

# 22

LEX 79



# News

and more news...

Not much happening with the club since the last issue was published. A couple of items coming up should be interesting, however. The Student Council has asked for budgets to be sent in by March 7, 1980 which gives us a few weeks to send it in. Registrations continue to come in for Apricon III. The ballots for the Best of the '70's issue have not. Out of 2700 sent out, only 6 have been returned. Bleah!

In outside news, Bosklone was held Feb. 15-17 in Danvers, MA. Attendance was about 800, a bit lower than expected. We'll have a full report next issue. We have received mail from both Wiscon and Norwescon. GoH's at the former include Octavia Butler, Joan D. Vinge, David Hartwell, and Beverly DeWeese. It's to be held March 7-9 in Madison, Wisconsin. Rate at the door will be \$10.00. Norwescon's GoH's are Alfred Bester and Fred Pohl with Theodore Sturgeon as Toastmaster. It will be from March 28-30 at the Airport Hyatt House in Seattle Washington. Rate until March 27 are \$9 and at the door \$10. Address for Wiscon is SF<sup>2</sup>, Box 1624, Madison, WI, 53706. Address for Norwescon is Norwescon 3 P.O. Box 24207, Seattle, WA, 98124. Oh, where do you think Eric Heiden is from? That's right Madcity. And one of the members of the U.S. hockey team is from there also. Wonder if there's any connection?

We also received Water Closet 1, which is the first Progress Report by the Johnstown in '83 Bidding Committee. It includes a short explanation of the bid plus a membership list. Denotations 1 also came by. Edited by the co-chair of Denvention II, Don C. Thompson, it contains a bit of personal news plus stuff about the con. Addresses for these two publications are Johnstown in '83, c/o 420 Bantel St., Johnstown, PA, 15905 and 57 S. Sherman St., Denver, CO, 80209.

Two of the publishing houses in New York have started newsletters of their own. Speculations is from Bantam and should be coming out occasionally. Mostly it gives the line-up for the next few months, plus a page on John Crowley's Engine Summer and Anne McCaffrey's Dragondrums. I did find one small mistake where Man Plus by Frederik Pohl was said to have won the Hugo Award. It was the Nebula. Kate Wilhelm's Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang won the Hugo that year. Berkley has come out with Worlds Ahead. Not as much news as the Bantam newsletter. This one emphasized Titan by John Varley, Watchtower by Elizabeth Lynn, and a new collection published by Berkley called Berkley Showcase. Also some rather uninteresting news on what's happening to people whose books they have published. Along with the newsletter came a press release on Titan. By now, many of you have seen the mainstream type cover used for the book. They also mentioned that [redacted] has been nominated for the Nebula and Hugo Awards. A bit misleading since anything could have been nominated. Question is, whether it will make the final ballot.



Locjaw

Harry Andruschak, 6933 N. Rosemead Blvd., #31  
San Gabriel, CA., 91775 11/10/79

Received CUSFUSsing #18/19, and am puzzled as how to Loc it. The book reviews are tedious, and the fan polls silly. I find it very hard to take any of these limited circulation ballots seriously, and this one is no exception, particularly in light of the results of that Seacon poll.

Do you really have nothing better to put in your fanzine than these meaningless tables of a non-representative poll.

((I wonder what he'd say if he subscribed?))

Nan Lambert, Rt. 1, Box 315, La Vernia, TX, 78121, 11/22/79

...I really enjoyed your Seacon report, in #17. A very nice balance of all the different elements; which is the best one can hope for since it would be impossible (even if you wouldn't get sued for libel) to report every single thing that happened.

I haven't read A Wrinkle in Time, so I'm a bit baffled by all this discussion of the first line. Let's see--cliché... "B" movies... Snoopy's novel... Could it be, by any chance, "It was a dark and stormy night."?

Scientific inaccuracies in SF movies do bother me when I notice them; but most of them probably slip right past me. But all this noise out in space--SW, BSG, BR, even Meteor--is getting on my nerves. I think those explosions would be much more impressive if presented in absolute silence.

I like the book reviews. You're right, you can't win.

As a Beatles fan from way back, and a more recent filksong fan, I love the combination.

((Yes, you're right about the line. The question is, if no one can hear you when you scream in space, can you hear spaceships going by?))

((Actually the whole mess can be solved by saying that sound does travel in hyperspace.))

A. D. Wallace, 306 E. Gatehouse Dr. H, Metairie, LA, 70001

Globs of gratitude for ##18-19, certainly (aside from repro) among the most interesting of all that I read. Perhaps even the repros are interesting. (Is repro singular or plural?) I join those who like to read about SF&F, reviews included, and of course locs.

I must disagree with William Lancaster in his review of Lynn's Different Light, not as to his feeling of the book per se, but in his willingness to excuse her lack of skill because she is virtually a novice at noveltry. Put bluntly, I quite fail to understand why the consumer should be offripped by having to pay full price for partially amateur work. Prentice labor should receive prentice pay. I am unwilling to accept the notion that Lynn's education should be subvented while she learning her trade. Of course you should know that this is really a general assertion and that Lynn is only a convient peg on which to hang it.

As another example (not reviewed in your zine) Doubleday demands \$7.95 for 186pp by Tim Lukeman, Rajan. Via the blurb this is Lukeman's first novel, and he is in the course of writing three others, to make up a tetralogy. While the story is not horrid-bad, it lacks all the graces and virtues of competent noveltry. For this \$7.95?

((One problem is trying to find the point where the amateur becomes the professional. Is it when a majority of the readers like the book, or when enough people buy the book so the publisher does well? And there is also the problem of the pro who writes a poor book. Are we subventing his learning?))

Harry Warner, 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland, 21740 11/4/79

Your double issue contains a great many things of interest even to a lazy fan like me who has read little of the specific stories that form the basis for most of its content. I'm also interested in the Best of the 70's ballot form you included, but I've decided not to participate in this voting. I feel myself disqualified because I've read such a small percentage of the important and popular stuff published during the decade. Voting with this handicap would be as foolish as those all-American football team voters who pretend to know the best players in perhaps five hundred colleges and universities, after a season in which nobody could see more than perhaps fifty of those teams even by attending a couple of games each week and taping the telecasts of college football that occur while he's in a grandstand somewhere, for later watching.

The book reviews in this issue are very well done, and in a few instances are quite brilliant, as far as I can judge from the impartial standpoint of one who hasn't read most of the books reviewed. (This neutrality, of course, prevents me from considering certain reviews superlative because the reviewers happened to share my own opinions of the book, sure proof that one of us is traveling in good company.)

I share the dismay over the way paperback prices are escalating. I know all about inflation and how paper costs have been rising with particular rapidity. But still the cost of paperbacks has been rising much faster than the general inflationary pattern, and some publishers are worsening the situation by apparently trying to see how much space they can waste and how large they can make the type. I wouldn't be surprised if a fan detective should discover some day that a few of the particularly high price tags on individual paperbacks got that way because publishers are deliberately attempting to test how far they can go before stirring up buying resistance. It's particularly disappointing to find no great differentiation in pricing between reprints and new works. The recording industry had different price structures, permitting people to buy reissues of popular recordings cheaper, and I don't see why something similar can't be done in the paperback industry. There may be trouble ahead in the science fiction and fantasy field which overly inflated prices will make worse. The birth rate's decline in the United States started long enough ago to be affecting now the number of persons reaching their middle teens. Those are the years when kids normally start to buy science fiction and fantasy paperbacks in quantities. If there are fewer purchasers because of the lower birth rate, and the price escalation creates buying resistance, the field could find itself in deep trouble.

...Perhaps the biggest surprise ((of the Seacon questionnaire)) is the outcome of the Tolkein like-dislike section. Could it be that a reaction is setting in, similar to the one that caused neglect of Lovecraft for so many years? (I don't know if it's significant, but I was able to buy at a local second-hand store recently a copy of The Silmarillion, apparently unread, for 20¢.)

((Whole problem is that those large paperbacks are selling well and there still haven't been enough complaints by the readers for the publishers even to think about changing their policies.))



# STUMPERS!

Created by Bob Miller

Alien is one yell of a movie, huh, folks? Let's holler some more because it's time to take another horrific quiz, albeit with some straightforward choices this time. And remember: The answer is "D" for "Deadly"! (Don'tcha just love these awful puns?)

Copyright 1979 W.R. Miller.  
"Alien" copyright 1979 Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation.

The ad slogan for Alien is

- a. You will believe a man can fly.
- b. This movie ends where all the others begin.
- c. Just when you thought it was safe in outer space...
- d. In space no one can hear you scream.

The Nostramo is

- a. real big
- b. huge, colossal, gigantic.
- c. 800 feet long.
- d. all of the above. (Isn't this a simple question?)

"Mother" is

- a. married to "Father".
- b. HAL 9000 with a sex change.
- c. the daughter of P.A.R.E.N.T.S.
- d. MU/TH/UR 6000.

On its way to Earth, the Nostramo encounters

- a. Darth Vader and his Stormtroopers.
- b. Bill Hailey and the Comets.
- c. the Lone Ranger and Tonto.
- d. a distress call.

Dallas is

- a. a city in Texas
- b. a city in Georgia
- c. a city in Paris
- d. a captain in a spaceship.

When investigating inside an alien ship, Kane finds

- a. the Easter Bunny's horde of eggs.
- b. Mr. Spock studying alien life forms.
- c. Ray Harryhausen dinosaurs.
- d. the "space jockey".

What comes out of the egg?

- a. a chicken, of course.
- b. egg juice.
- c. special effects.
- d. the Alien.
- e. Poppin' Fresh, the Pillsbury Doughboy.

"Hypersleep" is another name for

- a. parsec hibernation.
- b. supersonic shuteye.
- c. Geritol overdose.
- d. suspended animation.

The director of Alien is

- a. George the Great.
- b. Great Caesar's Ghost.
- c. Great Scott.
- d. Ridley Scott.

Kane suffers

- a. an Excedrin headache.
- b. a Big Mac attack.
- c. stomach pains.
- d. You tell us.

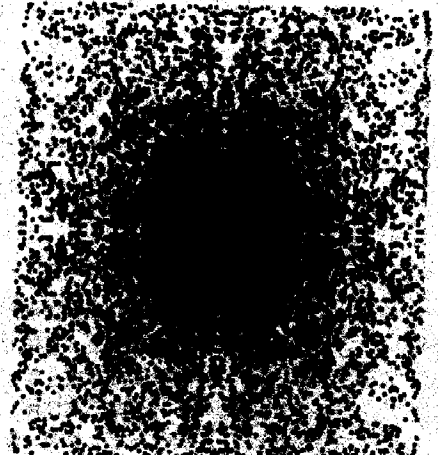
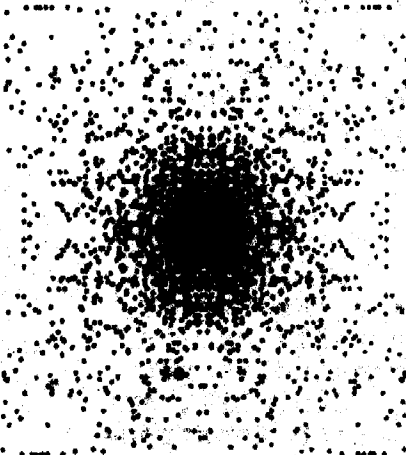
The ship's mascot is

- a. Morris the Cat.
- b. Fritz the Cat.
- c. The Cat in the Hat.
- d. Jones the Cat.
- e. The Cat from Outer Space.

The Alien is

- a. gross
- b. scary
- c. ugly
- d. all of the above.

Wasn't this test a scream?



You see, there are these people here at Columbia who like to write for me, but even more like to see their stuff in print, and because they have threatened me with physical violence...here comes the Water Pitcher Affair.

Moving Rachel, and Cheap Plastic Water-Pitchers: Part I  
Finding Great Things in Unlikely Places

by  
William Lancaster

Not long ago, several members and affiliates and such-like of the Science Fiction Society got together to help move our former Business Manager Rachel Furer into her new apartment. It wasn't too easy, it was often tiring and annoying, and some of us wound up with brown paint on our pants. But that's not important.

After we were done, we sat around on various pieces of furniture drinking Pepsi and beer, and munching potato chips. A few foolhardy types performed daredevil deeds on the rusty fire-escape. But that's not important either.

What is important is that three of us--Merrick Lex Berman, John Pierard, and myself--decided to go to the College Inn afterwards. John and I had obnoxious milk-shakes, while Merrick nibbled at an inoffensive piece of apple pie. But the food, apart from the various and varying states of mind it instilled in us, is also not important.

It's the water. Or more to the point, the water-pitchers. Who could have expected such masterpieces, objects so emblematic of our culture and indeed of the universe, in the College Inn?

Picture this, if you will, the image of a single pitcher: It is basically spherical in shape, but what a sphere! The bottom is flattened somewhat so that it won't roll around on the table and get the customers and their food wet. The top is sort of peeled back to form an opening (for the entrance and exit of the water), and the excess material is shaped to form a sort of spout, to guide, as it were, the water on its way. Opposite the spout is a loop, itself hollow and capable of holding water, that acts as a grip by which a customer--or, perhaps, a waiter--can hold the pitcher, tilt it, and allow the water to flow out. Add to this a uniformly warty texture, even round little bumps across the whole outer surface (excepting the bottom). If you run your hand quickly across this surface, the effect is almost electric (and, in dryer weather, it is actually electric). If you run your thumbnail or a credit card across it, it makes the most delightful ratcheting sound, something like a dying engine. And on top of all this, the color! Ours was a sickly, washed-out green, but ours is trivial. The really important pitcher, the one around which the entire day revolved, was pink. Fleshy pink, anemic pink, pink like the inside of your mouth. Properly, this pitcher was in an exalted place, set next to the plastic flowers that overlook the restaurant. No one who comes to the College Inn can help seeing it: it seems that the lights are all focused on it, making its significance clear.

The Cosmic Water Pitcher Affair--Part II

by  
Merrick Lex Berman

With an insipid texture that looked as if it were covered by diseased, pink beads of sweat, the pitcher rested casually on its shelf, a monument to the depths of depravity which mankind is now reaching. As the initial wave of nausea diminished, John, Bill, and myself stared at each other, occasionally at the greenish monstros-



ity with which our table had been blessed. By a slight glossy texture in their eyes, I knew that they had experienced the same flicker of enlightenment that had allowed the hideous to transcend all our conceptions of beauty, symmetry, and perfection; momentarily shattering our egos and personalities and spiriting us away through a thousand worlds, shapes and bodies through out the cosmos which had united in an indivisible, pantheistic reality. As we returned to our bodies in the booth at the College Inn, our senses began perceiving with an overpowering sharpness--each shade of color glowed with a dazzling individuality, an aura of cold encircled the metal milkshake containers, the apple pie crumbs radiated their presence, and each fold, plane, and curve of our surroundings imprisoned us with their acuity. It seemed I could feel each air molecule as it was drawn into my lungs. The layer of cloth between my ass and the booth seemed a thousand miles thick, as if I were hanging on the edge of a precipice and about to plunge downward for an inconceivable distance into my plate. Finally, the three of us escaped the influence of the trans-dimensional pitcher and looked at each other's ridiculous faces in the meaningless night at the barren coffee shop on this pointless planet. Despite what we had just been thru, the conversation drifted back to the usual assortment of sexual innuendos, non sequiturs, and vulgar jokes. Ultimately, our own presence became rather mundane so we decided to disband, although John lingered apprehensively at my place for a few minutes, using my phone to arrange a stroll with one of his 'acquaintances'. He then hurried off, and after taking my usual dosage of drugs, I drifted off into a delerium of subdued psychedelics and fragmented sounds.

### Part III

by

Michael T. Kaplan

That night I found Bil shuffling down Broadway in a daze. I didn't see him at first but recognized the racheting sound of his feet moving against the pavement. He was feverish. Sickly lumps of sweat dribbled. Flushing pink poured over his face. He might have been spaced out on drugs. Bil can not stand the taste of alcohol. So he searches for alternative means to keep a handle on life. Could it have been the pepsi and potato chips topped off by obnoxious milkshakes? My unvoiced suspicions were confirmed as his lips formed the spherical shape of an 'o' in the beginning of his eerie pronouncement.

"Oooooooooooooooooooooohhh! I think I'm going to be sick." The passers-by quickened their steps as Bil began to retch in the nearest garbage can.

"Bil, you didn't try to drink a beer or something?"

"No, worse. I bear witness to the handmaiden of drink. I have seen her flat bottom bumping over the surface of mediocrity! And from her spout issued a torrent of platitudes. My senses were inundated with her glorious bathos. My will was engulfed by her bromide humor. Her prosaic message saturated my consciousness! I stood before her drenched in pedestrian splendor, my body charged with her colorless current. I screamed in my ambrosial agony, 'Banality! Banality!'"

I felt a pang of sympathy and embarrassment when Bil began to weep. His polluted throat gave his breath a racheting sound. And as I stood there at the side of my suffering friend, holding his head in the garbage can, I asked myself many questions. "Bil, will you never be content? Must you always taste your stomach's vengeance? Forget the long libations of our sins. How long shall

you go on saying, 'anomaly, anomaly'? Why not make an end of your peculiar sins at this moment?"

All at once I heard the monotone voice of a deaf child from a nearby window. The gender of that bizarre voice was indeterminate, but again and again it repeated the refrain, "Partake and consume, partake and consume." There is no game in which children use such words as these. They could only have been a supernatural injunction for me to seek out the source of Bil's enlightenment.

In a moment I was rushing uptown on Broadway, not taking heed of those who stared at me in amazement as I ran by them. In front of the College Inn my attention was seized by a glistening pink object in the window. There and in silence I gazed upon the nemesis of my vulgarity, a plastic water pitcher. The euphoria of ambiguity flooded into my heart and all the subtlety of elucidation was dispelled. I, too, was joyfully retching in the street.

Such was the nature of my conversion to the common faith. May this account of it inspire others in their rejection of intellectual values.

What is all this plastic water pitcher crap, anyway?

by

Barbara Brittain

It all began so innocently. One day a few weeks ago I asked Bil how the task of getting Rachel moved in to her new apartment had gone. He answered with a long cryptic story about a late night snack he had with Merrick and John and a plastic water pitcher. As Bil frequently answers simple, direct questions with long, apparently unrelated stories, I didn't think too much of the episode.

A few days later I was visiting Bil when Merrick arrived at the door. He came in waving a piece of paper in Bil's face and exclaiming, "It's done! I've finished my plastic water pitcher story. You have to read this!" As he handed the paper to Bil he turned and saw me sitting at the table.

"Oh, I didn't realize that she was here." When Bil finished the story I asked, quite innocently, if I might read it. The flush of excitement drained from Merrick's face and he and Bil exchanged embarrassed glances. He reluctantly handed over the paper and I read the story quickly. Frankly, I don't think I understood the damned thing. It seemed to be all about having a snack with Bil and John and a plastic water pitcher.

Merrick and his story next turned up at a meeting of the Convention Committee. Shortly after Merrick passed around his story and everyone read it Dani brought up the topic of secret societies at Columbia. I don't know how I failed to connect the two at the time.

The most disturbing and unfathomable of the incidents in this strange saga occurred just this week. I spent a very pleasant afternoon studying psycholinguistics with my friend Mike. It seems that that very night Bil and Merrick and John and god-knows-who else got a hold of Mike and converted him to this strange cult of the plastic water pitcher. Since that night I have simply been unable to talk to Mike about psycholinguistics or anything else.

In looking back over the things which have happened since the plastic water pitcher thing began, I find myself asking a lot of very difficult questions. What did Rachel need to talk to Bil about? What was Sandy doing over at Bil's the night of Mike's strange conversion? What did Danny mean by his remark about seeing Bil with someone? What role does the editor of CUSFuSSing play in this whole business? And what is all this plastic water pitcher crap, anyway?



# ON HARLAN ELLISON

JAMES J. WILSON



Who is Harlan Ellison? Richard Delap suggests that to know Harlan Ellison we need only go to his fiction. To an extent this is obviously true for any writer since one can only write what one knows. It is far more true for Ellison than for most other writers, however. Take Asimov for example. I consider myself a fan of Asimov's science fiction. What do we learn about Asimov from his fiction? We learn a little bit about how he feels about certain topics and we can't help but get a little of his personality from his tone but we really don't know that much. Every writer, consciously or otherwise, puts pieces of himself into his fiction, though not nearly to the extent that Ellison does. The characters in his stories

are not Harlan Ellison. Rather, these characters are a vital part of Ellison. Everywhere from Eddie Burma and Johnny Noone to Donald H. Horton and The Harlequin we find bits and pieces of Ellison.

No one Ellison story can give us a very clear look at him, but his work, as a whole, gives us more of a feeling for Ellison than a thousand holographic movies can tell us what he looks like. More important, Ellison is a mirror for us as a society and as individuals. As with any work of art, Ellison's work is not appreciated by all for aesthetic reasons, for intellectual reasons, for many of the reasons that he so often attacks in his work, and because many just don't like what they see in this mirror. Like carnival mirrors distorted to reflect certain aspects of the subject in a highly exaggerated manner, it is Ellison's destiny to reflect the worst in us so that some might learn something by it. It is this basic driving force behind Ellison's work that sets it far above the other well written fiction. On this point, there are countless people who don't like or just don't care about Ellison's fiction, but no one can justly say that Ellison's work is not among the best fiction, AS fiction ever written.

All of Ellison's fiction is not of the same high quality. The vast majority of the fiction he wrote in the 50's is little more than slightly interesting pulp fiction that he wrote simply for survival. In these early days Ellison acquired the valuable lessons a would-be painter learns by earning a living at drawing for soap ads or cereal boxes; the result isn't exactly art, but the artist gets the chance to test his tools, to experiment with different ways he can move his wings before he takes the big jump and tries to fly for real.

The best of Ellison's work was written after he achieved some financial freedom and after he'd had some experience in writing some television and movie scripts. This experience added to his work an undefinable visual texture that is extremely effective.

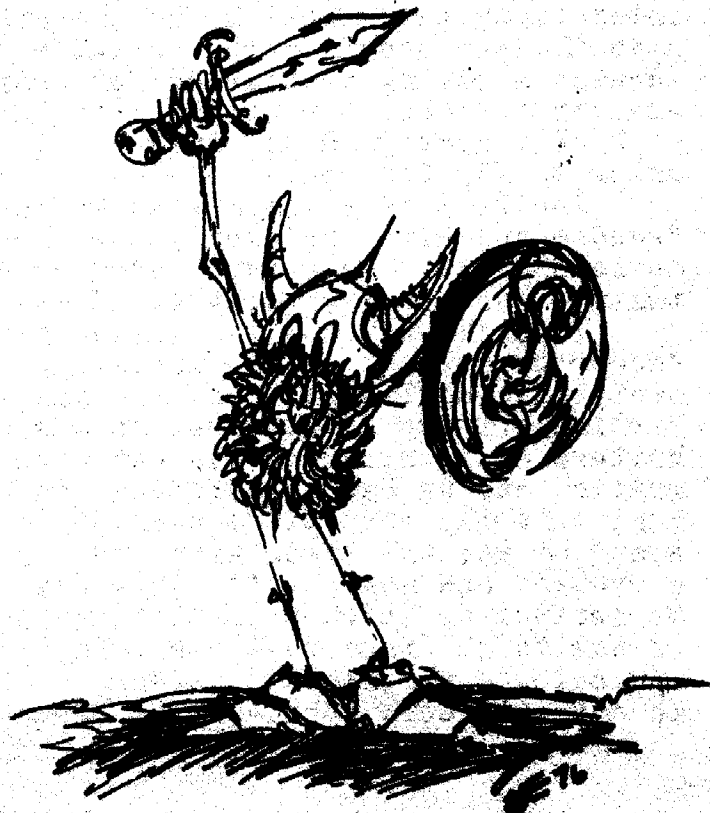
I don't know how indicative awards really are of whether something is "good" or not but it is impossible to talk about writer's awards without mentioning Harlan Ellison. He has won several Nebula Awards of the Science Fiction Writers of America, he has won the Edgar Award of the Mystery Writers of America, he has won more Hugo Awards than any other fiction writer, and he has, I believe, won the Writer's Guild of America Award for Best Teleplay more times than anyone else. It is interesting that the award he won the Edgar with was a story that really doesn't seem much like a mystery and none of the very few stories he's written that can loosely be defined as science fiction won the Hugos or the Nebulas for him. This is due to the fact that his work defies classification. He continues to win science fiction awards because he started out in sf fandom and continues to have his work published in sf magazines.

Despite beliefs that continue to persist to Harlan's continued dismay, he is not a science fiction writer. A handful of his stories may be sf and he did take advantage of the ready-made, built-in audience of sf fandom, but there is still no excuse for the fact that bookstore clerks still put books like Strange Wine and The Glass Teat (for crying out loud) on the sf racks.

One of the classic qualities of Ellison's fiction is the sense one gets that rather than reading a story someone is telling you a story. If that's not enough, his books are amply supplied with introductions, afterwards, and other various displays of Ellison outside his role as a fiction writer. The introduction to the collection No Doors, No Windows is the longest piece in the book! To many, Ellison's non-fiction is as interesting as his fiction. The reason for this is that he is constantly aware of his audience. He is in continuous demand as a speaker because of his ability to do whatever he wants with an audience without their knowing or caring about it. It has been suggested that Ellison is an actor with each book a separate performance.

Ellison claims that he doesn't write for anyone but himself and appreciates praise, but doesn't really care what his fans think. Maybe Harlan believes this sometimes, but most of the time it's just part of his way of dealing with his audience without which he would be totally lost. A year ago in Omni magazine Harlan said, "...I'm not given to that kind of pomposity, thinking that my work will alter anything, but that is my secret hope." Sometimes the motives behind his treatment of fans is a little hard to fathom. It is obvious that Harlan never answers the majority of the vast amount of fan mail he gets. Recently, a friend of mine received a very hostile letter in response to what were described as a few civil, direct questions to clarify some minor points in a few stories. Where a few informative lines could have helped out an eager new writer, why bother with such an action? While I have not had such an experience, I have received a few polite but direct notes telling me not to write so many letters. In all, my limited personal contact with Harlan has been generally pleasant and fruitful.

The best and only way to experience Harlan Ellison is to take advantage of his public output. First, read his fiction. For those who want to go a little beyond this I would highly recommend "An Hour With Harlan Ellison", a tape available from Hourglass Productions, 10292 Westminster Ave., Garden Grove, CA, 92643; The Book of Ellison, an excellent book by and about Harlan Ellison, available from Algol Press, P.O. Box 4175, NY, NY, 10017; and the July 1977 special Harlan Ellison issue of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.





## Media Reviews by Glenda Pintye

The Lathe of Heaven was the least typical science-fiction (fantasy?) movie I've seen on television, and I mean that as a complement. It's one of the few shows I've given any thought to after seeing it. (Were the aliens inventions purely of the dreamer? Was he theirs?) There were things in there to wonder about. The presentation was better than in the past; there was no comic-book flavor or obvious budget problems. I hope they do a lot more.

I'm going to be frustrated till I get a copy of The Martian Chronicles. I read it ten years or so ago, and I can't remember how different the television show was. I recognise whole lines of narrative and dialogue, and generally felt quite at home with the stories, but I'm sure there were changes and I can't pinpoint them. This must be a credit to whoever put the stories together as they did. I enjoyed watching favorite scenes, especially the last one (the best example of wet spoiling things that I can remember.) In short, to someone who has read the book, it was very pleasant, and I'm sure that it can stand on its own as well.

Star Trek: The Movie was the one movie in which I really expected to be disappointed. To anticipate anything for so long is usually to be let down in the end. This was an exception. The movie did not soar beyond my wildest dreams, but it was as good as most episodes of Star Trek, and even at \$4.00, I'll settle for that. The characters were believably the same as in the series, only older. The Enterprise was beautiful. The story was appealing, if not tremendously original. Vulcan was kind of neat, too, with subtitles and all. Most of my sf-reading friends either chose not to see the movie or hated it, but when it comes on TV, I'll probably watch it as many times as I've watched each episode of the series.

I watched the second episode of Galactica: 1980, having seen neither the Battlestar Galactica series nor the motion picture. I will not be watching any more. I can think of several sf television series that were worse, even much worse, but somehow the show grated on my nerves. I think it was the humor, mostly; that was about on the Mork and Mindy level without admitting it. The contrast with the serious tones of some scenes made the whole show seem quite silly to me. I guess I'd like to get away from "Quark" and other "make fun of science fiction" stuff until we've seen more quality material so we knew what we've spoofing. At least Pigs in Space doesn't try to be Star Trek.

Video in Review  
or  
How to Write an Ending  
by  
Harry Witchel

In the illiterate world of visual science fiction three zepelins have hit the screen of television and motion pictures within a month: Star Trek, The Black Hole, and The Lathe of Heaven. All three are expansive, expensive, and explosive. Unfortunately, all three are burned in the ending department.

Of the three events, Star Trek was, without a doubt, the most eagerly awaited, and for good reason--some of the old, low budget episodes represent the acme of video SF. Perhaps this recent effort would have gained from retaining the format of the one hour episodes, because as a full length feature it has its slow moments. Just like the good old days there are close-ups of Sulu's puzzlement (but he does not look back at the com chair), Uhura's fright, and Spock's curiosity. But then still more time is spent focus-



ing on more close-ups of other crew members, and of all blasphemies, better special effects. The effects are excellent, but they just don't cut the mustard when substituting for the plot.

The plot had a problem to begin with, having to explain away those ten long years when the Organian Treaty made life too boring for a series. Very little is shown about the two years supposed to have passed save that Kirk, Spock, and McCoy have disco haircuts. The story centers around the new captain, Decker, who is initially cocky but eventually likable, and his bald girlfriend from Delta who could have been more passionately portrayed by Phyllis Diller. The idea of a bald beauty is hair-raising by itself, let alone with a pointy-eared half-breed. I am disappointed by the layer of smoke on the floor of the Klingon bridge (was the fumigator there at the time?)

The story line of finding an old probe rings of the Nomad episode, but I found it more similar to "Where No Man Has Gone Before" because they both develop and then do away with integral members of the crew. The acting is at points very good. Kirk winks at Chekov and badly wants his ship, but it is not cornball hash as in "Obsession". Spock makes a superb entrance and as usual is his omniscient, dry witted self. McCoy makes his typical protests.

Chekov does not go insane.

I am a hopeless Disney lover--I've seen his Robin Hood (you know, with the foxes) as recently as six months ago--but I did not look forward to The Black Hole. Walt Disney is dead, so all that is left of the Magic Kingdom is the Financial Empire (Moneyland), therefore I did not expect a good natured flick with Dean Jones and Susanne Pleschette; not surprisingly, I did not get one. Instead my five bucks at the National got me 70 millimeters of entertainment for the adult market.

The plot is very straightforward and even while watching the film I thought of its disastrous similarity to The Poseidon Adventure. What breathes life into the film for me are the images within the ship and the vast array of characters to be met. As a rule, I dislike the obvious heroes because they are kill-joys: the captain is a straight, boring twit out of an ABC TV movie, his copilot is a cocky version of Robin the boy-wonder, and the woman takes her part so seriously she could sell exlax on the tube. Everyone else is in one way or another fan loving. There is Ernest Borgnine who is distrustful and always in the thick of things, the token scientist who wants to conquer all risks for knowledge, but best of all there is the mis-



understood genius turned villain who is so blatantly satanic he makes Corella DeVille seem downright jovial.

But the most likable character of all is Vincent, a mentally and physically agile robot with a personality combining the best traits of Burt Reynolds, James Garner, and Sean Connery. He beats R2D2 hands down. His face is more expressive, his drill more useful, and his hologram is far more spectacular. Vincent with his droll humor accompanied by a crew of robots who are human, a crew of humans who are automatons, and an aging gunslinger who has taken to the bottle make this film almost as engaging as Star Wars.

The effects are good--there is a computer simulation of a black hole for the titles and a decent hologram. There is also a scene in hell which may not belong in the film but is unquestionably the best effect in these three movies. The music, like Star Trek's, is ominous and at times the scores are identical. Scientific accuracy suffered--a lot of people survived big leaks in the air locks. The end of the film is ambiguous as it does not elucidate on what happens to the probe ship that goes through the black hole. Finally, the picture is disappointing as Disney and SF because there are too many tasks that are labeled impossible; instead of attempting miracles the characters change their goals. In all other respects the film is highly enjoyable.

As with the other two motion pictures, the critics disagreed with me about the brilliance of The Lathe of Heaven. One of the great dangers inherent in writing any intellectual or literate work is the chance that the author may mistake ambiguity for profundity. The Lathe of Heaven falls deep into this chasm of uncertainty.

The most obvious problem is the failure to explain what "after April" means. It obviously refers to the atom bomb exploding in Portland, but it is unclear whether the radiation gave Orr the ability to dream effectively and he dreamed the bomb away, or if the entire movie is a visualization of his delirium as he dies of radiation poisoning.

The picture effectively binds the viewers to the screen by posing many hard hitting questions. Unfortunately, the story fails to answer some of these questions. The film centers on Orr as the book does, so it is not satisfactory for Orr to emerge alive--a movie will not let you forget the six billion people whom the plague killed.

Basically the moral of this flick has been overworked. This is a story of hubris; you can't do everything, and if you try... The evil hidden in man's subconsciousness is the theme of that classic, Forbidden Planet. All you D & D freaks out there should recognize the rest as a reworked version of the tale of three wishes. The moral of the story is make only perfect wishes that are two hundred pages long.

The acting is spotless. George Orr has all the naivete of Luke Skywalker, and Dr. Haber is a much more colorful and overconfident villain than in the book--which supports my claim that the best villains are created by actors, not by writers. The effects are good for TV, and the entire film has a futuristic air about it despite being filmed in a modern city. The alien selling hot dogs is a nice touch. All told the movie is a brilliant production, but is poorly pieced together and often incomplete.

Thus I am brought to the conclusion of this article which so many of you have been desperately waiting for--not the article, the conclusion. My gripe is that all three movies lack a satisfactory ending. Star Trek's is anticlimatic, Black Hole's is childish, and The Lathe of Heaven's is confusing. To ameliorate

these problems in future films I have devised the following list of helpful hints for making endings.

Firstly, never write on an empty stomach. Should you be forced to, get good and drunk beforehand; thus, your lousy ending will be incoherent as well, and you will be acclaimed as a literary genius.

Secondly, never have the butler do it. It is a tired cliché, and you will only have to get a new one--and you know how hard it can be to get good help these days!

Also, never make a copout ending.

# HARD DRUGS

Reviews by William Lancaster



## Star Trek: the Motion Picture

In a nutshell, Star Trek: the Motion Picture is the episode of the TV show they filmed right after "Turnabout Intruder" but forgot to show on the air. So what they did was wait a few years, throw in some flashy but essentially unimpressive special effects, and then release it as a "new" movie. Very clever, but I'm not fooled. Neither was anybody else in the theatre the night I saw it: the people in the audience were practically falling out of their seats from laughing so hard. Not with it; at it. The movie doesn't advance the characters one second past the last episode of the show. In fact, they've regressed quite a bit, with only new wrinkles, toupees, beards, and clothes to show us that any time has passed. The entire original cast is reassembled here, but they might as well have used cardboard cut-outs.

This upsets me. In the original show, the characters were the only part of the show not made of cardboard. Fans of the show have favorite characters, not favorite monsters. Monsters, menaces, aliens, they were all usually side issues, something to further complicate matters while the crew of the Enterprise struggled with some much more important problem on board ship. Or if a monster happened to be the only major problem that week, then the emphasis was not on the monster and how powerful it was and how interesting it looked, but how it affected the crew and what the crew did not combat it. For example: "Obsession" is not about a blood-sucking cloud but about the way Kirk reacts when he encounters it again. "Balance of Terror" is not about a space battle between two powerful spaceships but about a battle of wits between two powerful men. Who can forget the final scene where, having struggled against each other for the entire show, Kirk and the Romulan commander finally see each other for the first time. Mark Lenard is in the movie, as captain of the Kling-



on starship Amar, but I didn't recognize him until the credits, and the best line he had was, "Tactical!" in Klingon, no less.

For me, one of the most irritating aspects of ST:TF is its lack of economy. There is enough material in the movie to have made a passable, if not memorable, episode of the television series. It was padded with long sequences in which nothing happens but things sure do look neat. After all, Paramount spent 42 million on this, and they wanted to have something to show for their time and money. So what we, the audience, get is long, meaningless sequences where we get to see every inch of the surface of the Enterprise, or where we are shown just how big and strange-looking the alien ship is. Special effects cost money, boy, and we are going to show you every rivet, every window, and every wrinkle of both ships. You want to see a big ship, we'll show you a big ship. Remember "The Carbonite Maneuver"? Well that was nothing. And so it goes, on and on, seemingly without end.

The point is, we don't need to be shown everything. We can make do with a couple of shots flying across the surface of the alien ship, a long shot showing how puny and insignificant the Enterprise is by comparison, and we're happy. We don't have to fly in circles around the new Enterprise for fifteen minutes; we know essentially what it looks like and the changes weren't that major. We can see at a glance how much different the insides are; we don't need to be led through the corridors. And that new bridge, it sure is big, bright, and shiny, with all new stations and seat-belts on the chairs, too, but does it have to be so cold? The old bridge was kind of a homey place, the type of place we wouldn't have minded hanging out in for awhile. I had thought that maybe the notion that bigger and shinier is necessarily better was behind us, but ST:TF shows clearly that it is not. Dammit, I'm not picking nits; the new Enterprise isn't the sort of place I'd want to spend any time in. Two hours was quite enough.

Spending so much time showing us around the place has at least two negative effects. The first is that, as I said, it is unnecessary and in the end boring. Even phenomenal and phenomenally expensive alien ships wear thin very quickly. Secondly, having spent so much time on simple mechanical exposition, there's no time left for things like characterization or story. The end raises quite a few questions, and none of our daring adventurers seems bright enough or inquisitive enough to ask them, much less do anything about answering them. I believe that the movie as it is could have been compressed without too much trouble down to between 45 minutes and an hour. That would leave another hour or more to get down to the really interesting stuff. That is, to be fair, the stuff that would have been interesting to me.

In the final analysis, ST:TF is a failure not because it fails to live up to ten years of expectation, not because the script is dreadful, not because the characters are lifeless, not because the special effects are cluttered and have a tendency to wobble, but because it doesn't look like Star Trek. The formula for deriving this movie is very simple: Take the leisurely pace and some of the "gimmicks" from 2001, impose them on Star Wars, throw in some familiar faces and a cliched plot from Star Trek, mix together randomly with no thought to making the end product look smooth or even like a coherent whole, and voila! you have Star Trek: TF. Certain individual scenes are not bad, certain special effects are pretty neat, but together they just make a mess.

There are two good things about the movie that even I could appreciate. First of all, it is very funny. Unintentionally so, painfully so, but it is is funny. Secondly, there is one brief moment

of hope in the movie, one moment when it all seems to click together and make sense. One moment where it looks, feels, and acts like Star Trek. Unfortunately, this is the very last scene on the bridge, right at the end of the movie. Unfortunately, it is too late to do anything but remind the viewer of what he is missing, of what the movie could have been if somebody had cared enough to make it a sequel to Star Trek rather than Star Wars.

Star Trek: TIF is a rip-off. It is a monument to tastelessness, sloppiness, and trend-jumping. It was put together by people who apparently liked Star Wars a lot, but who had no idea what made that movie as fun as it was. Worst of all, it was made by people who, to all appearances, didn't much like Star Trek: The Television Show. I know you won't believe me until you see it for yourselves, and it is almost worth one viewing. But for goodness' sake don't go back.

Star Trek the Motion Picture by Gene Roddenberry  
Pocket Books, 252 pp. \$2.50

I just finished reading the new Star Trek book, the one Gene Roddenberry adapted from the movie. I bought it used, of course, but I can't figure out for the life of me why I read it. After all, I truly disliked the movie, feeling it lived up to none of its potential. Besides that, Star Trek books tend to be pretty poor, showing minimal writing talent and no real understanding of the characters.

I'm surprised to report that I liked the book very much. To understand why takes a little explaining. First of all, I am not applying to this book the same critical standards I apply to any other book. In another book--or type of book--the writing would be unforgiveably bad. Gene Roddenberry is a TV producer and, at best, a screenwriter. He tends to trip over his own prose, using parts of speech where they don't belong. Rather than trying to convey excitement through the use of language, he resorts to italics any time anything important happens--almost like "Little Orphan Annie." It's entirely possible that he would have been unable to write the novel at all had he not been adapting someone else's screenplay. Harold Livingston's screenplay gave Roddenberry the framework and much of the dialogue for the book. All he had to do--all he was required to do--was describe the action, padding it out with occasional thoughts from the characters where needed.

But that's not all Roddenberry did. I'd like to imagine that he was as distressed with the screenplay as I was. But he had the ability to do something about it. He didn't just leave it as it was, but went beyond it and made it into what he wanted it to be--or as close to it as the screenplay allowed him to come. Roddenberry has shown in the past that he believes that human relations are the most interesting and important things in the world. One of the things that made the Star Trek TV series so good, and so popular, was its focus on the individual characters and their relations with one another. In a later show, The Questor Tapes (see my review in CUSFuSSing #10), Roddenberry reaffirmed his commitment to interpersonal relations, and in the process created one of my very favorite TV movies. Now, in the novelization of Star Trek the Motion Picture, Roddenberry has taken his old characters firmly in hand and made men out of them. Where motivations were missing on screen, Roddenberry carefully outlines them here. Where emotions seemed flat and unbelievable in the movie, here they are more fully defined, better fleshed-out. Sometimes he goes too far, as with his paralleling Kirk's relationship with the Enterprise to one be-

tween a man and a woman, but even that is given more background and tied in better with the TV series. Roddenberry even added a number of scenes--or perhaps they were originally meant to be included in the movie--that go a long way towards explaining things that happen in the movie. At the same time, the long tedious special effects scenes from the movie are here much compressed. This could be in part because Roddenberry was unaware of exactly how things would appear on screen. I like to think it is because he wanted to spend more time on people and saw that the amount of time spent on special effects was unnecessary.

In short, what Roddenberry has done here is give us back the television series. Even more, he has in some places advanced the characters--something the movie failed to do. I don't know if the book would have been as enjoyable if I had read it before I saw the movie; I doubt it. I think a large part of the reason I liked it so much is that it came as such a relief after the movie. If, unlike myself, you enjoyed the movie, I'd say there's a good chance that you'll like the book. And if you missed the same things in the movie as I did, the book will look even better.

The Warlock in Spite of Himself by Christopher Stasheff (Ace Books) January 1978, pp. 378, \$1.50, cover by Stephen Hickman

I gather that Christopher Stasheff's The Warlock in Spite of Himself became something of a cult classic after its first publication in 1969. Mentioning it was likely to bring cries of, "Oh did you read that one too?" Everyone I know who has read it--which is quite a few people, really--has enjoyed it. So I procrastinated for longer than I should have, and I finally got around to reading it. Nor surprisingly, I thought it was delightful.

Christopher Stasheff, judging from this book, is a very funny writer. He leads his hero, along with the reader, on a several-hundred-pages-with-no-breaks-for-chapters romp through the pseudo-medieval world of Gramayre. He--and we--encounter real live witches, elves, ghosts, and all sorts of neat stuff.. The jokes are funny and the puns are suitably atrocious. But in addition to the overt humor, Stasheff's writing style has an inherent humor to it that reminded me of, say, Laurence M. Janifer in Knave in Hand. Stasheff can be totally outrageous, but still have us following right along, swallowing every bit of it.

To elaborate on the comparison with Knave in Hand: Janifer's book was, in the end, rather uninteresting, despite the humor in the writing. Warlock, on the other hand, manages to satisfy. What Stasheff writes about is as funny as the way he writes about it; in other words, the medium fits the message.

Or does it? The book is entertaining, but one can't escape the feeling that there might be a serious "message" underlying all the fun and frivolity, that Stasheff might have something more to say than, "It sure is fun to play with witches." Now, personally, I find that this aspect of the book greatly enhances my pleasure in reading it. I like the fact that what is to all appearances a good and enjoyable rehashing of the old "boy meets girl, boy and girl save the world" plot, has at its core something that is important to the writer and which becomes important to the reader. Mind, this is done subtly, and if you choose to ignore it you can--or you'll think you can. In any event, you should finally listen to your eccentric friend Fred, the one with the room full of heroic fantasy and sword and sorcery and all that good stuff, and read Christopher Stasheff's The Warlock in Spite of Himself. It's really very good.



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Next issue will be full, crammed that is, with book reviews. Included should be Ringworld Engineers by Larry Niven, Stardance by Spider and Jeanne Robinson, Beyond the Blue Event Horizon by Frederik Pohl, The Beginning Place by Ursula K. LeGuin, One-Wing by Lisa Tuttle and George R.R. Martin, and Heavenly Breakfast by Samuel R. Delany.

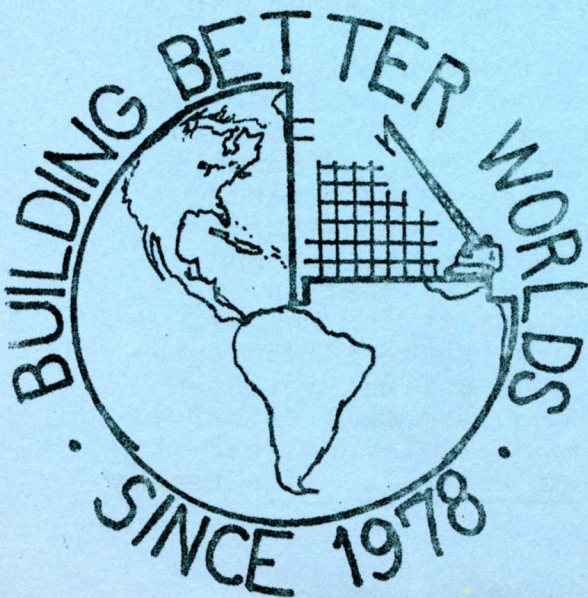
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Some notes on the Scanning of CUSFuSsing #22:

- This entire issue was printed on the blue paper seen on pages 1,2, and 20 of this scan. The remaining pages were scanned in black and white to save space.
- Two lines on page 2 were obscured because of a printing problem. Those two lines are: “27 are \$9 and at the door \$10. Address for...” and “the book has been nominated for the Nebula and Hugo Awards. A”
- The words of the tribble on page 14 did not scan well. They are: “Yeah, but who’s going to play Spock, kid? You?”
- A name was written on this copy and then crossed out. It is “Christopher Stashe...” As there is a review of The Warlock In Spite of Himself on page 19, I would guess that the intention was to send a copy to Christopher Stasheff. Whether a different copy was sent or there was an issue with the address, I don’t know.

-Warwick Daw, March 2006