasy* by John Ashmead, Darrell Schweitzer, and George Scithers. It's a complete guidebook for young writers.

By quoting "authorities" from Mark Twain to Lord Dunsany, they strive

for a non-genre air of literary respectability. But as the “scientifiction” in its title suggests, this 32-page booklet is rooted in the formulas of pulp fiction of the 1930s. So far as Scithers, Schweitzer, and Ashmead are concerned, most of the subtleties of fiction can be quantified. You do not write out of divine inspiration; you build a story like a house.

“Lay out a sequence of events – a plot – which will show all the necessary steps of your character working his main problems out to a resolution,” they advise. The “archetypal” plot, they say, consists of: “Situation (the protagonist meets a problem), Complication (the problem makes the protagonist do something(s) about it), Climax (the protagonist must solve the problem or be broken by it). Resolution (the problem unwinds, the protagonist succeeds or fails)...” and so forth. This is more like a system for devising bad television than a path to good literature. And it strikes a general blow against creativity, since it gives young writers the idea that stories do not grow from inspiration or obsession, they are assembled to specification.

What about style? “If it sounds as if we’re telling you to forget about personal style – *we are* ... Style is that use of language that creates a vivid, full-color image, with sound and smell and other sensory effects in the readers’ minds; *and that is all.*” (Their italics.)

What about character and relevance to real-life problems? “Readers aren’t all that interested in losers, already know that the Universe is full of nasty surprises (they read fiction to *forget* real-life futility), and expect the writer to finish properly what he’s started; so there just isn’t much market for futile stories.”

And fast-paced adventure should prevail over introspection: “Action is more revealing than synopsis or description, and action is ever so much more interesting.”

Yes, ever so much. And clichés? “Avoid clichés like the plague!” But of course.

This would all be trivial, except that Scithers et al. are not merely suggesting these as guidelines for contributors to their own magazine. They insist that these are rules for *all* writers. And by making their booklet available, cheap, to so many young people, they’re perpetuating precisely the formulas which have branded science fiction as badly written, juvenile, and trivial since the days of Gernsback (whom they refer to with obvious nostalgia).

You might think that, after his policy of middlebrow blandness proved to be too boring even for subscribers to *Asimov's* magazine, Scithers would have discredited himself. But in science fiction, as in other areas of publishing, incompetence is seldom a barrier to future employment.

You might think that this man, and his team of semiprofessionals with few published works to their names, have no right to be printing pamphlets telling other people how to write. But in this field, anyone can act as an authority. And the sad part is that the unpublished author won't know the difference.

Moments of Truth

“It's mostly a jejune, hack, etiolated, unvisionary, certainly undangerous collection of droppings from the crupper of a jade which, somewhat feebly jet-propelled by its own windbreaks, considers that it's related to Pegasus. ...

“I've no objection to the slangy, relaxed, intensely personal mode of address ... except that it tends to sloppy inexactness of diction and an impertinent buttonholing manner of advocacy that's no substitute for critical sobriety and editorial good manners.

“What I do object to is a general atmosphere of exclusiveness: we guys who write science fiction and don't give a damn about longhair stuff are buddies doing our thing, so stick that, you smart-assed critics. This is rather depressing. I'd always understood that SF, or speculative literature, was part of the main literary stream.... All there is is fiction, which one judges not in terms of a specialized subject matter but of a very general one – what human beings are like and how they may be expected to behave in exceptional circumstances (e.g., killing a king, committing bigamy, going to Mars).

“If I write a story in which the characterization is inept, the descriptions woolly, the dialog implausible, I cannot excuse its faults by proclaiming that it belongs to a new world of dangerous visions, in which the traditional canons of criticism don't apply. They apply all right, and they go on applying.”

– Anthony Burgess, reviewing *Again, Dangerous Visions* in the *Los Angeles Times*, a little more than ten years ago.

In future issues of The Patchin Review, the Survey will be shorter, and instead we'll have more reviews picking out new books of special value and interest – such as those below.

Reviews

To date, Rudy Rucker's novels *White Light*, *Spacetime Donuts*, and *Software* have appeared at the rate of one a year, like little tasty undigested lumps in the great pulpy mass effluxing each month from the orifices of Ace Books. Mixed in with *Red Sonja*, Gordon R. Dickson reissues, and H. Beam Piper, it's not surprising that Rucker's rather sensitive work has escaped the attention of reviewers. Since Rucker avoids most science-fiction social events, he isn't even recognized by most of his contemporaries.

Now, however, we have *The 57th Franz Kafka*, his first short-story collection (Ace, \$2.50). Coming on top of the special achievement of his novel *Software*, there is surely a chance, at last, for him to receive the attention he deserves.

His stories are less self-consciously ambitious than his novels; more appealing, vivacious, and human. Like Varley in the 1970s, or Niven in the 1960s, he uses topical science that other writers have overlooked. Unlike Varley, he is highly aware of his culture; he never simplifies or evades reality. Unlike Niven, his politics are radical, and his pacing is brisk. Unlike either Varley or Niven, he has a professional science background; the science in his stories is more complex, more authentic than clippings from *Mechanix Illustrated*. Best of all, he writes with a healthy, ironic sense of the absurd, and he can, on occasion, bring off some fairly surprising stylistic experiments.

A typical Rucker story starts with some misfit, malcontent mathematician – a dope-smoking freak fresh out of MIT – performing an arrogant experiment that brings him face-to-face with a quirk of spacetime theory, suddenly dramatized larger than life. The hapless victim is drawn into a two-dimensional Flatland, or finds himself thrown back through time, only to discover that every particle in the universe was larger, then, so that he's now a midget.

But these stories are more than conceptual games. Whether Rucker is describing an unemployed Ph.D. delving deeper into "Pac-Man Space," or a

German rock fan decoding sounds from grooves in an Egyptian vase, he retains Philip K. Dick's sharp eye for the texture of his own suburban life. Almost all his far-fetched ideas are anchored right here in the 1980s.

Rucker also has Vonnegut's delight in the absurd, and Bester's love of tinkering with narrative and idiom. The touch is light, but the ambitions are large.

Having said all that, I have to add that there seems a heavy debt (and maybe some discreet homage being paid) to H.G. Wells. Where Wells depicted a reclusive amateur scientist synthesizing time pills or *Cavorite*, Rucker describes a faculty reject hiding in his basement from his suburban wife, using a home computer and a couple boxes of surplus radio parts to fiddle with "quarkonium" – which has the awkward effect of removing inertia, but not mass, from all matter in the vicinity. Strong parallels here with "The Man Who Could Work Miracles", and other classics. This is, of course, a storytelling formula, but a venerable one – more so than those which arrived with the pulp era, and linger still.

Aside from its basic crippling handicap of being an Ace paperback original, there are two shortcomings in the way this book has been published. First, the title story, which opens the collection, is the most obscure of all, and calculated to turn off any squeamish readers – as if Rucker chose to test their mettle by rubbing their noses in the messiest essence of his madness.

Second, the cover art is so genteel, so far from the essence of science fiction, as to be self-defeating. Respectability, yes – but at the cost of depressing sales even below the meager level that a supposedly "difficult" writer like Rucker must normally expect? It's enough to make us nostalgic for green slime and brass brassieres. Science-fiction fans don't want covers with good taste, they want covers that, so to speak, taste good; there must be a better compromise than this.

Against Infinity by Gregory Benford is due to be published as a Timescape hardcover in April. Excerpts have already appeared in *Amazing* magazine. Superficially, this novel links with *Jupiter Project*, Benford's 1972 young-adult adventure about mining the Jovian moons, which paid homage to Heinlein while overhauling his crustier prejudices and rejecting his stupider plot devices.

But *Against Infinity* is a sequel only in that it shares the locale and one character from *Jupiter Project*. The scope is far more ambitious; the concerns are in no way juvenile.

At first, the elements seem familiar: The deep-space environment, pursuit of a mysterious alien creature, a wise old mentor supervising the coming of age of a young male hero. But by using a scenario which he knows so well, Benford is able to save his real energies to develop a far more ambitious theme: an analysis of the male tendency to discover, conquer, and destroy – three urges which, the book rather grimly suggests, are inextricably linked.

Yes, the scenario is still Heinleinesque; but Benford asks the hard questions that Heinlein never faced, and the answers are by no means easy. Yes, this is a high-tech novel; but the technology is flawed – indeed, causes catastrophic loss of life. Rather than an adventure in wish-fulfillment, this is a conscientious attempt to mirror reality.

Benford's alien entity (symbolizing all that is unknown and infinite – hence the book title) is never neatly explained. Nor does the young male hero get the girl, or any other conventional material reward, in the final chapter. Thus, though this is unmistakably category fiction, it transcends its category. It has the simple, gut-level, page-turning power of an adventure, without ever being simplistic.

Benford deserves credit, also, for providing the most authentic, detailed depiction of how it would really be, how it would really feel, to grow up on the frigid, hostile surface of a Jovian moon. An interesting comparison, here, with Clarke's *2010*, which uses the same locale, but in the old style: a boy-wonder story of super-gadgets and empty quips, with shallow political idealism pasted in.

Admittedly, the verisimilitude in Benford's book is achieved despite, rather than by virtue of, some excesses of his prose, which runs amok several times in great big chunks of ostentatious lyricism. And the story succeeds despite its structure: having perversely reached the obvious dramatic climax two-thirds of the way through, the only escape from this self-imposed trap is by violating all unities of space, time, and character, and subsiding into a kind of long coda, or epilogue, which drags in love interest, half-formed socio-political messages, and a whole bunch of subsidiary characters who have very little function in the story.

However, somehow this all links legitimately with what has gone before, and becomes an expanded commentary on the initial assumptions and scenario. Anyone who reads only the magazine excerpts, and misses the last part of the novel, will miss most of its portent.

Both Rucker and Benford are scientists. Their recent work seems to me the most literate, ambitious, and genuine science fiction thus far in the 1980s. One wonders if this can be entirely a coincidence.

Moments of Truth

“Two editors do not do twice as much work as one. Two editors interact with each other, which takes time. They spend part of their time talking to each other – say, twenty percent – and another ten percent taking phone messages for each other or asking each other if there have been any messages. So each editor does only seventy percent of the work of one; two editors equal 1.4 editors’ work. As the numbers go up, the efficiency goes down. With four editors, you reach the point of office birthday parties and long staff lunches; efficiency drops to maybe fifty percent. At six editors, you begin to need a managing editor to keep the other five in line. At the ten-editor stage, you are into weekly editorial meetings, bridal showers, and softball teams. By twenty, intraoffice affairs begin to occur. You lose perhaps two or three afternoons a week to sex, and an average of about one to hysteria.”

– Frederik Pohl, in *Yesterday’s Tomorrows*.

The Patchin Review Survey

There was no Survey last issue, and this one is just a bare-minimum round-up of notable 1982 books. Compiling a thorough Survey is too much work, and takes too much space; readers who want a properly complete critique of all new science fiction should subscribe to *Science Fiction and Fantasy Book Review*, edited by Neil Barron for the Science Fiction Research Association. It appears ten times a year, \$10 annual subscription to U.S. residents, \$15 overseas and Canada by surface, \$30 air mail (US Dollars only.) Send checks (made out to SFRA) to Elizabeth Cogell, Dept of Humanities, University of Missouri, Rolla, MO 65401.

First, a brief look at some small presses. As many *Patchin Review* readers already know, small presses have begun offering not only reprints but new

work by well-known authors, in quality editions, often on acid-free paper and almost always in properly sewn bindings as opposed to the glued bindings now used by most large hardcover publishers. As hardcover prices continue to rise, small presses are becoming increasingly competitive.

A relatively new venture, representative of the direction of the field, is Cheap Street, run by Jan and George O’Nale, Route 2, Box 293, New Castle, VA 24127. They have announced forthcoming new work by Tanith Lee, Elizabeth Lynn, and Pamela Sargent. They already offer reprint material from Zelazny, Leiber, Le Guin, Yarbro, and Sladek. Send a stamped self-addressed #10 envelope for their catalogue.

Alexei and Cory Panshin have started Elephant Books (P.O. Box 999, Dublin, PA 18917). Their first volume is *Transmutations* by Alexei Panshin, personal essays chronicling post-1960s disillusionment: “I have been busily engaged in trying to reason my way to what comes next and failing again and again. At the same time, I have never lost my conviction that I ought to be writing SF. The result is that I have written nothing.” And: “What is apparent to me now is that the form of science fiction, its concepts and parameters, were based on the science, the facts and the assumptions of 1940. And these are no longer valid.” However: “I am ready to write a story again. An SF story, but not science fiction. I’m not quite sure what it will look like ... It will be an expression of the sense of wonder in a new and contemporary form.”

Several writers who entered the field in the late 1960s (as Panshin did) seem to have experienced comparable difficulties. His odyssey, though highly personal, has application to the general state of the art, and offers some valuable commentary.

Beyond the fringes of science fiction, in that gray zone of surrealist (or at least nonrepresentational) literary art, is *She Comes When You’re Leaving & Other Stories* by Bruce Boston (Berkeley Poets Workshop and Press, Box 459, Berkeley, CA 94701). One-time contributor to *New Worlds*, Boston writes succinct, vivid stories, sometimes disturbing, sometimes funny. I highly recommend this collection.

Lastly, NESFA Press continues to publish limited-edition hardcovers, often as tie-ins with science-fiction conventions. *The Men from Ariel* contains ten stories by Donald A. Wollheim, including his first, his last, and some never before printed, with short introductions. There’s a 1930s flavor to the prose (as one might expect), but it’s highly readable, and these stories

provide interesting perspective on our most venerable paperback editor.

Also from NESFA, in hardcover Ace-Double format, *Up to the Sky in Ships* by A. Bertram Chandler is incompatibly mated with *In and Out of Quandry* by Lee Hoffman, Chandler and Hoffman being professional and fan guests of honor, respectively, at the 1982 Chicago world convention. Reprinting several obscure Chandler stories was worthwhile, but the fragments by Hoffman, some from her fanzine, are insubstantial, and cliqueish in a way that will annoy readers other than diehard fans.

Two valuable reference guides from NESFA are *The N.E.S.F.A. Index to the Science Fiction Magazines and Original Anthologies, 1979-1980* and its sequel covering 1981. Professionally, legibly typeset, these 8x11 format, stapled books list absolutely everything, by title, author, and date. NESFA have not supplied prices, but their address for information is P.O. Box G, MIT Station, Cambridge, MA 02139-0910.

Ace

Trevor Hoyle *Seeking the Mythical Future, Through the Eye of Time, and The Gods Look Down*. Ignored by many reviewers, this powerful alternate-worlds trilogy was surely the most daring science fiction of 1982, ambitiously mixing physics and surrealism, image and myth. Cohesive, literate, highly entertaining. British edition appeared in 1977, spurned by US publishers for four years because it was too – difficult? Complex? Intelligent? \$2.25. PB.

Rudy Rucker *Software*. Cobb Anderson, retired robot designer, is rescued from drunken oblivion among geriatric Floridan hippies, refitted with new hardware (i.e. body) by renegade Lunar robots – but twists, and humor, multiply; will Anderson's consciousness (i.e. software) be trapped forever among Josephson junctions of the big computer in the Mr. Frostee ice cream truck? Rucker's funniest and best novel so far, despite its unravelled ending. \$2.25. PB.

Dean Ing *Pulling Through*. Silly macho-gritty prose, but highly effective holocaust drama, followed by 120 pp. of do-it-yourself plans for foiling fallout. Ing is deadly serious about survival. Classic of its kind. \$2.95. PB.

Barry Malzberg *The Cross of Fire*. Ritualized encounters between narrator, playing Jesus, and biblical contemporaries, for purpose of "therapy" and glib, ironic theological debate. Wit perceptible only by those with religious background. \$2.50. PB.

Charles Sheffield *Erasmus Magister*. Overdone, clumsily comic adventures of Darwin's grandfather, solving myths and mysteries. "Sheffield writes science fiction like an old pro," says *Library Journal*. Indeed he does. \$2.50. PB.

Keith Laumer *Star Colony*. Somewhat wordy annals of mankind's first colony in alien star-system. Straight adventure, "lightened" by Laumer's wit, much dialog being in Japanese dialect. His antipathy to being edited is a problem. \$2.95. PB.

Michael Bishop and Ian Watson *Under Heaven's Bridge*. Earnest attempt at sensitive depiction of linguist-anthropologist's gradual mental empathy with enigmatic alien race. Unravelling the mystery is a somewhat slow process. \$2.50. PB.

Avon

Isaac Asimov *Asimov on Science Fiction*. Old *IASFM* editorials, forewords, intros, miscellaneous platitudes, fluent but incredibly dull, because Asimov is too nice to say anything negative. He hated the PBS version of *The Lathe of Heaven*, but can only mumble apologetically: "I have an affection for logic. I kind of like it and when things get silly and stupid, I kind of don't like it. I'm sorry." \$2.95. PB.

Piers Anthony *Viscous Circle*. Despite pun title, a fairly straight adventure, with Anthony's usual virtues: Literate, well paced and structured, inventive, with a humane message. That he writes mainly for younger readers should not be held against him. \$2.95. PB.

Stanislaw Lem *Return from the Stars*. Yet more plodding social satire from this Eastern European pet of the New York Literary Establishment. Not quite as silly and tedious as Doris Lessing; but close. \$2.95. PB.

Thomas O'D. Hunter *Softly Walks the Beast*. Holocaust survivors face the Beast that Grew from Nuclear Radiation. EC Comics idea given achingly sincere rendition by one who should know better. \$2.75. PB.

Sean Kelly and Ted Mann *The Secret*. Most flagrant opportunism yet from the Byron Preiss machine. The real-hidden-treasure idea is puffed up with bad fantasy art and an insultingly condescending Guide to Little People by ex-*Lampoon* experts in exploitation. \$9.95. TP.

Thomas M. Disch *The Man Who Had No Idea*. A pontifical tone predominates, with Disch as pundit, offering parables stripped of fictive elements such as characters allowed to control their lives or endings that resolve. In 334, *Camp Concentration*, and the first segment of *On Wings of Song*, Disch's fiction took itself entirely seriously, without lapsing into social satire. He no longer seems to find this very rewarding. Readers may feel the opposite. \$2.95. PB.

Samuel R. Delany *The Ballad of Beta-2*. From the grave, this 115-page half of a 1965 Ace Double shows Delany's usual simple delight in formula space opera. With truly awesome expediency, Bantam have appended a 12-page excerpt/preview from new novel *Neveryóna*; seldom has a publisher's anxiety about recouping an excessive advance been so embarrassingly obvious. \$2.50. PB.

David Ireland *A Woman of the Future*. Self-consciously literary, analytical fragments as narrated by a woman of a mythic future Australia, in a landscape of sexual fantasy. Such a long book needs more structure, and its mannered style further inhibits momentum; but an interesting and unusual vision nonetheless. \$3.95. PB.

Annette Peltz McComas, ed. *The Eureka Years*. Highlights from *F&SF*, 1949-1954, including mildly interesting correspondence between editors and writers. Most of the stories are familiar, and the main appeal here is nostalgia. \$3.50. PB.

Berkley

Frederik Pohl *Yesterday's Tomorrows*. "I've read professionally somewhere around five hundred million words of science fiction. As an editor, I published about two percent of that..." And these are his favorites from that two percent. Except for a *Dullgren* excerpt (which Pohl says Bantam used to call "Fred's Folly" – till it started selling), this is an excellently readable anthology of predominantly old-style science fiction. We have no editors, now, with Pohl's particular savvy, risk-taking, and authority. We're poorer for it. \$9.95. TP.

Orson Scott Card *Hart's Hope*. Card's knack for dredging up neuroses and travelling in their foulness is tempered here by mannered fantasy idiom. But it's far, far from dungeons and dragons; you choke on the stink of medieval

peasants. Graphically readable. \$2.75. PB.

Barry B. Longyear *Elephant Song*. If, with superhuman self-control, we look at Longyear's success dispassionately, it's interesting that an author's whole career can grow from one tiny subsection of a subsection of a category; i.e. space opera about a travelling circus. If that's a success formula, why not space-roving stand-up comedians? Or a travelling brothel from the Crab Nebula? But less dispassionately – illiterate elaboration of a vacuous notion is an insult to adult intelligence. Few writers deserve their success less. \$2.50. PB.

Keith Laumer *Bolo*. With laconic lines like “The equipment had more bugs than a two-dollar hotel room,” these classic Laumer stories are hard to resist. Totally automated super-tanks, more quirky than HAL in *2001*, confront baffled bureaucrats and the usual iconoclastic hero slicing through military red tape. \$2.25. PB.

Philip Dunn *Cabal 2: The Black Moon*. More intelligent and capable than most action-series writers, Dunn can't conceal his skepticism – he knows it's all silly. So much for suspension of disbelief. \$2.25. PB.

George Alec Effinger *The Wolves of Memory*. At one point in this wry, iconic novel, fumbling nonhero Courane, trying to stay on the right side of the Big Computer that Runs Everything, is assigned to become a science-fiction writer: “Your first novel will be entitled *Space Spy*. It will be wry and ironic, yet containing seemingly important statements about the human condition.” And so forth. Mildly amusing. like *Saturday Night Live* but a great deal longer. \$2.50. PB.

Robert Thurston *Set of Wheels*. Sixties-flavored, with slightly experimental prose (no quote marks, present tense, first person, slang like “fuzz”). Unconvincingly decent desperado cruises regimented future USA in illegal hot-rod Mustang. Readable, but slight. \$2.50. PB.

Daw

Sharon Green *The Warrior Enchained*. “If you like John Norman, you will like Sharon Green,” says cover blurb. A promise, or a threat? Warrior in chains on cover raises false hopes; no dominatrixes trampling barbarians in high-heel thonged sandals, just lots of debates *about* bondage and submission, as if Green, unlike Norman, would rather discuss it than get out

the whips. Frustrating. \$2.95. PB.

Donald A. Wollheim and Arthur W. Saha *The 1982 Annual World's Best SF*. "...fantasy is taking more and more of a role. Not surprising since writers themselves do not know how to answer the questions of today and so resort to pure imagination, to the spinning of adult fairy tales." This from Wollheim's intro. Almost all are new writers, in this collection, most of them searching for a new context for science fiction in the 1980s. Wollheim is never as conservative as his reputation. \$2.95. PB.

E.C. Tubb *The Coming Event*. This is Dumarest of Terra book number (count 'em) 26. Tubb does high-grade space opera, BUT THIS SERIES HAS GONE ON LONG ENOUGH. \$2.25. PB.

Tanith Lee *Red As Blood*. Wry and clever retelling of classic fairy tales, from Pied Piper on. Deft, mature writing. \$2.50. PB.

Edward Llewellyn *Prelude to Chaos*. Extremely high-grade action-adventure, combining all the most effective elements: imminent global doom, precise realism, hero trying to clear his name, lust, power, yes, even social relevance. With just a touch more maturity, and higher ambition (maybe a more demanding editor?) Llewellyn could become an important presence in the field. \$2.75. PB.

Del Rey

Jack Chalker *The Web of the Chosen, Dancers in the Afterglow, Charon, And the Devil Will Drag You Under*. Chalker, who sometimes seems smug about his own mediocrity and limited vision, epitomizes worst tendencies of publishers to play safe in 1982. We will deal with his novels (including those published by Timescape) thoroughly, in a forthcoming issue.

Arthur C. Clarke *2010: The Odyssey Continues*. A happier subtitle would be, "The Odyssey Concludes". Despite miscellaneous mildly interesting high-tech surprises, this is the old boy-wonder stuff with naive political idealism pasted in, plus an episodic plot which exhibits all the worst defects of sequels generally. The genius of *2001* was in Kubrick's grand vision, not Clarke's literal-mindedness, so much more appropriate to fact than fiction. \$14.95. HC.

Rusty Miller *The Jedi Master's Quizbook*. Just what the world needs: a trivia book about overrated juvenile movies, by an eleven-year-old pedant. Is there

no end to the del Reys' crimes against intelligent literature? Overpriced at \$1.95. PB.

Piers Anthony *Night Mare* and *Ogre, Ogre*. Hostility from serious reviewers to Anthony is out of all proportion; perhaps it stems more from jealousy than lit crit. Xanth novels are unambitious, but playful, never condescending to their young audience. Scenarios are entirely original, untouched by whimsy, romanticism, pretentiousness, or cliché – more than you can say for Stephen Donaldson. \$2.95. PB.

Piers Anthony *Blue Adept*. Slightly more serious than the Xanth books, this series shuttles between science and fantasy, logic and intuition, but never quite intersects or interacts with reality. \$2.75. PB.

Anne McCaffrey *Crystal Singer*. Despite sort-of high-tech argot (“Half the crystals in the drive must be overheating. Can’t you tell from the ejection velocity monitor?”) McCaffrey remains a classic case of fantasy as pollution of science fiction, for little girls who like horses (Author’s Note credits Langshot Stables, Surrey as her fact source). Cloying, chummy, and very reassuring. \$2.95. PB.

James P. Hogan *Voyage from Yesteryear*. Title does not refer to 1930s science fiction, but might just as well, with additional contemporary flavor of the Right. \$2.95. PB.

Charles L. Harness *The Venetian Court*. Slightly dated tone but strong characters and ideas, relevant to computers in the twentieth century. Worthwhile, albeit not as powerful as his best. \$2.25. PB.

Assorted novels by Simak, E. Hoffman Price, and Gerrold/Niven: A reviewer shouldn’t shirk his obligations. But I can’t face any more of this. Of the 72 mass-market Del Rey paperbacks in 1982, virtually none was in any real sense innovative. Predictable science fiction should be a contradiction in terms. The Del Rey machine is a form of willful stagnation.

Donning/Starblaze

Ray Faraday Nelson *The Prometheus Man*. Careful but stilted near-future semi-satire of debt-ridden USA threatened by socioeconomic collapse despite being a New Utopia. Shallow characters (secret global dictator, wide-eyed ingenue) undercut sense of realism; and there’s not enough humor or worldliness to make the writing come alive. A brave attempt. \$5.95. TP.

L. Sprague de Camp *The Dragon of the Ishtar Gate*. BC historical novel as opposed to fantasy. Period detail and authenticity (he actually toured the Far East locale) moderate the melodrama. Mythic animal, strange races, high adventure; an enduring novel, and good contemporary value (340 pp, nice Stephen Fabian illustrations, decent paper). \$5.95. TP.

R.A. Lafferty *Aurelia*. Empty-headed alien female visits Earth, has adventures intended as comic, illustrated like a comic. \$5.95. TP.

Forrest J Ackerman *Mr. Monster's Movie Gold*. Ackerman's childlike obsession with sort-of movie fame ("I am wearing the actual Dracula cape of the Late Bela Lugosi, who was a friend of mine during the last three years of his life") makes him an endearingly de-fanged Rona Barrett of Monsterdom, impossible to dislike. Stephen King evidently didn't have the heart to refuse to write an intro to this big glossy Famous Monsters Book. \$12.95. TP.

Doubleday

Isaac Asimov *Foundation's Edge*. The old first book of this trilogy opened with some scope, some grandeur, and bright boy's initiation into galactic secret society – the classic hook for teenage fans. But sequelitis is now terminal: stupid permutations of drab, dumb characters, described by rote, without inspiration or structure. Cluttered with repetition and cliché. \$14.95. HC.

Terry Carr (ed). *Universe 12*. Highly stylized, Clarionesque stories avoid declarative sentences or dialogue with verisimilitude. Behind the affectations, some humanity and some ideas; but less profound than the styles suggest. \$10.95. HC.

Pamela Sargent *The Alien Upstairs*. In a near future of shortages, unrest, unemployment, etc etc the "alien" suburban lodger offers hope to nice dull couple via spacetime machine and other super-pseudo-science. Some wit, or at least ironic detachment, would have helped alleviate the comfy torpor. \$11.95. HC.

Marvin Kaye and Parke Godwin *Wintermind*. Ten years on from *The Masters of Solitude*, basically same scenario: distant-future post-collapse Earth, split into mystic forest dwellers and more-materialistic denizens of a mythic City; having made peace, both groups are threatened by Wintermind, classic horror-type Psychic Menace. Ambitious, elaborate, meticulously consistent

detail, but this is pure self-contained fantasy. \$15.95. HC.

Harmony

Douglas Adams *Life, the Universe, and Everything*. Third Hitchhiker novel offers more tiresome foolishness on the assumption that failure is funny. Ample room for endless sequels. \$9.95. HC.

Playboy

John Cleve *Spaceways* novels 4-6. Sharon Jarvis's less-than-lurid legacy lingers on, and on, and on. Ideas that catalyzed great books (e.g. Farmer's *Strange Relations*) are trivialized, debased into superficial silliness devoid of wit or eroticism. Score 0 for Offutt. \$2.50. PB.

Scribner's

Everett Bleiler, ed. *Science Fiction Writers*. Studies of 76 writers, from Shelley through Ballard. Partial bibliography of each, some biographical info, but mainly a guide to published work. Quirky selection of names (e.g. Niven, without Pournelle) but the essays are excellent. Big 9x11 format, 600 pp, enormous index. \$55. HC.

Starmont

Various Writers *Reader's Guides to Bester, Clement, Delany, Dick, Lindsay, Lovecraft*. Bibliographically conscientious, while lacking verve and imagination, these scholarly essays of dubious necessity are so complete, who need bother reading the novels? \$4.95. TP.

Timescape

Philip K. Dick *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*. From the tentative, uneven *Valis* and *Divine Invasion*, Dick progressed to this beautiful, integrated, compassionate study of obsessional faith; clear proof that he'd finally reconciled his visions and dilemmas and was entering the richest, most profound phase of his career. Theological debates may be too extensive for some; but the tenderness and depth of character make this a compulsive, resonant novel. \$15.50. HC.

Philip K. Dick *Confessions of a Crap Artist*. First mass-market edition of this tragi-comic satire of 1950s suburbia invaded by paranoid, deluded science-fiction nut – the Crap Artist, ridiculous but never, ever ridiculed, emerging as

lone gentle survivor in a world of selfish consumers. The Lundgren cover is beautiful. \$2.75. PB.

Gene Wolfe *The Citadel of the Autarch*. Held over to '83 in hopes of a Nebula, this final phase of Torturer Severian's meanderings crowns him as Autarch, but settles not much else – *intentionally*, since Wolfe's smug evasiveness permeates basic structure as well as self-satisfied elliptical sentences. Relentless constipated portent. \$15.95. HC.

Norman Spinrad *The Void Captain's Tale*. Highly ritualized taboo affaire between ship captain and female pilot, whose psychic presence in the "jump circuit" enables interstellar flight, while giving her transcendent orgasms. Weird prose ("I can hardly summon the hubris to paeon what glory I may have attained prior to that karmic nexus," Captain narrates), may be deliberately pompous, sort-of excuses Spinrad's repetitive tendencies. A bold novel, his most accomplished in five years, but messy ending implies that, despite Spinrad's anti-sequel pronouncements, the Captain may return. \$13.95. HC.

Roger Zelazny *Eye of Cat*. Mouse-and-cat game in future USA, as Last Indian tracks shape-changing alien, risking life and soul. A potent mix of futuristic hardware and mysticism, rather more heavily styled than the content demands. Most ambitious Zelazny in years. \$13.95. HC.

John Sladek *Roderick*. Conceived in two volumes; to appear here as three. Life story of first intelligent robot, built with misappropriated NASA funds, turned loose in a cruel USA of petty crime and suburban life imitating TV sitcoms. Sladek's satire targets are well-worn, but his sense of fun is his own, witty and intelligent. There are serious implications about Man and Machine. A fine and memorable novel, by science fiction's best humorist. \$2.75. PB.

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Final Issue

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This final issue of *The Patchin Review* is number 7, dated March 1985. Xerographically reproduced in a small edition for subscribers only. Published by Charles Platt, 9 Patchin Place, New York, NY 10011.

Debts to Subscribers.

The Patchin Review still owes money to some subscribers. One way or another, this debt should be paid. If possible, I would like to avoid issuing refund checks; the bank charges, postage, and labor are prohibitive. So here is what I suggest.

You can convert the issues that you are still owed into issues of other little magazines that you might find interesting. A slip is enclosed, specifying how many issues still remain in your *Patchin Review* subscription. For each of these issues, you can receive:

Two issues of *Ansible*, an irreverent, amusing British monthly offering all kinds of news about European science fiction, edited by David Langford. If you have enjoyed Gabby Snitch's gossip columns, you should enjoy *Ansible*.

Or, you can substitute one issue of *Science Fiction Review* for each issue of *The Patchin Review*. *Science Fiction Review*, edited by Richard E. Geis, is probably the best-known little magazine publishing kinds of commentary on the science-fiction field. It appears quarterly.

Please state your preference before *April 1985*. Choose one magazine or

the other, not a mixture, please. And to all subscribers, my thanks for supporting *The Patchin Review*. Your faith is appreciated.

Then as Now

“The early *Amazing Stories* magazine was padded with reprints of the work of mature men like H.G. Wells and Jules Verne. This, in part, accounted for the early success of the magazine.... Within five years science fiction exhausted this reprint field ... and, alas, fell into the hands of the pulp writers. It was then that the great decline set in, because science fiction began to reflect the inwardness of the hack writer, and the essence of the hack writer is that he has no inwardness. He has no contact with reality, no sense of dramatic proportion, no principles of human behavior, no eye for truth, and a wooden ear for dialogue. He is all compromise and clever-shabby tricks.”

– Alfred Bester, from a lecture given at the University of Chicago, subsequently included in *The Science Fiction Novel*, a collection of essays published by Advent in 1959.

Editorial

This final issue of *The Patchin Review* is a stripped-down subscribers-only cheapo production, because two years of ennui and procrastination have made it uncomfortably clear that original plans for a grandiose farewell number were highly unrealistic.

Short stories by A.A. Attanasio and Rudy Rucker were to have been included. There was going to be a special free giveaway role-playing game, *Books and Crooks*, accurately simulating the publishing industry (unlike most such games, it would have allowed each player to assume several roles at once, so you could sell stories under pseudonyms to your own anthology, draw artwork for your spouse, publish your lover’s short fiction in order to give him/her sufficient funds to travel to your next tryst at a science-fiction convention, and so on).

There was also going to be a pull-out parody of *Locus*, to be titled *Bogus*, faithfully exaggerating the salient traits of this monthly manual for business-oriented wordsmiths: greed, personality cultism, and a total absence

of thoughtful critical values. (I was especially looking forward to including a column titled *Getting Yours*, a guide to browbeating and litigation for profit-motivated scribes seeking rough justice in the hurly-burly book-biz.)

A serious article I had planned was *Self-Evident Standards*, which would have demonstrated beyond argument that some literary values are objectively measurable, functionally essential, yet missing from most science fiction. Trouble is, this elaborate proof would have taken up the whole magazine. Who has time to read such a thing, let alone write it? And it would merely have stated the obvious to discriminating readers, while indiscriminate ones would have ignored it.

Lastly, an item I couldn't quite face writing was a detailed summary and analysis of short stories published in *Omni* magazine over a period of twelve months. I mean, isn't it about time some brave investigative reporter delved into this plethora of mood-pieces and whimsy and tried to figure out what the hell is really going on here? *Omni* pays *ten times* the rates of its nearest competitor. The editor works full-time to publish just three stories a month and has an assistant who does all preliminary reading. You'd think this would allow ample opportunity to encourage important new talent, nag famous names into doing worthwhile work, and develop an unassailable reputation as the premiere showcase for short science fiction. And yet *Omni's* stories are seldom anthologized and win no awards (despite active editorial politicking). The magazine is ignored by many science-fiction readers, and viewed with love-hate by writers who crave the largesse while dreading the quixotic editorial policy – not to mention butchery of their prose to fit art and advertising layouts. (Words are not merely chopped, they are routinely *added*, by editorial staff if the writer is unavailable).

But such an article would have been seen as a personal attack on a well-intentioned, charming, inoffensive editor; and maybe *The Patchin Review* has offended enough people at this point. Most of the time, they weren't even the *right* people; looking back, it's amazing how thin-skinned some of my friends were, compared with the total indifference of the Enemies of Imaginative Fiction at whom the main thrust of the critical diatribes was directed. Even now, it still goes on: out of misplaced sentiment I did a Gabby Snitch column for Andrew Porter's sad little news magazine, only to find a couple days later I had an anonymous phone message on my answering machine telling me (in a voice oddly reminiscent of Harlan Ellison) that I had "gone too far" and would "pay for it"; and a letter from Jerry Pournelle

saying that the insults that I reported had finally convinced him it wasn't worth attending any more science-fiction conventions. I mean, hey, come on, it was only a *joke*, you guys!

Well, maybe Jerry has finally convinced me it isn't worth writing any more humorously intended gossip columns. I don't hear much gossip these days, anyway. Superficially, I'm still linked with science fiction: writing a novel for Avon, reviews or related nonfiction for *Heavy Metal*, *Asimov's*, *The Washington Post*, and *Omni* once in a while ... but when I look at the paperback review copies that keep coming in for *The Patchin Review* (thanks to the unbusinesslike generosity of publishers' promotion departments) they seem appallingly unimaginative and dumb, as if intended not just for younger readers but for a less evolved species of human being. Most writers who made their careers in the 1950s have totally lost whatever primitive vitality they once had; writers from the 1960s have turned away from their formerly adventurous themes; and new authors (excepting Gibson, Sterling, Robinson, Rucker, a couple others) seem willfully ignorant of literature outside science fiction and characters other than sci-fi stereotypes. Their work is terminally derivative and self-absorbed, telling the reader nothing profound, or even vaguely important, or even mildly interesting. But this has all been said at considerable length in previous issues of *The Patchin Review*, and repetitive lit-crit compounds the crime of repetitive literature ... so enough.

Epilogue: In little-magazine terms, this one was financially successful. I sold a thousand of each issue: about half through dealers, half through subscriptions. I placed a few ads in *Locus* during the first few months, after which advertising was unnecessary. All contributors were paid who wanted to be paid, albeit at relatively low rates. The magazine never lost money, so long as I wrote much of it myself, did all the typing, design, and production myself, and considered my labor free. I could have built up the circulation much more, but there are easier ways to make money, and I never did enjoy stuffing envelopes and wrapping packages.

Whether *The Patchin Review* was at all successful in its real aim – influencing people who mold the science-fiction field – is another matter. Overall, I think its effect was probably negligible.

– Charles Platt

Note: The following (plus additional text by Gregory Benford) was read as a paper at the Eaton Conference in California, 1985. Gregory Benford has

since written a different treatment of the same theme, to be published in a book of papers by the University of Southern Illinois, and elsewhere under the title Reactionary Utopias.

The Pompous Rose by Charles Platt and Gregory Benford

Ursula Le Guin is the only American science-fiction writer to have been published in *The New Yorker*, and to have won a National Book Award. She is highly regarded as a contemporary novelist whose work contains important statements about politics and pacifism. Her reputation is unique and impressive; but to what extent, really, is it deserved?

Her early books were planetary adventures, not especially ambitious, and conceptually unremarkable. They were more eloquent than most, and had a humane quality; but it was not until Le Guin began developing her ideas about feminism, Taoism, and socialism that she was acknowledged as a writer of real importance.

The Left Hand of Darkness, her first novel with a strong social message, postulated a colony of human beings who have become hermaphroditic. Interviewed in *Mother Jones* magazine, Le Guin has said that eliminating gender was the only way she could postulate a society without war; to her, men – or at least, the differences between them, and women – evidently seem the root cause of human strife.

From this feminist manifesto she moved to a statement on science, ambition, and the male desire to “play God”. *The Lathe of Heaven* describes a passive, pacific “common man” whose unique talent for changing reality is misappropriated by an egotistical psychiatrist seeking to remake the world. The title of the book comes from Chuang Tse: “To let understanding stop at what cannot be understood is a high attainment. Those who cannot do it will be destroyed on the lathe of heaven.” Or, as the protagonist puts it: “I do know that it’s wrong to force the pattern of things. It won’t do. It’s been our mistake for a hundred years.”

After this Zen manifesto, Le Guin tackled politics. *The Dispossessed* describes two cultures, one anarchistic and pacific, the other rampantly materialistic, and leaves no doubt where her own sympathies lie, although the story shies away from proposing any one social system as a simple answer.

Since that book was published in 1974, she has written relatively little.

The Eye of the Heron, a novella published in a 1978 story collection, was republished as a novel in 1983. It is another fable of two cultures: a rural tribe of pacifists, and an urban group known as the “bosses,” descended from exiled convicts. The two sides play out a classic “people’s struggle” with frequent soliloquies on the subject of male aggression and female sense of harmony.

The Beginning Place (1980) was a gentle adventure-romance for young readers. Her two collections *Orsinian Tales* (1976) and *The Compass Rose* (1983) brought together a miscellaneous assortment of short stories of the late 1960s and middle 1970s, which reaffirmed her reputation as a stylist. But her critical standing as a Utopian writer is still based almost entirely on the four novels itemized above.

In her collection of essays *The Language of the Night* (1979), Le Guin refers to herself both as a science-fiction writer and a fantasy writer. Clearly she dislikes category labels, and uses them loosely; but the main point is clear enough: she is without doubt a fantasist, most comfortable when describing a hypothetical reality, rather than a writer of strictly representational fiction, describing our external, shared, everyday reality. Even her contemporary non-genre fiction takes place in landscapes of the mind as opposed to landscapes that anyone can personally visit.

Le Guin insists that fantasy is no less “relevant” than fiction of a more documentary flavor, because fantasy is necessary to our psychic health: “The use of imaginative fiction is to deepen your understanding of your world, and your fellow men, and your own feelings, and your destiny. ... It is by such statements as, ‘Once upon a time there was a dragon’, or ‘In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit’ – it is by such beautiful non-facts that we fantastic human beings may arrive, in our peculiar fashion, at the truth.” (From “Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?” *PNLA Quarterly* #38, 1974.)

She believes, it seems, that childlike innocence lies dormant beneath our armor of social conventions; within each of us is goodness untouched by our cultural conditioning of greed, sexism, and aggression. Fantasy speaks directly to that inner self, and if we would only nourish it instead of denying it, we would find fulfillment.

She has written: “Did you ever notice how very gloomy ... all those billionaires look in their photographs? ...As if they were hungry for something, as if they had lost something and were trying to think where it

could be, or perhaps what it could be.... Could it be their childhood?” (From “Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction,” in *Parabola* I,4; 1976.)

This conviction (which, incidentally, ignores the petty cruelties and selfishness of children in any school yard) is fundamental to her depiction of characters throughout her work. Her protagonists are shy and naive, almost like Disneyesque woodland creatures. Her villains are muddled, clumsy, plagued by conscience, and never truly malicious or evil. In *The Eye of the Heron*, when Nazi-like “bosses” charge into a village to round up pacifists and herd them off to a work camp, they seem no more menacing than a bunch of drunken farm hands on a Saturday night. Confronted by the quiet pacifism of their hostages, their aggression quickly melts into embarrassment and guilt.

The idea that some adults might actually *enjoy* beating up weak and defenseless citizens seems too horrifying, or too implausible, ever to appear in a Le Guin novel. She refuses to acknowledge the sadism in ordinary, everyday people – in a crowd at a bullfight, or a mob shouting “Jump!” to a man on a ledge.

To her, pacifism is not a logical choice, but an inevitability; a natural state. Any other outlook is a symptom of social sickness.

It’s tempting to infer that this reflects a fear of unruliness or disorder. She is certainly disturbed by the mildest description of danger; a devout fan of Tolkien, she confesses she is glad she did not read his work before she was twenty-five, “Because I really wonder if I could have handled it.” (From “The Staring Eye”, in *Vector* 66/67, 1974.) And in *The Eye of the Heron*, the one really violent moment, in which the protagonist dies, is skipped over, described obliquely, via dialogue, as a flashback, as if a blow-by-blow depiction would have been too painful.

Perhaps it seems unfair to pick on a writer for being a sweet-natured pacifist – and indeed, Le Guin’s traits are so exemplary, they have probably protected her from negative criticism. Nor would there be any reason to complain, any more than one would want to pick on Anne McCaffrey or Andre Norton, had she remained content to dwell harmlessly in her private realm of myth and archetype. However, she chose to turn make-believe into a belief system, tackling the central ethical, social, and political questions of the world we live in; and this ambition was not ideally matched to her particular preconceptions and talents.

Fantasy can certainly be used successfully to make pointed social

comment via allegory. But to write such fantasy demands infinitely more worldliness than to write Tolkienesque fantasy, which remains an end in itself. To shift from her adventure stories of the 1960s to her message stories of the 1970s, Le Guin needed to support her simple faith with hard, practical knowledge of human behavior outside of the sheltered liberal climate of her home town of Portland, Oregon – where nuclear activists marked the 1983 anniversary of Hiroshima by sending up little home-made hot-air balloons and softly singing “Give peace a chance,” and Le Guin, for her part, wrote a short poem. This is hardly the stuff of which revolutions are made; and yet it matches the tone one finds in her books, in which revolutionary groups confound their oppressors not by force, or even by tough political bargaining, but by appealing gently to their inner decency.

If this outlook were argued from hard-won experience, one might be disposed to listen. If Le Guin’s writing showed the streetwise savvy of a priest who has used nonviolence as a tactic to win the trust of delinquent ghetto children, for example, her ideas would be more plausible. But as a fantasist, her stories do not derive from hard-won experience. Her characters may seem “realistic” in that they talk in a contemporary idiom, but they behave as myth figures governed by dogma, and when they argue their cause, it is usually by historical analogy. As a fantasist, Le Guin is simply not very practical.

Our criticism of her Utopian fiction goes beyond whether it is workable, however, to question the purity and wholesomeness of its values.

In *The Dispossessed*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and *The Eye of the Heron*, the small communities of idealists are nonviolent, thoughtful, compassionate, and hard-working. They reach decisions by consensus. When a member of the group is too disagreeable to be reasoned with, he is simply ignored; exclusion is the only form of punishment.

Again, it seems mean-spirited to disparage such right-minded behavior. And yet the very idea of anarchy by consensus is an oxymoron. Freedom to do as we please, so long as we all agree with each other and remain in a state of Zen harmony with the cosmos, is no freedom at all. It is little better than a religion in which faith in a deity has been replaced by faith in a some half-baked truths of the human spirit. It is a single-party political system that seems congenial only because the people in it are somewhat implausibly easygoing and nice.

The result is a system as superficially benign, yet as subtly authoritarian,

as Disneyland. Untouched by violent dissent or decadent adult values, it is perpetually embryonic, a model, mythic childhood. Its appeal is nostalgic, and it denies reality in the manner of genre fantasy – where Le Guin began writing and where many of her loyalties still lie.

Her Utopias are nostalgic also in that they are rural and technophobic. Where technology exists, it is introduced as a plot device or for metaphorical purposes; it is not an integral part of the society, sustaining the citizens. There is, indeed, evidence that Le Guin mistrusts technology and the whole idea of “progress”. *The Lathe of Heaven* purports to present a fair and equal depiction of a scientist. Haber, the messianic psychiatrist, is not a “bad man”; he is motivated by a desire to save humanity. But by attempting to “force the pattern of things,” Le Guin suggests he must inevitably degrade the world. This message is emphasized repeatedly as a law of nature, an article of faith, never argued historically or logically. As the protagonist puts it, “It doesn’t work to try to stand outside things and run them.... There is a way, but you have to follow it. The world *is*, no matter how we think it ought to be. You have to be with it. You have to let it be.”

Here, then, is another nostalgic vision: of a static “natural order of things”. Le Guin presents it ingenuously as a vague Utopian principle, without ever getting specific about its limits. Is it, for instance, wrong to impose our will on the natural harmony of bacteria, birth defects, or agriculture in third-world countries?

The Lathe of Heaven also implies the necessity of a seer to guide us along this “one true way”. In this role, George Orr is as decent and unthreatening as the members of Le Guin’s Utopian colonies. Like them, he is selfless, humble, tormented by guilt, and stoic when threatened by oppression.

But if we separate his philosophy from his character, it is really as inflexible as Haber’s. A “one, true way” of any sort is an attempt to deny diversity, no matter how nonviolently it is applied. The lack of freedom allowed by Le Guin’s philosophy, as expressed via George Orr, is evident in the repeated use of the phrase “you have to” in his monologue.

By ever-so-gently disapproving of traits such as aggression, leadership, defiance, and acquisitiveness, and ever-so-gently suggesting that our only choice is to cooperate with (her interpretation of) the way things really are, Le Guin is an authoritarian writer. She may express doubts about the fate of her cause, but never about its justness. She may depict her gentle people

losing a brave battle against oppressors, but she never casts doubt on the *rightness* of their struggle. Her politics may seem radical, but in fact she is advocating an inflexible, permanent status-quo.

This is all the more evident when we compare her work with that of a truly radical, truly anarchic writer such as Philip K. Dick. Where Le Guin's tone is dogmatic and humorless, Dick is irreverent and funny. Where Le Guin's characters work together for a Cause, Dick's protagonists are uncooperative and contentious. They resist any group activity or social order, as a curtailment of their liberty. Le Guin proposes social solutions in a reformist spirit; Dick never prescribes an answer to anything, and depicts people as being incapable of transcending their very human weaknesses.

Le Guin has stated that she was influenced by Dick's work, and she dedicated *The Lathe of Heaven* to him; but in co-opting his idea of multiple realities, she left out Dick's corollary that there is no such thing as a "one true way" or single objective truth. In his explorations of shared subjectivity, such as *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, there is no benevolent guru telling us how to straighten out our lives and get people to be nice to each other. The only source of absolute truth is a malevolent deity, feared rather than revered.

It is unkind, but perhaps not too unfair, to compare Ursula Le Guin with Fay Hume, the leading female character in Dick's *Confessions of a Crap Artist*. Both women are organizers, bothered by male contentiousness, and determined to create a sanctuary insulated from unpalatable aspects of everyday life. The only real difference is that Le Guin is subtler about it.

It is worthwhile also to contrast Dick's style with Le Guin's. For all his eloquence, he was a colloquial writer, whose ability to capture contemporary flavor and dialogue was well proven in books such as *A Scanner Darkly*. Le Guin, on the other hand, is disaffected with modern American society, and distances herself from it with a formal prose style, classically British in tone. In *From Elfland to Poughkeepsie* (Pendragon Press, 1978) she states, "A plain language is the noblest of all." Her next paragraph then defines her idea of "plain prose" as being that written by Tolkien. This is hardly plain to an American ear – or, indeed, to any British reader with modern tastes.

Her use of this dated form is necessary, however, to suspend disbelief in the separate realities she builds, distanced from the present day and thus protected from tests of plausibility by comparison.

Possibly, Ursula Le Guin might argue that her social models are not intended to be taken as literal prescriptions for Utopia. Perhaps it is the role of the

idealist merely to encourage hope and the dream of transcendence, just as it is the role of a fantasist to remind us of the myths that make us human.

In this case we would reply that it is misleading and dishonest to couch such vague promises in such seemingly concrete terms, depicting make-believe as if it *could actually happen*. Le Guin's societies are anything but realistic, in that they deny all the harder lessons of history. Just as Trotsky apparently could not imagine the prospect of Stalin, she never acknowledges the latent authoritarianism in her monotheistic communes, and offers no advice on how to prevent a society based on a single behavioral model from degenerating into totalitarianism, as has happened to virtually every Marxist system in the real world.

Ignoring the examples of the twentieth century, she draws her hope from idealistic European notions of the nineteenth. To some extent these were a reaction against the rationalist, free-market ideas of the American revolution; ironically, the American system, whose flaws Le Guin reacts against so strongly, has sustained its original ideals better than any of the socialist models that she presents as attractive alternatives.

She has written: "Those who refuse to listen to dragons are probably doomed to spend their lives acting out the nightmares of politicians." Unfortunately, experience indicates that such nightmares are not to be avoided simply by indulging in wishful thinking.

Science Fiction and Social Relevance

"Science fiction should be an effective literature of social criticism – but ... it is not. I believe that in science fiction the symbolism lies too deep for action to result, that the science fiction story does not turn the reader outward to action but inward to contemplation. I think the unwitting compact between the writer and reader of science fiction goes: 'We are suspending reality, you and I. By the signs of the rocket ship and the ray gun and time machine we indicate that the relationship between us has nothing to do with the real world. By writing the stuff and by reading it we abdicate from action, we give free play to our unconscious drives and symbols, we write and read not about the real world but about ourselves and the things within ourselves.'"

– C.M. Kornbluth, from a lecture at the University of Chicago, reprinted in *The Science Fiction Novel*, published by Advent, 1959.

Few people now remember Venom, a little magazine started in 1981 for the sole purpose of printing nasty pseudonymous book reviews. It imposed a perversely even-handed policy on its reviewers: before you could condemn a book written by anyone else, you had to attack one of your own. Several well-known professionals contributed on this basis, among them Philip K. Dick. Unfortunately, the magazine collapsed before Phil's self-review could be published; but the manuscript was safely stored in the Venom archives and has now been exhumed by an anonymous member of the one-time editorial collective who chose to donate it to The Patchin Review. It appears below.

When Philip K. Dick Reviewed Himself

Letter dated September 29, 1981:

Dear Venom:

That curious wasp Charles Platt says that you will print book reviews in which the author pans his own work. Can I do that, please? I have no motive except, well, I'd like to see if I can do it. So enclosed you will find my attack on *The Divine Invasion*, my most recent novel...

Be sure to let me know if the enclosed review is satisfactory and will see publication.

Cordially, Philip K. Dick

Book Review: The Divine Invasion by Philip K. Dick

They say old dopers never die, they just write pompous novels (nobody said that? Well, they should have, because here is a case in point). Herb Asher, the typical anti-hero that Dick uses and reuses endlessly as the protagonist of his novels, gets nailed as the putative father of God by unmarried virgin Rybys Rommey who is pregnant by and with the Almighty. Helped by the prophet Elijah, no less, these boring people make their way to Earth in order to unseat the evil rulers, a fusion of the Catholic Church and the Communist Party. It is a hard job to make God boring, but Dick manages it; God is born as an obnoxious little boy who seems more interested in an equally obnoxious little girl named Zina than in remembering his Mission.

As you might suppose, the grand plan to unseat the enemy proves successful; after all, Yahweh is Yahweh. As I read – or did my best to read – this labored venture at combining s-f with theology, I asked myself, Is there any better argument against drug abuse than this? If so I haven't heard of it.

The amazing part is that Phil Dick takes himself seriously, or at least takes his writing to mean something. The portions of this novel that are original are dull; the parts that spark some meager interest in the reader seem to be culled – at great effort – from obscure reference books, and, of course, the bible. I think what really ails this novel is the intent, more than the execution. It is glib enough, but apparently Dick is trying to work off the bad karma he allegedly acquired during his year or years with street people, criminals, violent agitators, and just by and large the scum of Northern California (this all took place, apparently, after the collapse of one of his many marriages). This reviewer suggests that a better way to make amends would be to take some much-deserved R&R: stop writing, Phil, watch TV, maybe smoke a joint – one more bite of the dog won't kill you – and generally take it easy until both the Bad Old Days and the *reaction* to the Bad Old Days subside in your fevered mind.

Harlan Ellison once remarked that Phil Dick “has tried out everything but homosexuality, and that’s probably where he should have begun.” Think about it, Phil; and *don’t* think about a follow-up sequel to this one: cut your losses and forget it.

– Philip K. Dick

Letter dated October 26, 1981:

Dear Venom:

Thank you for your card regarding my review of *The Divine Invasion*. – As a pseudonym on my review, let’s use Chipdip K. Kill. Okay? The clever reader can trace this down; it is the joke version of my name that John Sladek used for his parody of my writing that he titled “Solar Shoe-Salesman”. Thus the astute reader can trace it back to me, if he or she is so inclined.

I’m glad my review is okay. By the way – I sent a carbon of it to my agent, Russell Galen at Scott Meredith, and Russ says it’s as good as anything I’ve ever done. He frankly found it hysterically funny. It’s nice to have an agent with a sense of humor.

I’ll look forward to receiving my 5 copies.

Cordially, Philip K. Dick

Department of Synchronicity

“So this is the city of dreaming spires,” Sheila said. “Theoretically that’s Oxford,” Adam said. “This is the city of perspiring dreams.”

(From *The Glittering Prizes* by Frederic Raphael, 1976.)

“This is the town of dreaming spires, as I think the poem goes.”

“Oxford’s the town of dreaming spires,” he corrected her.

“Cambridge is more like perspiring dreams.”

(From *Timescape* by Gregory Benford, 1980.)

Book Reviews

No formal reviews, these; just a few mentions of items that seem worthwhile or vaguely important.

First, I encourage anyone who has enjoyed *The Patchin Review* to send for a sample of *Cheap Truth*, a broadsheet available from 809-C West 12 Street, Austin, Texas 78701. It’s free; simply enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope. The style tends toward militant radical raving, some far-fetched arguments that seem more contrived than wholly heartfelt, but it’s the only coherent “alternative voice” in science fiction that I know of right now, emanating from an insular fanatic who refuses to be dragged down by the Decade of Ennui. The most recent issue (#9) features a scathing editorial denouncing modern science fiction for its “terror of the future”; reviews of obscure magazines, including one published by English-speaking Islamic futurists prophesying a high-tech third-world future faithful to the Moslem creed; and a horrifyingly smug Statement of Position by a pseudonymous magazine editor widely rumored to be Ellen Datlow.

Another small-press publication that I personally enjoy is *Velocities*, a magazine of speculative poetry edited by Andrew Joron, 1509 Le Roy Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94708. Joron has been resolutely attempting to bring some degree of sophistication to science-fiction poetry for several years, in his own work and the poems that he publishes by other writers. Single issues cost \$3.50 (make checks payable to Andrew Joron).

I also recommend *Nu Yu*, which bills itself as a magazine of 1997 frivolously dedicated to product descriptions and illustrations of biological freaks achieved through futuristic bio-engineering. Sometimes funny, sometimes sleazy, sometimes heavy-handed, this is an original concept developed in a style quite different from your average science-fiction product. Send \$2.00 to Data Day Communications, Box 251, Philadelphia,

PA 19105.

Lastly, if you like hand-printed, hand-sewn books on fine paper in small editions, you should by now be familiar with Cheap Street, a small press at Route 2, Box 293, New Castle, VA 24127. Send a stamped self-addressed business-size envelope for their catalog. There are some fine items included, though they are anything but cheap.

Getting back to the mass market ... the past two years have, of course, seen some new publishing imprints (Baen Books, Blue Jay Books) and expansion of other science-fiction lists. For a while, existing writers will be able to make a better living, and newcomers will have a better chance of breaking into print. Market saturation, followed by recession and retrenchment, should fall due sometime early in 1986, which just might also be when Blue Jay Books chirps its last, and Lou Aronica at Bantam Books comes face to face with some unpleasant sales figures on some of his more far-fetched selections. If I'm wrong, I'll be glad; the cyclical fortunes of science-fiction publishing are tough for everyone, and unusual books are always the first to be blamed or sacrificed. On the other hand, where Blue Jay is concerned, it's hard to see how such a totally eccentric line can survive.

By contrast, Berkley/Ace seems set to displace DAW as the most "rational" science-fiction imprint: i.e. paying as little as possible for books that will be straightforwardly profitable. Editor Susan Allison redeems herself (just as Wollheim did before her) by employing Terry Carr to edit the Ace Specials. Odd that Carr, situated well outside the world of New York publishing, should have been able to develop so much impressive new talent, so quickly. You don't need me to tell you how good William Gibson's *Neuromancer* is, do you? At last, a science-fiction novel that has a worldly, truly *modern* flavor. Too bad the science is mere razzle-dazzle, but we can forgive Gibson a lot for having revitalized some tired old ideas (space colonies, giant intelligent computers).

Del Rey Books, of course, has no such item of quality to balance its endless Asimov reissues, Jack Chalker adventures, and light fantasies by Piers Anthony. In fact I would say Del Rey are totally irredeemable at this point, and *proud of it*: even their covers are aggressively cheap, as if to prove science fiction does better that way. The only kind thing I have to say about this high-volume, low-brow hotbed of mediocrity is that they still send me review copies, years after they should have cut me off. This costs them money, I'm glad to say, and it gives me a few more titles to sell at my local

science-fiction store for fifty cents apiece. Thanks, Judy-Lynn.

Baen Books have published more or less what one would expect, the only surprise being the abominably low standard of copy editing and proof reading. I'd guess there are just about enough militaristic teenagers with high-tech power fantasies to keep Baen in business, and some of his nonfiction items have been quite worthwhile.

Last in this incomplete and biased survey, Avon Books has been unobtrusively publishing some moderately interesting titles under the guidance of John Douglas, formerly second-in-command to David Hartwell at Timescape Books (RIP). *Saraband of Lost Time* by Richard Grant is a light adventure in a post-technology world, with some nice turns of phrase and moments of real wit, like M. John Harrison on Elavil. *The Time-Servers* by Russell M. Griffin is a humorous intrigue featuring extraterrestrial ambassadors attempting to cope with ill-mannered aliens and hostile native life forms, like Keith Laumer on Valium. Nothing very radical or even breathtakingly original, here; but these modest entertainments do give the impression of intelligence at work, and they have some awareness of style, which places them in the top five percent of contemporary science fiction. I just wish John Douglas felt he could afford to be a little more ambitious, and risk exercising what seems to be his real editorial taste.

Personally, the only books that have really excited me in the past year have been obscure, or non-science fiction, or nonfiction. For instance, *Weapons and Hope* by Freeman Dyson is an extremely fine examination of the arms race, nuclear policies, and the human failings and urges that lead to armed preparedness and conflict. Assuming that people who read science fiction are serious when they say they aren't interested in escapism, I don't understand how they can settle for Niven and Pournelle when nonfiction like this offers so much more depth and eloquence. But maybe my assumption is somewhat optimistic.

In that gray zone between fantastic literature and contemporary fiction, J.G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* is a truly astonishing book, which gave me nightmares for a week. It puts all his earlier work in a new perspective, and conjures up a society and landscape that are disturbingly alien in the truest sense.

William Burroughs' *The Place of Dead Roads* has a great science-fiction vignette embedded in it, featuring The Baron, a homosexual alien shape-changer whose exploits are narrated in a style familiar to any Gordon

R. Dickson fan, though the content is somewhat different. Here's an excerpt I can't resist including:

"All right, you jokers, you're here to learn and learn fast. Your planet is riddled by the walking dead taken over by a Venusian virus. I will show you how to recognize these virus-controlled bodies. Many of them are Christians. In fact Christianity is the most virulent spiritual poison ever administered to a disaster-prone planet."

"You mean, Sarge, that most of the trouble on Earth is caused, by Venusians in human bodies?"

"Now you're getting smart."

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to kill these mothers?"

"Now you're getting smarter. ... Slaughter the shits of the world. They poison the air you breathe."

"But sir, aren't the B.B.s [*Bible Belters*] and their equivalents in other countries, the bigoted ignorant basically frightened middle class, just dupes and lackeys of the very rich and the politicians, exploited for votes and labor and the consumption of consumer goods while they also serve as convenient guard dogs to protect the status that benefits the very rich?"

"Yes, but they are still vectors, carriers of the virus. ... Now some vectors are more potent than others. Look at Jesus Christ..."

And so forth. I don't have space to include the bit where the Baron eats "fuel eggs" that enable him to fart his way across the landscape, clad in a cloak of fur-bearing oysters, while riding his faithful Arn. The rest of the book reiterates some of the anti-religious obsession, in a non-science-fictional context. It tends to be somewhat repetitive, but is more coherent and structured than Burroughs' previous two or three novels.

But you don't want to read any more infatuated tributes to aging 1960s writers, do you? So I'll leave it at that. After all, as Bruce Sterling was heard to remark at the Baltimore World Convention (where he was nominated for two Hugos and won neither of them): "I must be crazy sitting here when I could be watching MTV."

Note: Because of the long gap between this issue and the previous Patchin Review, some of these letters are no longer entirely topical in their

references to trends in science-fiction and book publishing. However, the viewpoints and conclusions remain pertinent.

Letters

From Malcolm Edwards, London, England

Few people would deny that science fiction publishing, on both sides of the Atlantic, has been in a difficult period. Over here the main symptom of that is a falling away of the middle ground, leaving a gulf between the few big-sellers and the many who scrape around at breakeven point. But fewer, at least in the science fiction world, will admit that science fiction itself is in an equally parlous state, and that these two factors may not be unrelated. Most of what presently appears in the USA is a) terrible and b) fantasy.

I am probably the only person in British publishing who is first and foremost a science fiction editor (though it is not all that I do). I am also editing the only regular hardcover science fiction list remaining in Britain. I could publish more books than I do, if I could find more books that I felt were *worth* publishing.

Perhaps the mass audience for science fiction has changed, demanding the familiar, safe, comfortable and easy in preference to the original, challenging and thought-provoking. (This is in response primarily to Dave Hartwell's depressing comment about the lack of an audience for high-quality work by unfamiliar names.) On the other hand, perhaps publishers have become less successful at identifying the different elements of that audience and packaging the books for that audience. Maybe it's no surprise that difficult and literary science fiction novels packaged like juvenile trash fail to reach anybody. A few years ago, in Britain, when the fashion was to put all paperback science fiction in packages with Chris Foss spaceships on the cover, Tom Disch's *334* was produced in just that format. Well, if you had picked up something which looked as though it was going to be an E.E. Smith type book, and what you got was *334*, what are the chances that you would have been pleased? Alternatively, if you were looking for a complex and intelligent science fiction novel, what are the chances that you would pick up something looking like an E.E. Smith novel?

These days I find specialist science fiction bookshops profoundly depressing. Hundreds upon hundreds of books, all of them looking the same. No wonder books which aren't the same are thought 'not to fit'.

From Michael Morrison, Norman, Oklahoma

I have been quite interested in the comments in *The Patchin Review* and elsewhere concerning the state of science fiction in the 1980s. In particular, I have been trying to figure out what has happened to science fiction. These musings were brought on by the depressing experience of reading Terry Carr's 1982 best-of-the-year anthology. I have been reading Carr's anthologies for a long time and have high respect for him as an editor. Therefore I conclude that these competent but intellectually unexciting (and emotionally unmoving) stories really were among the best written in 1981. Having also recently read several novels that left me cold, I began to wonder if the problem was me. Had I lost interest in science fiction? So I went back and re-read some of Carr's earlier anthologies and reviewed some of the late 1960s and early 1970s fiction that I fondly remember. The problem isn't me. Science fiction really is different now: more conservative (both in style and content), and rather bland. Although several reasons for this malaise have been bandied about (the pernicious influence of fantasy, the current state of the economy as it influences publishing, political trends in the U.S., etc.), I have not seen a single extended essay exploring this question.

I must admit that I find the current state of science fiction pretty disheartening. With increased skill in writing and characterization seems to have come a diminishing of intellectual excitement and emotional involvement on the part of many writers.

From Philip José Farmer, Peoria, Illinois

Yesterday, while watching TV, I got to thinking that the books you prefer and the movies you watch might be an index to your character. For instance, it's well known that I greatly admire *The Avenger*, etc., but I've never revealed that my favorite folk-hero is Bugs Bunny. Or that I once had a thing for Betty Boop. Now that I'm fairly well established and too old to care much about the opinions of others, I can reveal these weaknesses.

After fifty-eight years of wide and indiscriminate reading, I confess that my favorite twentieth-century writers are Charles Bukowski, Henry Miller, and George MacDonald Fraser. My favorite nineteenth-century writers are Mark Twain, Lewis Carroll, Charles Dickens, and Herman Melville. Of all writers. Homer is the greatest. I do much admire John Irving, Tom Robbins, and Thomas Pynchon. Pynchon, however, badly needs a good editor. He'd be a better writer if he suffered from amnesia now and then.

Speaking of characters, I once wrote a detailed outline for a novel titled

Wild and Weird Clime. This was about the science fiction world and had a Dickensian number and variety of characters who were “characters”. You’ve met most of them. The editors to whom I submitted the outline rejected it on the grounds that all previous novels about the science fiction milieu had not sold well. I pointed out that these had not depicted the science fiction world in depth. My protagonist would be a man whose career had included not only being a writer but had been an editor, agent, and publisher, not to mention a vigorous participant in fandom. He had also been forced to write pornography and TV scripts to support his family, and one section would be about his adventures in the wild, woolly, and corrupt world of the space-defense industry. Etc. No go.

I thought, “Well, fuck you. After I become a well-known mainstream author with *Pearl Diving in Old Peoria*, I’ll be able to interest a publisher.” I have few virtues, but I do have the endurance and patience of a Chinese peasant and the knowledge that if I can live long enough I’ll do all I want to do. Time is both my ally and my enemy.

From Paul E. Clinco, M.D., Texas

The Arnold Klein piece in *Patchin Review* #6 had an interesting tidbit buried in it: that Shelley et al, the early romantics, hated science. First, was that Mary or Percy? If Mary, certainly her use of a scientific motif in *Frankenstein* to separate the child of nature, the Monster, from the decadent urban types can’t be construed as an attack on science. Surgery back then was a last-ditch effort against catastrophe which usually failed – Mary Shelley wasn’t addressing that, obviously. If Percy, I refer you to Jacques Barzun’s *Classic, Romantic and Modern* in which he points out that the early Romantics were largely enthusiastic over the rise of Science, which threw so much Classicism out of fashion. Also, the corpus of science being much smaller, educated folks usually got a healthy helping of the body of scientific knowledge during their studies. Barzun mentions the lyrical ecstasies of Faraday, which, of course, did not prevent him from founding the science of electricity.

I had always thought that the grand old man of science fiction was Jules Verne, the “first artist who wrote fiction about science”. Captain Nemo may have had his emotional problems, but Verne clearly loved the *Nautilus*.

From Raymond Embrak, Washington, D.C.

The 1980s have already become a tiresome decade. On a daily basis one

is confronted with examples of America's fierce and solemn dedication to Sturgeon's law enforcement, and I have seen more sweat sox since 1980 than in the twenty years previous.

The sounds being made in science fiction in the 1980s are seriously unattractive to any beginning writer unlucky enough to wind up reading the right stuff. Malzberg's *Engines of the Night* is pretty stiff business; if made into a movie, it would have been directed by Hitchcock. *The Patchin Review*, in a pleasantly smug manner, routinely tells us of a bad climate for any writer dumb enough to have something original in mind. Mercantile editors and mindless masses are stock in trade of our little drama, yet it's still an accurate picture of the way things are. Writers will still write; they just can't expect to make a living from doing what they do best. At least in Hollywood there's money in return for debasing one's art. In science fiction, one is expected to do it for nothing. Perhaps writing should be consigned to the sort of eccentric hobby one sees on Sunday TV news after the weather report: the ex-stockbroker who runs a washateria for beer cans in Superman, Michigan. Any moderately intelligent beginning writer viewing all this would conclude that it just isn't worth all this bullshit – and certainly not for a sub-literary genre nobody reads, anyway.

For all this, you'd think there was money at stake; or that anyone actually gives a damn about science fiction unless it's on a screen and parlays "ideas" Gernsback would have called stale, and whose main concern is the amount of lachrymal fluid in the popcorn. He would know where he was neither wanted nor needed; it only takes ten to fill the bestseller list, and they're already there.

Regardless, being hooked, he will continue to crawl around the bed of his career, stroking the unresponsive spouse that is the publishing business. He may suspect, in a moment symptomizing pre-dementia, that a second new wave, complete with self-indulgences, will eventually arise because the meaning of the first was too quickly forgotten, thus allowing the world and the publishing business to catch up with his genius. Five minutes later the idea will bore him, and he'll go back to just trying to get lucky.

Maybe he'll advance to the raving stage (Jody Scott). But beyond that stage lies another. This is the one where he smiles benignly at you at the bus stop, and will tell you if you ask: "Writing is where it's at. Bringing joy to the hearts of millions is what's in it for me – not money. You can't replace the joy – the love you spread – not for anything in the world. They may give me

millions, but it'll never replace the love vibes I get from people wherever I go. It's like I was telling Ballard on Merv the other night – science fiction makes the world swing, and I'm just glad to be on the merry-go-round. And one more thing. Never play with dead foxes, or you'll catch a clever disease.”

And then you'll sort of edge away from him, sideways so he won't notice, then you'll wonder why he'd get so worked up about that weird stuff nobody reads anyway.

On the Imminent Unfeasibility of Science Fiction

“We will soon create intelligences greater than our own. When this happens, human history will have reached a kind of singularity, an intellectual transition as impenetrable as the knotted space-time at the center of a black hole, and the world will pass far beyond our understanding. This singularity, I believe, already haunts a number of science-fiction writers. It makes realistic extrapolations to an interstellar future impossible. To write a story set more than a century hence, one needs a nuclear war in between – to retard progress enough so that the world remains intelligible.”

– Vernor Vinge, writing in *Omni*.

Bonus Articles

- [The Rape of Science Fiction](#): Charles Platt
- [Too Many Books](#): Charles Platt

The Rape of Science Fiction by Charles Platt

This situation is no longer tolerable. It's beyond cynical humor, even beyond one's capacity for fatalism. The body of literature that I love has been doped up and defiled, draped in fake finery and turned into a flabby old hooker smelling of festering lesions and cheap perfume. For this I blame Judy-Lynn and Lester del Rey, Isaac Asimov, Byron Preiss, George Lucas, Stephen Spielberg, Charles N. Brown, J.R.R. Tolkien, Robert Asprin, Roger Elwood, Vonda McIntyre, Joan Vinge, and L. Ron Hubbard, among others. During the course of this article I may find a few more names to add to the list. I may even add my own.

Those who degraded science fiction were not motivated by malice. Some of them even had good intentions. We know, however, where the road paved with such intentions is liable to lead, and that indeed is where we find ourselves, wedded to a form that was once provocative and stimulating but is now crippled, corrupt, mentally retarded, and dying for lack of intensive care.

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Maybe I exaggerate, writing as I do from the heart. Maybe I sound like a boring old fart pining for a "golden age" that only exists in my imagination. The fact is, though, science fiction *did* once have brains and beauty to seduce even the most grudging skeptic, and the age that I'm lamenting was a mere twenty years ago.

I can substantiate my ravings, but before I do, let me admit that even in my pit of nihilism, I acknowledge some hope. From cyberpunk emerged a cadre of sterling writers, whose idealism has not yet been entirely poisoned by the stench of greed and failure that permeates paperback publishing. And idea merchants such as Greg Bear and William Gibson have shown us that commercial savvy – opportunism, even – can coexist symbiotically with

genuine talent.

I salute, too, some wily veterans who continue to stalk and raid the clumsy beast of Commerce, evading jaws that long since squeezed the creative juices from their contemporaries. Brian Aldiss, Frederik Pohl, J.G. Ballard, Norman Spinrad, Joe Haldeman, Vernor Vinge, even Harlan Ellison: all have stayed true to their visions in their separate ways, and have managed to make a living at the same time.

Their work, however, constitutes the embers of a spiritual fire that once dazzled our adolescent brains with its brilliance. Maybe I do exaggerate; but not by much. When I got mixed up with science fiction, it was no idle flirtation. Other forms had sought to lure me between their covers with elegant declamations and human warmth, yet they seemed stuffy and arthritic compared with science fiction, which was young and brash and full of rebellion. It denied all limits and told me to look outward, not inward. With a sense of helpless wonder, I fell in love.

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At that time, serious science-fiction writers didn't make much of a living. They suffered ridicule and humiliation, and they persevered for one reason only: they cared. Even their clumsiest prose conveyed their deep commitment.

There weren't many serious science-fiction readers, but they constituted a valuable, enduring *core-audience*, technologically aware and reasonably intelligent. You didn't have to write down to their level.

As for the editors, they tended to want even simple adventure novels to be set in rigorously plausible scenarios. The editors had been in the field all their lives. They cared whether stories made sense, and they took time to inculcate their values into new writers who came along.

At the end of the 1960s, however, all this changed.

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I have to mention the so-called New Wave of that period, even though it's only tangentially relevant. It attempted to enliven and humanize science fiction, and it did help to broaden some minds and raise some literary standards. Those were its noble aims, but it also had a degrading influence that was far more important in the long term.

In the name of humanism, New-Wave writers cut a few corners where rigorous plausibility was concerned. Michael Moorcock, who gave the

movement its editorial focus, freely admitted he didn't know anything about science, and didn't care. Harlan Ellison, who promoted the movement in America, was equally ignorant of technology.

Thus from the New Wave, via the *Dangerous Visions* series, thence Damon Knight's *Orbit* anthologies and Milford writing workshops, evolved a generation who used the props of science fiction (aliens, time travel, starships) without any real interest in plausibility as their predecessors had known it. A new "soft" science fiction emerged, largely written by women: Joan Vinge, Vonda McIntyre, Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Kate Wilhelm, Carol Emshwiller. Their concern for human values was admirable, but they eroded science fiction's one great strength that had distinguished it from all other fantastic literature: its implicit claim that events described *could actually come true*.

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Of course, if you had a whimsical, muddled view of the world – if you didn't know anything about science, and didn't care – soft science fiction could seem perfectly plausible. And many new readers related to it in these terms. Unlike the old core-audience, they didn't enjoy mechanistic, technical stuff. They preferred mythic fables about dreamsnakes and snow queens.

Fantasy had never previously existed as a separate adult category; stories about talking animals or princesses and magicians had been considered suitable mainly for young children. Yet by the 1970s, *Watership Down* was a bestseller, and *Lord of the Rings* was a classic.

Why was whimsical bullshit about little furry creatures suddenly so popular? Well, in this strange time of love and peace and flower power, whimsical bullshit was big all over. Young people whose bone marrow had been rendered radioactive by atomic fallout were understandably suspicious of science, so they turned instead to crackpot fads, from macrobiotics to transcendental meditation. If they dropped acid they might actually believe they could *visit* Middle Earth. Drugs, indeed, were a major factor in the new credulity: not everyone "tripped out," but enough did – and wrote about it– to legitimize the idea of realms beyond everyday reality.

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Heinlein, Howard, and Herbert followed Tolkien to bestsellerdom, and publishers tried to cash in on the trend. Half-a-dozen new science-fiction programs were born; but there weren't enough knowledgeable, qualified

editors to run them. In some cases, fans were turned into editors overnight. In other cases, science fiction was added to an existing editor's responsibilities, even though the editor knew nothing about it and didn't care one whit for rigorous plausibility. "Fuck the science. What matters is whether the guy kisses the girl," Victoria Schochet commented from her new position at Berkley.

Schochet's techno-philistinism was shared by several of her contemporaries. Ironically, their ignorance was in some ways an advantage, because it enabled them to empathize with the vast new soft-science-fiction readership. By comparison, a cultured core-audience devotee such as David Hartwell was penalized by his own erudition, his taste increasingly out of sync with the times. Ultimately he became somewhat embittered: "There is in my experience no discernible audience within the science-fiction readership for high-quality work not written by a familiar name," he commented in 1983. Shortly afterward, the entire Timescape list was axed by its parent publisher.

Meanwhile, Judy-Lynn and Lester del Rey had done so well at Ballantine, they were given their own imprint. Del Rey Books billed Terry Brooks as the new Tolkien; rescued Stephen Donaldson from well-deserved obscurity; refurbished the execrable Jack Chalker; and with an unerring instinct for juvenile taste, made Xanth what it is today.

Their commercial success was unprecedented, and had its origins around the time that *Star Wars* was first released. Although ostensibly science fiction, this movie used technology merely as window-dressing, to be thrust aside at the climactic moment in favor of some more whimsical bullshit ("Go with the flow of the Force"). Good news indeed for anyone who had difficulty operating a telephone-answering machine or installing a phono cartridge: According to George Lucas, you didn't need to learn any difficult scientific stuff to function in the frightening world of high technology. You could just close your eyes and push the button when it felt right.

Most writers and editors were outraged by the way *Star Wars* ripped off and trivialized science fiction. But the del Reys loved it. They commissioned an appropriately mediocre neophyte to write a novelization, and they bought the right to publish promotional "non-books" with lots of pictures and minimal text. They foresaw the movie's immense appeal to a generation that spent more time playing video games than reading books, and had never heard of "rigorous plausibility" because their vocabulary no longer stretched

that far.

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I dwell at length on the del Reys because they helped to ruin not only their own science-fiction list, but everyone else's, too.

In the 1970s, as large corporations bought up publishing companies and started demanding greater profitability, editors generally were being told to think in more commercial terms. Science fiction had been sheltered from such pressures while it remained a literary backwater for which no one had high expectations. But now there were science-fiction bestsellers, attracting unwelcome attention to the category; and now Judy-Lynn del Rey was making it look as if you could sell 50,000 copies of just about anything – even a first novel – if it was simple-minded enough.

Judy-Lynn can do it, so why can't we? This was the question that editors learned to fear from their bosses. With extreme reluctance, in fear of losing their jobs, they started learning to stomach the kind of literary junk food that Judy-Lynn seemed to thrive on. For those who were idealistic and naive, this was an especially depressing experience.

Picture yourself newly promoted to the position of science-fiction editor at Piranha Books. You love science fiction and you want to publish challenging, imaginative novels – but at the same time, you are uncomfortably aware that your superiors are more interested in sales figures than sense of wonder. So you make a vow to yourself: you'll do some blatantly commercial stuff to start with, to establish a good track record. Later, as soon as your position feels secure, you'll indulge your real tastes.

Two years pass. With thinly disguised self-loathing, you publish hideously overwritten fantasy novels about unicorns, wizards, and gnomes. You package them in garish, trashy covers. And – your strategy actually works! The books sell!

But now, your bosses want you to build upon this level of success. Their expectations rise on a sliding scale, always one step ahead of your performance. Your position still doesn't feel secure, and it never will. You can sneak maybe a couple of "difficult" books a year into your list, but the rest of the time, you simply have to give the market what everyone now believes that it wants.

Maybe you feel so dissatisfied by the commercial realities of paperback publishing, you quit (as I did myself when I was Avon's science-fiction editor in 1973). Or, you may resolve simply to work as hard as you can to

satisfy the requirements of your position, as I imagine Susan Allison does at Ace Books, achieving enviable profitability as a result. Or you may lose all interest in books and treat publishing merely as a cynical game in which the payoff comes from outwitting your competitors. Or maybe, like John Silbersack at New American Library, you can outlive your reputation as an editor with literary predilections, and find within yourself a genuine talent for understanding and even empathizing with the tastes of the mass audience.

I suspect that most editors have to make some sort of trade-off between what they want to do and what they have to do. From my perspective, science fiction is degraded as a result. Yet I can't condemn them if, indeed, they make some compromises. We all know what happens to those who don't: Jim Frenkel's Bluejay Books published a persistently offbeat, literate range of science fiction, and Bluejay collapsed as Timescape had collapsed before it.

Since that time, so far as I can see, no paperback editor has dared to make a science-fiction list too intelligent or adult.

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We come to the present day.

The core-audience is now a geriatric minority, vastly outnumbered by people in their teens and twenties for whom *E.T.* served as a science-fictional apotheosis. Personally, I don't begrudge these simpletons their cheap thrills. I'm happy that they are well supplied with the junk they like. What annoys me is that their crass demands have commercialized science fiction to the point where it's getting hard for me to find any books that *I* like.

Even when a paperback editor does risk a relatively adult, interesting novel, it quickly sinks in the quicksand of simplistic trash; for how many readers have the fortitude to sort and sample it all, searching for one rare exception? (This explains the success of hardcovers in the past few years: the core audience, now with a median age around forty, is not only desperate enough but rich enough to buy anything that implies some assurance of quality.)

A paperback editor may try to attract attention to a serious novel by making it look more sophisticated, but this strategy is fraught with danger. Many wholesalers assess books on the basis of front covers only, and are skeptical of science fiction that looks too intellectual. Retailers, likewise, know that big-sellers tend to have del-Rey-style covers featuring big weird machines, fantastic beasts, or men with guns. It's as simple as that.

The survival of intelligent science fiction has been threatened further by

the rise of B. Dalton and Waldenbooks, whose buyers routinely check an author's previous sales when they decide how many copies they want of his new work. This sounds sensible, yet it discourages writers from taking risks. If one poor-selling novel can jeopardize a writer's future sales, there's an obvious incentive to play safe and do the same thing over and over again instead of trying something new.

The biggest factor of all, however, is that there are simply too many books. Too many publishers, tantalized by the seeming bestseller potential of science fiction, have glutted the market. At this point, it would make sense to produce fewer titles and sell more copies of each; but any publisher that cuts back is liable to lose retail rack space to its competitors. So there is an incentive to continue producing as much as possible, regardless of quality, merely to keep a foothold in the marketplace.

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The glut of product and the emphasis on sales (at a time when sales are diminishing) have created *name fever*. A truly Big Name will lift paperback sales from 20,000 to 200,000 or more. The trouble is, there aren't enough Big Names to go around.

Picture yourself still in your editorial position at Piranha Books. You've somehow endured ten years of sales conferences, editorial meetings, office politics, prima-donna art directors, unreasonable agents, and irascible authors. You must continue to publish four science-fiction or fantasy titles a month, every month. Your obligations are overwhelming; you do almost all your reading on evenings and weekends. And most of your books simply don't sell very well. You print 30,000, and a couple of months later, 20,000 have their covers stripped and returned for refund. The authors blame you, the publisher blames you – it's a soul-destroying job, and it doesn't even pay very well. Your one remaining pleasure is attending conventions, where you get drunk on your expense account. And now, today, as your assistant threatens to quit because she can't afford to live on \$13,000 a year – what's this? It's a phone call from Byron Preiss.

You have mixed feelings about Mr. Preiss. He's not an author, and he's not an agent. He's a *packager*, which means he thinks up an idea, gets an editor interested, gets someone else to write the book, and takes a large percentage of the money. (Sometimes his own art department designs and produces the book for an additional fee.)

Preiss tells you he has an attractive proposition. He's persuaded a

genuinely Big Name to sponsor a new series that will be written by other, lesser names, sharing a fictional “universe” that the Big Name created long ago in one of his early works. His Name will appear on the new novels in huge type at the tops of the covers, while the lackeys who actually write the books (for maybe \$4,000 apiece) will receive credit in microscopic print at the bottom.

Well – this seems a bit sleazy. It reduces book publishing to the level of Hollywood exploitation movies. And yet – for you, the editor, it offers blessed relief. A Big Name, *cheap!* An open-ended series to fill all those slots in your list! And if Preiss fulfills his part of the bargain, you won’t even have to deal directly with the authors!

Little wonder, then, that Big Name franchises are booming. Martin Harry Greenberg invented the concept; he put together anthologies that he supposedly “co-edited” with personalities such as Isaac Asimov, who was always eager to see his name plastered on yet another dust jacket. But Greenberg was a mere cottage industry. Preiss’s commercial genius has turned it into a bonanza – significantly more decadent in literary terms, but infinitely more profitable.

The franchising of science fiction has now progressed to the point where Big Names are mating with one another. Gregory Benford has written a sequel to Arthur C. Clarke’s novella “Against the Fall of Night,” to be published with it in one volume by Ace Books. Benford defends the arrangement, pointing out that doing variations on someone else’s theme is a legitimate practice with precedents in both literature and music. He adds that his sequel functions as critical commentary on early science fiction, not as uncritical homage to it. Inevitably, however, the amount of money has attracted more attention than the content of the work: Benford and Clarke have split \$300,000 between them.

Not to be outdone, Asimov made a deal with Bantam for Robert Silverberg to write three sequels to old Asimov stories at \$500,000 per book. Asimov will supposedly share some of the labor, when he’s not writing meaningless, semi-literate introductions to volumes in his various other franchises – volumes which, one senses, he doesn’t have time to read quite as thoroughly as we might wish.

I myself have participated in the plundering of Big Name authors’ early works. I wrote a couple of novels linked with Piers Anthony’s *Chthon*, a book for which I have high regard. But Piers was far too honorable: he

refused all but a token payment, and asked that my name be at least as large as his on the cover. Looking back, I see we were naive, like David Hartwell trying to publish “ethical” *Star Trek* novels in his days at Timescape Books. There’s no place for scruples in this kind of activity.

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Science fiction, like Hollywood, is now dedicated to intense short-term exploitation. Every success spawns sequels, and name fever has reached personality-cult proportions. Inevitably, this has hurt lesser-known newcomers most of all.

Ace Books has no plans to continue its series of “specials” (which launched Ursula Le Guin and Samuel R. Delany twenty years ago, and William Gibson, Lucius Shepard, Kim Stanley Robinson, and Richard Kadrey more recently). For \$300,000, Ace could have published a “special” every month for the next five years, investing in new talent that might revitalize science fiction. But no; the company prefers to spend all that money on one sequel to a story Arthur Clarke wrote in 1948.

Rudy Rucker’s novels, originally published by Ace, are now almost all out of print. He spends most of his time writing computer programs. Marc Laidlaw’s fine novel *Neon Lotus* is likewise no longer available, after less than twelve months on the shelves, and Bantam has declined to publish his new book. John Sladek has been trying to find a publisher for his most recent novel for at least a year. Thomas M. Disch has stopped writing science fiction altogether. Samuel R. Delany has had his most recent work turned down by his publisher. John Shirley is unable to sell paperback rights to his wonderful *A Splendid Chaos*. Bruce Sterling is doing well collaborating with William Gibson, but has hardly been overpaid for his previous work, and faces an uncertain future if Gibson’s glitz fails to stick. Gibson himself has been immensely successful – unless you measure success in terms of paperback sales, in which case *Neuromancer* is one-tenth as impressive as any bad, boring novel by the wretchedly prolific Asimov.

There may be good literary reasons why some of our most imaginative authors are now finding it hard to sell their work. Maybe the books simply aren’t very good. But I don’t think so. I think it has become more difficult to market them successfully, and as a result, most editors are less and less willing to take a chance on work with minority appeal– unusual ideas, rigorous plausibility, and an adult level of thought.

I myself have no complaints as a writer. One way or another, I have

always been able to sell what I want to write, and my most recent novel, *Free Zone*, is more idiosyncratic than I would have thought the market could bear.

As a reader, however, I remain angry and frustrated. Science fiction once stimulated my imagination and challenged my preconceptions. Nor was this merely a reflection of my youthful taste; I take another look at those early novels by Pohl, Kornbluth, Bester, even Heinlein, and they are substantial, worthy books. In the years since then, the literature that I used to love has been prostituted and debased for the mass audience to the point where it no longer rouses my affection or even my respect.

And this is why I hold the following people accountable:

- *Judy-Lynn and Lester del Rey*, for their abominable taste. They dragged competitors down to their level by proving that exploitative, stupid, garishly packaged, melodramatic, crass escapism can reap unprecedented profits from a juvenile audience.
- *Isaac Asimov*, for his rampant vanity. Asimov has supported almost any enterprise that promised to disseminate his name on more and still more books, regardless of their content.
- *Roger Elwood*, for literary strip-mining. Elwood, a religious fanatic with more energy than sense, flooded the field with so many short-story collections, he permanently damaged the viability of this form, thus robbing new writers of valuable markets.
- *Byron Preiss*, for what I perceive as his unbridled opportunism. Preiss tempts potentially good writers to work for miserable pay on projects they cannot call their own.
- *George Lucas*, for simple-minded conceptual plagiarism. His second-hand visions trivialized science fiction mainly because he was too shallow to understand what he was stealing.
- *Stephen Spielberg*, for pernicious romanticism. Before Spielberg, even the dumbest reader had enough sense to know that if you kiss an alien, you're liable to catch something.
- *Charles N. Brown*, for contagious petty avarice. Brown's monthly journal for profit-oriented wordsmiths significantly exacerbated his readers' greed while degrading literary standards with dim-witted book reviews.
- *J.R.R. Tolkien*, for tempting a generation scared by science to retreat into a baby-land of babbling pets.

- *Robert Asprin*, for promoting the shared-world concept, legitimizing the notion that authors could get rich by incestuously feeding off each others' trite ideas.
- *Vonda McIntyre and Joan Vinge*, for softening and sweetening science fiction, turning literary mind-food into conceptual cotton-candy that corrupted the tastes of naive adolescents.
- *L. Ron Hubbard*, for proving that even a tired old hack from the 1930s could still get on the best-seller list if he promoted himself ruthlessly enough.
- And lastly *myself*, for lacking the fortitude to resist some of the temptations that I have listed above.

Science Fiction Eye #5
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Too Many Books by Charles Platt

“The problem is,” said Larry, the large hairy man behind the register, “there are too many books.”

I was in my local specialty bookstore, browsing among the glossy pictures of muscle-men in black leather combat suits, blond women with large breasts and wires coming out of their heads, dragons, castles, gnomes, men with swords, wizards with swords, aliens with swords, and so on. There were scores of new titles for the buyer to choose from, which seemed to imply scores of opportunities for the store to make money. “*Too many books?*” I exclaimed. “How can that be?”

“Overall, sales are down a bit,” Larry told me, folding his arms across his Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles T-shirt. “But we keep getting the same number of titles each month. Some publishers have even started putting out more. So, each title gets a smaller slice of the pie. It’s crazy, because below a certain number of copies, no one makes money out of a book.”

He pointed to a massive rack of new releases by small- name authors. “Nationally, those will sell only 10,000 or 15,000 apiece. But think, if there were half as many titles they’d probably sell twice as many of each, and everyone would be better off.”

I pondered this vision of an alternate universe in which publishers

cooperatively agreed they had flooded the market, and sensibly restrained their output. Would it really work out? “Suppose that book there had never been published,” I said, pointing to one of them. “How can you guarantee that the person who would have bought it would automatically buy something else instead?”

“I can’t guarantee it,” he agreed, “but I’d bet on it. Right now there’s so many titles, no one can keep track. You could chop the number in half, and readers wouldn’t know the difference. They’d still have ten times as many choices as they could read.”

He turned away to ring up a sale. It was time, I decided, to do a little research.

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Where better to start than Ace Books? They produce more paperback titles than anyone else, so you’d expect them to have a positive outlook on quantity publishing.

But when I spoke with Susan Allison, Vice President and Editor in Chief, she cheerfully agreed with Larry’s lament. “Without a doubt,” she said, “the main problem in paperback science fiction is that there are too many books. It’s very hard to draw attention to any one title, because they all get lost in the flood, which means it’s tough for a new author to build a reputation. Also, each book tends to get yanked off the shelves after a month or so, to make room for the new ones coming in. There are simply too many titles compared with the number of readers.”

Should I conclude from this that Ace was planning a cutback?

“No, because I would lose my retail display space to another publisher. It would also get announced in trade magazines, which would be a bad message to send out. And if I did, say, six books a month instead of ten, I would have three years’ worth of new manuscripts waiting to be published instead of two, so I couldn’t acquire anything for a while, which wouldn’t exactly delight my authors.” She paused. “You know, I seem to remember back in the late 1970s Ace Books did actually cut back, from twelve titles a month to nine. But this did not result in bookstores taking more copies of each title. They just said, ‘Thank god, fewer books!’”

I imagined for a moment a whole system of publishing, distribution, and retailing which everyone basically agreed was wasteful and foolish, while no one had the power to do anything about it. Could things really be that bad?

“It might help if we could eliminate the practice of sending out books as

returnable items. Bookstores have no reason to order selectively, because they know they can return anything that doesn't sell. So they try a little bit of everything."

"You'd never get bookstores to go along with it voluntarily," I objected.

"Of course not," she cheerfully agreed. "So the fact is, I don't have anything very helpful or innovative to say on this topic. Maybe you should speak to David Hartwell. He'll probably have some kind of theory for you that'll make fewer books seem like a great idea."

I thanked Ms. Allison and decided to take her advice. Hartwell is currently Director of Science Fiction at William Morrow and a consulting editor at Tor Books. He also teaches at Harvard, and has been a science-fiction bibliophile all his life.

He turned out to have a theory, just as Susan Allison predicted. But it wasn't very encouraging. "It's quite true that there is a very large concern among all publishers that we have reached a condition of overproduction," he said. "But let's look at the reason for this. In a generally expanding market it is possible to expand your number of titles and your sales using marketing alone. You don't need to have expertise in editing, and you don't need taste or experience. You simply build up a kind of careening juggernaut driven by marketing techniques, racing against other careening juggernauts, trying to outrun your returns – the unsold copies sent back by bookstores. If you stop to take a breath, the returns catch up with you and, at least on paper in the short run, you lose money. This is unacceptable at a time when editors, vice-presidents, and even company presidents are all afraid for their jobs. So to cut back, you'd have to have a publishing corporation that wishes to suffer through a very negative period. And right now, I know of none."

Still, if what he said was true, commercial realities might eventually *force* publishers to cut back.

"This may be so. And I believe this is a problem without scale, so that little publishers and big publishers alike may find themselves pushed to the wall."

Sobering stuff! I wondered if I would find a more hopeful analysis if I asked elsewhere – at Bantam books, for instance. Bantam, after all, is the richest and most powerful of New York paperback publishers, and definitely not in the habit of doomsaying.

I called Betsy Mitchell, Associate Publisher of Spectra and Foundation, Bantam's two science-fiction imprints. Would she agree that generally

speaking, there were too many books?

“What we really need are more readers,” she said, with a tone of such sincerity, she almost convinced me she wasn’t evading the question. “There’s an advantage in having so many titles out there – even titles that don’t sell in large numbers. They create more chances to pique the interest of readers and maybe expand the audience.”

But is it economically feasible?

“It’s true that the same size pie, in terms of readers, is being cut into smaller and smaller pieces. But when this has happened before, it’s the little publishers who get squeezed out. So I would say that the marginal publishers of science fiction have to be real careful in uncertain times like these.”

Meaning – what? Which “marginal” publishers did she have in mind?

“Heavens, I’m not going to name them. Do you think I’m crazy?”

I apologized for my indiscretion. Dealing purely with Bantam itself: did it have any plans to publish less?

“No, we feel no pressure to cut back the size of either of our lists.” She sounded as uncompromising as a press release. “You know,” she went on, “you’re giving the impression that some of our midlist books might not be worth publishing. I assure you that we believe when we buy any book, it definitely *is* worth publishing.”

Well, ahem, of course. In fear of offending Ms. Mitchell any further, I turned to John Douglas, Senior Editor at Avon Books. He currently plans to *increase* his output of science fiction, from two to three new titles a month. This seemed an odd decision. Weren’t there already too many books out there?

“I think some other publishers are doing too many titles,” he said. “And this does make things tediously competitive. But let’s suppose everyone agreed to cut back their output. Undoubtedly, a brand new publisher would come out of nowhere and fill the gap. The imperatives of the business are growth oriented, even now. If you don’t grow, you’re in trouble. What you may be doing is attempting to take the food out of some other publisher’s mouth, but that’s how the competitive economy functions, and I believe in the free market.”

I said that this sounded like a very sanguine outlook.

“The system is in place, and I may not like it, but I have to live with it. So basically I can’t afford *not* to have a sanguine outlook.”

I thanked Mr. Douglas for his assessment and reflected that of all four

editors, none had denied that some sort of problem existed – while making it clear, of course, that they weren't personally responsible for it.

Maybe I'd get more straight talk if I turned to someone whose job wasn't at stake. I called Steve Brown, publisher of the fine magazine *Science Fiction Eye*. Brown once worked for Olsson's Books and Records, the largest independent bookstore in Washington, DC, where he handled a lot of the mass-market buying and controlled the mystery and science-fiction departments.

I asked him to imagine how large general bookstores might respond to an overall cutback in science fiction. Would they keep half as many titles on display for twice as long?

"Definitely not. Shelves allocated to science fiction would shrink. Moreover, they would end up being populated solely by fantasy trilogies and bestselling name-authors. Idealistically, I'd like to see fewer books, because there are so many bad ones out there. But pragmatically, I'm afraid the good ones, the chancy ones, the interesting ones, would be the first to go."

Did Brown think there was a real chance of some sort of cutback actually occurring, despite pronouncements from publishers to the contrary?

"There may actually be a big change in the offing. Outside of science fiction, the bestseller mentality has led publishers to gamble very large sums on a very few authors. They're squandering limited financial resources on a very few tosses of the dice. If the dice hit, then everybody's okay; but if not, the fallout could affect numerous marginal authors. Moreover, chains such as B. Dalton and Waldenbooks encourage this tendency to make large gambles on a few titles. They want it that way; they want to fill a huge area with 150 copies of the same book."

But surely, bookstore chains don't control the industry.

"The chains, and supermarket rack jobbers which choose maybe a dozen science-fiction paperbacks out of the ocean, are where most books are now sold. The store I used to work for is now a dinosaur. Outside of places like Washington and New York, the big general bookstore has generally vanished. And even when I was at Olsson's, it was a constant struggle. I was inundated by product all the time. Books were crowding each other off the shelves. I tried to display titles that I considered worthwhile, but it ended up a process of unending frustration – which is why I turned my back on American bookselling."

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Back at my science-fiction specialty store, I told Larry the sobering results of my research. He listened while he sold a book with a giant snail on the cover to a teenager wearing fluorescent green sneakers and a baseball cap turned back-to-front.

“So,” I finished up, “no one’s going to cut back unless they’re forced to by financial crisis – which may come sooner than we think.” Struck by a sudden thought, I turned to the teenaged book buyer. “Tell me,” I said, “if there were fewer books – like, if that one you just bought didn’t exist – what would you buy instead?”

He barely hesitated. “Nintendo cartridges,” he said.

Behind the register, Larry shrugged and spread his hands.

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The End

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