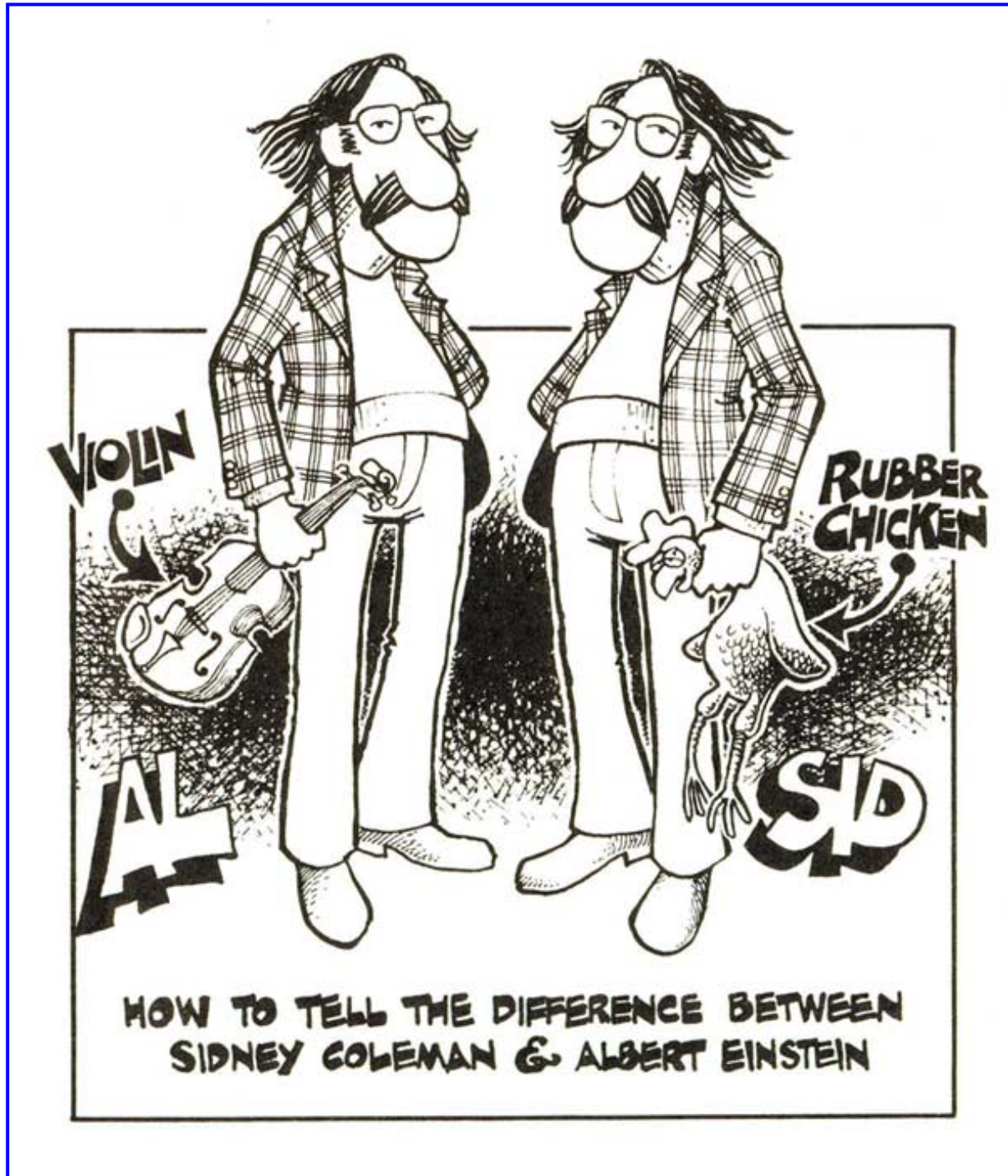




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That is my principal objection to life, I think: It is too easy, when alive, to make perfectly horrible mistakes.

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Deadeye Dick*

THIS ISSUE OF *eI* is in memory of Sidney Coleman. In the strictly science fiction world it is also in memory of Walt Bowart.

#

It's True...

...as we begin this issue of *eI*, Bill Burns and I enter our seventh straight year of publication. An incredible milestone of time and patience, never mind the energy and hot air created with all the airborne particles blowing around.

Here, in issue *eI*36, we pay special tribute to my old friend Sidney Coleman who passed away last November. Most of us inside this issue knew him well and loved him to the same degree. We tried to do our best for him.

Special notice should be given to Gregory Pickersgill for all the superb work he did for

this issue. Gregory OCRed five pieces for this issue, as well as scanning covers and photographs. His efforts on our behalf make this issue very special indeed.

Bill and I would also like to call your attention to another special feature, exciting, imagination-grabbing back covers (shades of *Other Worlds*) by none other than the fabulous Ditmar [Martin James Ditmar Jenssen].

#

As always, everything in this issue of *eI* beneath my byline is part of my in-progress rough-draft memoirs. As such, I would appreciate any corrections, revisions, extensions, anecdotes, photographs, jpegs, or what have you sent to me at earlkemp@citlink.net and thank you in advance for all your help.

Bill Burns is *jefe* around here. If it wasn't for him, nothing would get done. He inspires activity. He deserves some really great rewards. It is a privilege and a pleasure to have him working with me to make *eI* whatever it is.

Other than Bill Burns, Dave Locke, and Robert Lichtman, these are the people who made this issue of *eI* possible: Gregory Benford, Carol Carr, Sidney Coleman, Terry Carr, Diana Coleman, Jacques Hamon, John-Henri Holmberg, Ian Maule, Gregory Pickersgill, William Rotsler, Barbara Silverberg, Robert Toomey, and Paul Turner, and Gordon Van Gelder.

ARTWORK: This issue of *eI* features original artwork by Ditmar, and recycled artwork by Grant Canfield and William Rotsler.

It's very helpful if you're painting or telling a story to assume your readers know something.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, "An Interview with Kurt Vonnegut," 10/17/87

...Return to sender, address unknown.... 26

The Official *eI* Letters to the Editor Column

Artwork recycled William Rotsler

By Earl Kemp

We get letters. Some parts of some of them are printable. Your letter of comment is most wanted via email to earlkemp@citlink.net or by snail mail to P.O. Box 6642, Kingman, AZ 86402-6642 and thank you.

Also, please note, I observe DNQs and make arbitrary and capricious deletions from these letters in order to remain on topic.

This is the official Letter Column of *eI*, and following are a few quotes from a few of those letters concerning the last issue of *eI*. All this in an effort to get you to write letters of comment to *eI* so you can look for them when they appear here.

Friday November 30 2007

Ashley Spicer:

I have just come across your eZine online and absolutely loved it—quite how I have survived thus far without being aware of its existence is a mystery! Thank you for this treasure trove of information and memories that I have found fascinating and invaluable.

I came across it as my wife and I are researching a documentary on the very beginning of the adult film industry; in particular we are fascinated with the films that provided the link between the '60s sexploitation industry and the '70s hard-core films. Films such as documentaries like 'The ABCs of Marriage' and early narrative films such as 'Adultery for Fun and Profit'.

Both of these were directed by Rick Robinson—and so we were absolutely fascinated to read about your experience with the latter film. For ages we had been wondering if he was contactable and interested in talking about his memories from the time—but had not know his whereabouts or whether he was still alive or not.

Try as we might, we cannot seem to find a copy of the 'Adultery' book either...

Loved the story about Cee Cee as well—wonder where she is now...?

Sunday December 2, 2007

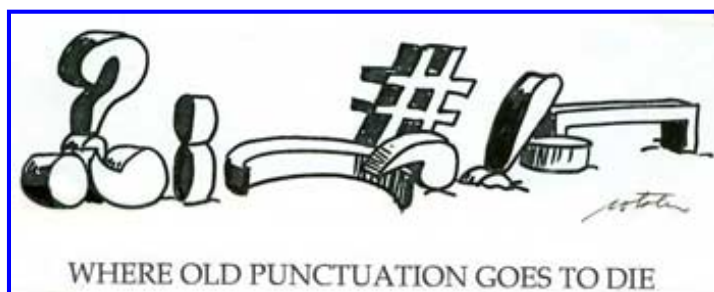
Dwain Kaiser:

Earl's *eI* makes us all look like lazy bums (true in my case I'm afraid).

Monday December 3, 2007
Robert Lichtman:

Thanks for a really ace issue of *eI*, this 35th—your sixth annish, as we used to call the things back in the day. (Is fanspeak dead?) I'm a little bemused by a sentence about this issue on the first page: "In the strictly science fiction world, it is also in memory of Calvin Demmon." While it's true that Calvin had seven stories published in the SF magazines in the '60s and '70s (one a collaboration with Ted White), it's for his fanwriting that he'll be most remembered. I'm hoping eventually to produce a collection of some of the best of it.

In the letters Chris Garcia writes, "As I was once told, 'every fan should play the guitar.'" Like Chris, I have no musical talent at all when it comes to playing *any* instrument. I used to be able to plunk out things like "Heart and Soul" and "Chopsticks" on a piano, but I think even that limited muse has left me. As for anything involving plucking strings or blowing into a mouthpiece, forget it. I *can* carry a tune, though, and have admirably butchered various tunes over the years—mostly in private.



Also like Chris, I'm pretty sure I've read some Nelson Bond stories over the years (and long ago), if only one or more of his "Lancelot Biggs" yarns in prozines no longer owned (early '40s *Amazings*, as I recall). I see that copies of a 2000 Wildside reprint of the 1950 collection, *The Remarkable Exploits of Lancelot Biggs: Spaceman*, are available inexpensively from various source, but I still haven't finished reading all the Rog Phillips books I got when you featured him in *eI*. (And as I vaguely recall, I liked Robert Bloch's "Lefty Feep" stories better than Bond's "Biggs"—and I *did* read the collection of them that came out back in the '80s.)

And speaking of Bloch, does Mike Deckinger *really* believe that people are unaware that he "in his own distinctive way, bridge the gap between the fan and pro communities"? I didn't get that from the comments in *eI*34. *Every* point Mike raises about Bloch is one that's well known. One that he overlooked is that Bloch came to fandom via the Lovecraft circle—that as a teenager he was a correspondent of HPL's, that his first sales were to *Weird Tales* and strongly influenced by Lovecraft's writing, and that he made the leap from the Lovecraft circle to SF fandom via *Fantasy Magazine* and *Marvel Tales*. Good for us all that he did!

I enjoyed Mike Ashley's ramblings about how he discovered science-fiction magazines. Like him, "I found Stapledon's books incomprehensible, though fascinating," and in truth I've never gone beyond that—to me he's ponderous and ultimately unrewarding. Some

years ago I was given a copy of the 1953 hardcover collection, *To the End of Time*, editing by Basil Davenport and collecting *Last and First Men*, *Star Maker*, *Odd John*, *Sirius* and *The Flames* in one thick volume. I'm afraid that page after page of narrative with little to no dialogue just bogs me down. Elsewhere in his article I was caught short by his noting that *Astounding* changed its name to *Analog* as far back as 1960. I'd remembered it being later, but checking www.sfcovers.net I confirmed that I was wrong. It's fascinating to survey the 1960s covers and see "analog" make a shadowy appearance in the background of the February issue and "astounding" disappears altogether after the September issue. (The January number is the thirtieth anniversary and the last on which "astounding" appears alone.)

I liked Victor Banis's "Welcome to Antoinette's" but have nothing to add. And Moorcock's "A Child's Christmas in the Blitz" was fascinating reading—in a way so outside my own experience of early childhood (in Cleveland and then in L.A.) that it was almost like reading fiction. I've seldom been able to wrap my eyetracks around Michael's fiction, but I was rapt with attention and enjoyment throughout this lengthy narrative. Is this part of a longer autobiography that is (or will be) available?

Steve's "personal choice" art supplement was a joy. Even though I'd seen most of these before, his notes on each made for interesting reading on top of the eye candy of the artwork itself. The comments he made on that *Trap Door* cover were *most* poignant.

Wednesday December 5, 2007

Ted White:

It's been a long time since I've written you a LoC on *eI*, but I have time today. This is one of those rare days when I'm at work with no work to be done (after working hard on a rush-rush job yesterday—go figure). Outside it's vaguely snowing—our first recordable snowfall this year, but only an inch or so—a gray, gloomy day. So I've been catching up on *eI*.

Before I get to the meat of this letter, I want to register a small complaint, and a suggestion: It's annoying that you don't identify your letter writers at the *beginning* of their letters. Please do so. Just preface each letter with the name of its author. As it is, I scroll down to find who wrote each letter before reading that letter, because I want to know who I am reading. It helps me translate the tone and style into a (usually familiar) voice.

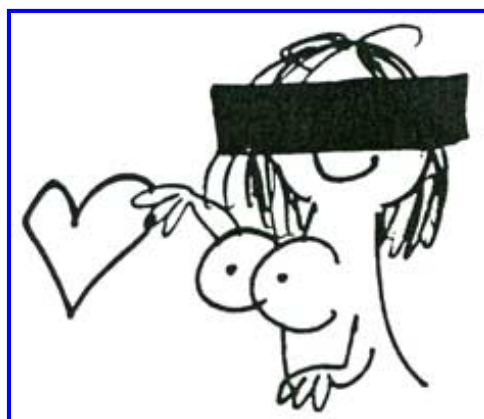
I want to respond to the interview with Budrys in #34. And in preface, I must observe that this was obviously an OCR from its original appearance—"obviously," because there are so many typical OCR typos. Lower-case Ls for numeral 1s, Ns for Ms, etc. It needed more cleaning up. And, in your introduction, you say, "It was a tape-recorded interview and the published text made from a translation of those verbal recordings." You don't mean "translation." You mean "transcription." I deal with transcriptions (of meetings, court proceedings, depositions) every day—except today, as it turns out.

I used to worship the ground Budrys walked on. There was a time when I thought he was the best new writer in science fiction. He was without question the most promising SF writer of the '50s. He was also an acute critic, capable of piercing insights and aware of so much of what went into the craft of writing. Plus, he was a great story-teller.

It's a shame that as a human being he fell short.

I got my first inkling of that after I reviewed his novel *Rogue Moon*, and said that it didn't work for me. I'd heard him say in conversation that he'd tried something new in that book: substituting *emotional* action for physical action. The conflicts were emotional, verbal, rather than physical slugfests. I think he saw this as a Big Step Up in pulp-style fiction, rather than already a given in "literature." But in *Rogue Moon* it translated into forced and unmotivated emotions erupting without warning from the various characters in what seemed to me at the time (I've never reread the book) an arbitrary fashion.

I don't recall where I reviewed the book, but it might have been *Yandro*, and if it wasn't, it was in another fanzine—not a prozine. But Ajay read it, and from that moment on his attitude toward me became distinctly cooler. In those days we saw each other socially a fair amount. We both had Larry Shaw as a good friend, and Larry sometimes had me drive test cars from Manhattan out to Ajay's New Jersey home (I took a bus back), for Ajay to write reports on for one of Larry's automotive magazines (which he edited alongside *Infinity*). I saw Ajay at parties, and he was at the founding meeting of the Fanoclasts. I considered us friends. I never asked Ajay for favors, never presumed on that apparent friendship, but we always greeted each other warmly when we met. I held him in high respect, as I had done for most of the '50s (I had first read him in a fanzine also called *Infinity* in the early '50s). He probably saw me as a kid fan of some promise.



Interruption. Vice President Cheney's motorcade just went by my office. Seven motorcycles—often there are eight—two limos, five SUVs (one with its tailgate down), and two police cars, lights and sirens blazing, bulling their way through red lights and pretending Imperial rights for the veep. This happens almost daily. My office is on Connecticut Avenue, directly between the White House and the veep's manse. My office is on the 6th floor and my desk is immediately next to a floor-to-ceiling window.

As I was saying, we were friends of sorts—until Ajay read my review of *Rogue Moon*. "Where'd you get that stuff about my substituting emotional action for physical action?" he demanded, confronting me.

"From you," I said. "From your own mouth."

“I never said that,” Ajay told me, closing the book on the subject, “and it’s not true.” But of course it was true and I couldn’t figure out why he’d lie about it.

Roughly five years later my first hardcover SF juvenile was published. *Secret of the Marauder Satellite* went through five printings in hardcover and garnered rave reviews from *Library Journal*, *Kirkus Review*, and *Analog* (Miller called it the best SF juvenile of the year). It wasn’t reviewed in *Galaxy*, however.

Figuring that for some reason Budrys hadn’t been sent a copy, I sent him one myself. A third party told me, “Ajay says to stop sending him copies of your book or he *will* review it, and you’ll wish he hadn’t.” That came as a shock, but not entirely a surprise. I’d already noticed he was playing personal politics in his *Galaxy* column.

And, a year or two earlier, my friend Larry McCombs and I were in Chicago and we’d gone to Second City, where another friend of mine, Ray Cymoczinsky, was doing the lights. We ran into Ajay and Frank Robinson in the Second City bar, where, it turned out, they were regulars. Frank ranks at the top of my list of editors. He’d turned my first piece for *Rogue* into a decent article with some adroit editorial magic (“they were still your words, Ted”), and I still hold him in high respect.

While Ray and I went off to meet the current Second City cast, Larry hung out at the bar with Ajay and Frank. Later Larry told me, “As soon as you left with Ray, Ajay remarked about you, “There goes a guy who can’t write and will never amount to anything, but he doesn’t know it.” I’d already had a couple of paperbacks published, but I knew I was still learning my craft and was still on the bottom rungs of the professional ladder. But it was disheartening to hear that I’d been so callously dismissed by one of my old heroes. Frank had stuck up for me, Larry said, but Ajay shrugged it off. I was a loser.

So Ajay, rather than find his judgment of me had been premature and maybe wrong, simply refused to read the first book of which I was proud and for which I was lauded by others. His opinion of me, formed out of my review of his book, was more important to him.

It was then that I realized how small-minded and petty-malicious Ajay Budrys could be. My respect for him was significantly deflated.

Nonetheless, when he switched venues to *F&SF* and began writing essay articles rather than reviews, I thought what he was writing was some of the best and most insightful criticism in SF.

I’ll have to cut this short. I’ll leave out the way Ajay Turned Weird after moving to Evanston in 1961, as told to me by both Harlan Ellison and Larry Shaw, both of whom had thought they were among Ajay’s best friends. And I’ll leave out the way Ajay fell all over himself to curry favor with the Scientologists/Bridge Publications/Fred Harris, both publicly (Brighton, 1987) and privately, because I understand his panic at finding himself without an income when (like me) he thought his royalties would support him in his old

age.

The bottom line is that it's sad that Ajay never fulfilled that early promise. He had it in him to be the next Heinlein, Sturgeon, and Simak rolled into one, the best SF writer there was. But something—I'll call it inner demons, to be kind—held him back. Kinda like, in a way (but not really) Alexei Panshin, potentially the greatest writer in SF to follow Budrys, equally gifted with both insight and craft, from whom we're still awaiting that Great American SF Novel. Panshin is a better human being, though.

Thursday December 13, 2007

Peter Weston:

Just read your rotten little fanzine on-line. I thought the Mike Ashley article was great, but he would have done better sending it to a fanzine dealing with British SF fandom. Very much enjoyed the Moorcock piece, but thought it belonged in a fanzine which had already published some of his more recent memories. Liked the Stiles portfolio, but think he ought to be doing more for British fanzines that don't see his work very often.

Otherwise the rest of the issue was OK for an American fanzine.

Saturday December 15, 2007

John Purcell:

Steve Stiles most definitely deserves to be winning Hugos. That cover simply makes me smile, and also makes me wonder about the universe his mind wanders through. Steve has a delightful sense of humor—warped, too—and I continue to enjoy his work. He's been doing this kind of crackerjack work for years upon years now—that portfolio preview is only a small sampling of the work he's done over the years. Simply great stuff.

It is also nice to read that Mike Ashley got sucked into the sf universe in much the same way as a whole bunch of us: book stores and the unquenchable thirst for science fiction reading material. I can't help but wander through a bookstore if given half a chance. And here all along I have had this impression that Ashley had some high-faluttin' voice calling him to "find and fulfill your destiny." So he's actually sort of like the rest of us. That makes me feel better. That and the fact that "Hooked" was an enjoyable read helped matters along.

Mike Moorcock's recollections of growing up during the London blitzkriegs was fascinating. The only real comment I have to make here is that his article places my knowledge of Mike in a whole new perspective. And this is a bit perplexing to me. Until I read this, I have known for so many years about the bombing of London and England during World War II, but for some reason had never really put a personal face on living through such horror. Mike does a splendid job of making this long-ago event seem so real and current. This bears some rereading, which is something I really don't do much with fanzines. The best material keeps bringing me back, and "A Child's Christmas in the Blitz" belongs in that group. Fascinating reading. Thank you, Michael, for sharing this

with us.

And I thank you, Earl, for producing another fine issue. That Garcia kid makes a good point: it's an Earl Kemp fanzine, and we shouldn't expect nothing less. Well, we could, but I'm not going to say anything untoward about you. Besides, your last name has me craving ice cream right now, which is dangerous.

Saturday December 22, 2007

Lloyd Penney:

I have to disagree with Chris Garcia on why every fan should be able to play the guitar. Years ago, Yvonne and I ran the con suite for the local filkcon FilKONtario. We heard more screeching, fractured chords and baying at the moon in the key of off. It is understood that the people who take part are not professional or taught, and that it is all done for the love of participation, but hearing jazz-style tunes about a particular starship captain may have cured me of wanting to go back.

Nothing more on Papoonda, as far as I know...I think the shooting is done, and the whole mess is in post-production to make it look good. I hope I'll find out more next year. Should be good for a larf.

Greetings to Mike Ashley...I just finished reading one of your anthologies, *Souls in Metal*, in paperback. The yellow dust jackets of the Gollancz books was also a signal to me of science fiction novels, and I read as many of them as I could. It may have been the Gollancz books that pulled me away from the anthologies I cut my teeth on, and into the novel formal. I also like the fact that science fiction has a history, as does fandom, a third dimension that makes fandom more than just a hobby.

Kudos to Victor Banis for Antoinette's, a wonderful story, just in time for Christmas, and perfectly written to bring a tear or two to my eyes. May we all have such an experience to soften our hard hearts, and make us smile and redeem some of the little faith we put into our species.



I've noticed over the last few years that lights of white, deep blue, the indigo Michael Moorcock refers to, and even pastel blue have almost replaced the bright colours lights and other decorations took on in the past. I wonder if we are trying to make a clean break from the Christmases of the past, and create a new Christmas, with new traditions, for ourselves.

He also reminds me of Rupert the Bear. There have been some wonderful Rupert cartoons made in this country, and I've also seen recent stop-motion cartoons as well.

Rupert made appearances in books my Scottish grandparents sent to me, and they also sent me comics like the Beano, the Dandy, the Hotspur and the Wizard. These were published by D.C. Thomson, and seeing my mother's maiden name (and my middle name) is Thomson, I may have some tenuous relation to these publishers of my youth. (D. C. Thomson attends the annual BookFair Canada each year, and that's where I found out that many of the comics of my youth are long gone, but many characters from those comics still around, are still around themselves.)

There's a lot of personal pain expressed in this essay as well. I hope that not only has writing this provided a little catharsis for you, Michael, but allowed those of us to see a little more inside your head, and perhaps understand your novels a little bit more. Thank you for that glimpse.

35.1...Thank you for the index, always helps to find where articles are, and I've already had the chance to use it. I wonder if, should you ever end *eI* for whatever reason, if you'd do the index for the entire run? It would also help you to assemble all the parts together for the fannish autobiography you're working on, too.

And, the Stiles portfolio...I can't say anything else that hasn't already been said. The front cover of 35 was great, and here's just the tip of the Stiles iceberg. Give that man a silvery rocket to say thanks for all his work and talent, and then, we'll see what else is on the menu... We need to appreciate our talented fan artists more.

His mind whirled with the noisy gaudy pointlessness of a cuckoo clock in hell.
--Kurt Vonnegut, *Mother Night*

Sidney Coleman (1937–2007)

By Earl Kemp

It takes months to bring off a special-dedication issue of *eI*, so the best laid plans oft go bonkers.



Sidney Coleman
photograph courtesy
Robert Toomey
Collection.

Gregory Benford approached me some months ago with the idea of gathering together Sidney Coleman’s book reviews from his *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* columns and reprinting them as a special tribute to Sidney and a sort of Internet get-well card. So a bunch of us jumped into the fray and began gathering up material to make the issue as special as we possibly could. I need to mention Gregory Pickersgill especially and loudly for his extra duty work gathering and OCRing five separate pieces for this issue, as well as scanning a number of photographs and magazine covers.

And then, in November, only days before my birthday, Sidney Coleman had the audacity to die on us, again shattering one of my favorite fantasies. I thought he’d live forever...and me too... but wouldn’t you know it, he’s proved me wrong again.

Nevertheless, we finished up what we started and put it all together in this special memorial issue dedicated to my dear childhood friend, Sidney Coleman. R.I.P., partner....

#

When Sidney’s death was announced, Charlie Brown asked me to write something special for Sidney’s extended obituary section in *Locus*, and I readily agreed. Charlie asked me to “write a short piece starting with my first meeting with Sidney Coleman through the formation of Advent Publishers.” Here is what I wrote for Charlie and for *Locus*:

Sidney Coleman first accosted me in 1952, in a funky old used bookstore in Chicago in the science fiction section. He was obnoxious and pushy to an embarrassing extent...a chubby little wiseass know-it-all. He was 15 and I was 23. Plus, I was married and already had children of my own. I didn’t need Sidney, not as a son or an anything. In fact, I didn’t have anything going with any kids except my own. Nevertheless, Sidney persisted and, before I knew what had happened, I had my very own first illegally acquired son. Taking it to the limits, he infiltrated my house and my family and became friends with my children and would sit in the middle of the floor wearing a propeller beanie and play games with them and their toys. They loved him too. They rechristened him Squidney Peepots and offered him their prized potty chair

to sit in every time he came to visit.

His main purpose in life it seemed, at that moment, was to force me somehow to upgrade my I.Q. a bit as Sidney, correctly, insisted that I was woefully lacking in numerous departments. Even with that cross to carry, Sidney persisted in flashing me his sparkly eyes and almost evil little grin as he went about fulfilling his main purpose.

He taught me many things that I really needed to know...little sleight-of-hand tricks with flash-paper and imagination to amuse and amaze the easily amused and amazed.

We had a great run with it for a few years, Sid and I and a big bunch of Chicago fandom. Amid all the fun and games, Sid and I and a few others even managed to make a permanent mark on science fiction in the form of Advent Publishers. Then Sidney had to spoil it all and grow up and became the legendary Dr. Coleman, giggle-menace of Harvard and all points Nobelward. He made me proud. I miss him always.

What's not to love...?

--Earl Kemp

#

Since I began producing *eI*, Sidney Coleman has turned up a time or two in various different forms, either things that he wrote himself in years past, fannish things, or memory pieces about Sidney written by people who knew him best. All of them are worth a second look, especially now, when full attention is focused only on Sidney.

From [eI10, October 2003](#) there are the following pieces:

Chopped Liver and Propeller Beanies, by Earl Kemp
The Punch-Line Kid, by Earl Kemp
Sampling Sidney Coleman, the Fan, by Sidney Coleman
Gilding Golding, by Sidney Coleman
PITFCS (excerpts from), by Sidney Coleman
Who Killed Science Fiction? (excerpts from), by Sidney Coleman
The Afterthoughts, by Sidney Coleman
A Story to Be Illustrated Maybe, by Sidney Coleman

In addition there are a number of photographs of Sidney through the years scattered among those pieces. Plus, two extra special Coleman graphics created just for the issue, one by Steve Stiles and another by Alan White.

From [eI33, August 2007](#) there are these two pieces:

The Complete Toomey Experience, by Gregory Benford
The Improbability of Being Sidney Coleman, by Robert Toomey

In addition there are a number of photographs of Sidney included within those two articles.

#

Unfortunately, we'll never have the pleasure of knowing Sidney's reactions to this collection made in his honor. Then again, in a perfect world Sidney already knows, and approves, and smiles contentedly upon those he loved and left behind.

Keep looking out for the rest of us; we're headed your way....

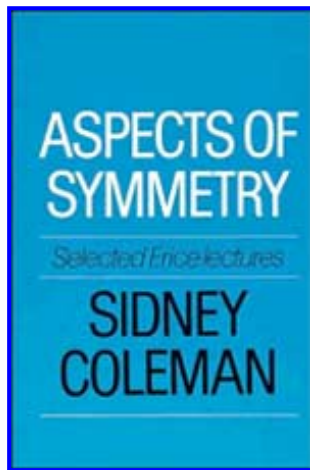
I was gazing at a list of all I'd published, and wondering, "How the hell did I do that?" I was feeling as I feel now, like whalers Herman Melville described, who didn't talk anymore. They had said absolutely everything they could ever say.

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Timequake*

Not a Mere Device

By Robert Toomey

Sid Coleman died on November 18, 2007 after a long, heartbreaking illness that came like a thief and slowly robbed him of the power of speech, and maybe even of thought. As the sickness progressed, his voice was reduced to a whisper, and he found himself unable to complete sentences. In the end, he could barely manage a syllable. A sad finish for a great teacher and brilliant wit.



For a sense of what he was like as a physics lecturer, you might glance at *Aspects of Symmetry* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), the only book Sid published during his lifetime. It's a selection of "lectures on topics in theoretical high energy physics [that] has few rivals for clarity of exposition and depth of insight. Delivered over the past two decades at the International School of Subnuclear Physics in Erice, Sicily, the lectures help to organize and explain material that at the time existed in a confused state, scattered in the literature."

Sid's wit is immediately evident in the preface: "I first came to Erice in 1966 at the fourth of the annual schools on subnuclear physics organized by Nino Zichichi. I was charmed by the beauty of Erice, fascinated by the thick layers of Sicilian culture and history, and terrified by the iron rule with which Nino kept students and faculty in line. In a word, I was won over...." Of course, these are physics lectures, not comedy routines. But Sid's puckish sense of humor peeks through on occasion: "...there are some special tricks based on tensorial methods which are useful for a very restricted class of problems. (Which, through the grace of God, turns out to include many cases of physical interest.)"

But you're here for Sid's book reviews, not his academic lectures. It should be said that Sid's interests were wildly eclectic, ranging far beyond subatomic physics into art, religion, literature, and just about anything else that passed his way. On his bookshelf,

Thurber's cartoons snuggled up, in delightful disorder, against the poetry of Auden and Yeats and collections of Victorian Fairy Tales and ancient Sears catalogs. His favorite novel, he told me once, was Thurber's *The 13 Clocks*. It's my favorite too. How could anyone resist the Golux, with his indescribable hat? The Golux, who "is on the side of good by accident and happenstance," and is "the only Golux in the world, and not a mere device."

Like the Golux, Sid Coleman was unique, and he was certainly not a mere device. He will be missed.

- - -

Photo courtesy Robert Toomey Collection.

"And what is literature, Rabo," he said, "but an insider's newsletters about affairs relating to molecules, of no importance to anything in the universe but a few molecules who have the disease called 'thought.'"

-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Bluebeard*, 1987

Sid the Critic, Sid the Scientist

By Gregory Benford

It is quite hard now to recall the *zeitgeist* of the 1970s, the spirit of those heady times. The space program was fresh from the moon landings and we all knew that we surely would march on to Mars, after trying out the first true space station—Skylab. Nobody guessed that we would run around in circles, literally never leaving near-Earth space for half a century or so, yet spending ever more money to do even that.

What's more, surely science fiction was going to climb to better things, building on the literary infusion of the late New Wave. I agreed on this myself, in conversations with Joe Haldeman in those fabulous early 1970s. I first met Joe in a physics class in electrodynamics at the University of Oklahoma. He stood out among the other physics major like my brother Jim and myself, and certainly among the mere engineers. He was quick and sharp, despite an aroma of beer wafting from him across the aisle of desks in that 10 AM class. Meeting him again in the early 1970s, I registered a sad gravity about him that came from his year in Vietnam. He had taken dozens of shrapnel wounds when a Viet Cong ammo dump exploded while he was guarding it in a combat sweep. (Why guard it? Because GIs policing up some souvenir weapons might set off a booby trap. It didn't occur to the officer in charge that maybe the whole pile was on a timer.) The only survivor in his squad, Joe the conscientious objector (so no *direct* combat role) had emerged from Walter Reed with a desire to...write science fiction. He, too, was of The Faith—that humanity was bound for the stars, far from the mud of Vietnam.



Gregory Benford

I had loafed in the States, escaping from ROTC by not showing up for the swearing in ceremony. I further avoided service by getting a Bachelor's from OU, then an MS and Ph. D. from UC San Diego, a postdoc at Livermore working with Edward Teller, then a staff position there. All deferred until I was too ancient to fight. But by the time Joe and I met up again I was a professor at UC Irvine. We both stood in awe of a figure well known in sf circles since the 1950s, and in quantum field theory since the 1960s—professor Sidney Coleman of Harvard.

Sid was who I often wanted to be. Though I was pretty good at mathematical physics, I knew I couldn't waft blithely through the realms of field theory, skating on mathematics that stretched beyond my horizon. I published in the *Journal of Mathematical Physics*, but Sid wrote an entire book (based on his summer school lectures at Erice, Sicily) on aspects of quantized fields. Even more daunting, he had helped found Advent: Publishers while a fan in Chicago, and in the early 1970s wrote book reviews for *Fantasy and*

Science Fiction. Only Joanna Russ wrote with his sublime intelligence about the rapidly unfolding delights of a genre unleashed.

These columns cost Sid months to write. He was a fabulous wit, whose mere fanzine letters cast a piercing light through our pretensions. He labored over them, producing lines that skewered and defined the field. He summed up an Alexei Panshin novel with, “Rarely has so little happened so delightfully.” And knew all the principals when he said, “The editorial policy of Moorcock’s *New Worlds* could be roughly described as unlimited enthusiasm for everything John Campbell loathed.”

Sid the scientist peeked through these reviews, as when he neatly dissected an entire subgenre. “It is strange that there is not a richer literature of hard-core time paradox stories, stories in which the paradoxes are central; after all, there is nothing like a closed causal loop for making your head feel funny, and making your head feel funny is one of the main functions of science fiction.” Just so. I took this to heart while writing *Timescape*, a few years later, the hardest novel I ever wrote. I struggled to confront another deep Sidney truth: “Emotionally, time travel has two faces: the bright multiverse of infinite possibility, and the grim infernal machine of closed causal loops.” How to capture both emotions? I tried.

Sid was even better in dealing with the fine writers those '60s and '70s brought us. He knew all the physics behind the stories, so was undaunted by it. Better, he was witty about it: “I remember asserting publicly in 1967 there was more real science in a page of Zelazny than in the collected works of George O. Smith; at about the same time, Harlan Ellison wrote that Zelazny was the reincarnation of Geoffrey Chaucer. I quote these statements as evidence of the spirit of the age rather than of critical acumen; either of them could be translated as ‘Wow!’ with negligible loss of content.”

I recall discussing Poul Anderson’s *Tau Zero* with Sid somewhere in the 1960s. “It’s got a lot of clunky writing,” Sid said. “Sure, but some wondrous passages, too,” I replied. “And good, accurate science.” Sid scowled. “Okay, half credit.” We shared a professorial chuckle.

Sid embodied a line of his own: “Being a genius is a profession for the young.” This applied well to his *F&SF* criticism of Roger Zelazny. He felt that once Zelazny went full-time he lost some of the buzz that lit his prose. “... it might have been the pressures of the market. Zelazny began free-lancing full time about five years ago, and the economics of writing are not such as to allow time for tinkering with the elaborate and delicate machineries of wit.” Then he nailed the essence of Zelazny’s approach. “It is sometimes called irony, but this is not quite the right word, for the comic vision does not undercut the heroic one, but underlines it. Wit is a better word, if we remember that wit is the root of both witty and witting. The double vision is richer than the sum of its parts, because each part illuminates the other.”

Sid was a wit, and recognized the zest of Zelazny’s method. That later persisted in the Amber series, though Roger remarked to me on one of my visits to Los Alamos that he

tired of the series quickly, writing one a year to pay the rent. He had a gracious home in the old, unpaved district of Santa Fe that was becoming even in the 1970s a posh locale, boasting the best restaurants. I happened to be staying there in the home of another friend when, after Roger's death from cancer, his widow sold all his magnificent book collection to a used book dealer. She was a lawyer and he told me once that she had not read anything of his, just considered writing his job. After that I wondered if she ever sensed his wit, for she never seemed to laugh at his often subtle jokes, even after our round of double margaritas. Or maybe she was just getting even with him by selling his cherished books, since he had left her to live with another woman several years before his death.

I do know that Sid visited Roger whenever he was in Santa Fe, and that *Doorways in the Sand*, his fine novel constructed with intricate logic, came in part from discussions with Sid. (In it, each cliffhanger chapter ending gets its resolution not immediately at the beginning of the next, but as a flashback halfway through to the next, inevitable cliffhanger. It's a model of how to plot for writers.) Sid liked Zelazny's more than Delany's work, in part because it returned him in memory to the zesty pleasures of sf.

Not that Sid only read for style. He liked Larry Niven's work, and understood that "The primacy of ideas links Niven to the super-science writers of the thirties, an age when concept was king and *Astounding* would trumpet new stories as 'thought variants' or 'novas'; the de-emphasis of conflict separates him from them." He even remarked in *F&SF* that "(*A Coney Island of the Mind* is a great title that is now wasted on a book of bad poems by Ferlinghetti; it would serve better attached to Niven's collected works.)"



Photo courtesy
Robert Toomey Collection

Not by coincidence did Niven actually publish a short story collection in the 1990s titled *Playgrounds of the Mind*. This is just a tiny instance of what I saw in the 1970s; Sid's reviews were the best in the field, and they influenced how writers thought of the field. Few reviewers do that.

Alas, in mid-70s Sid told me he found the labor in writing them getting to him. He made pleasant remarks about my own fiction, but I wanted him to give it a review, scathing or not; I didn't care. Joe Haldeman said to me once he, too, waited for years in the hope that Sid would review his work.

Alas, Sid gave up reviewing for good in the latter 1970s, in the heat of working on some groundbreaking work on fundamentals of field theory. He came very close to the discovery that has now driven cosmology for the last quarter century: the inflation of the early universe, discovered by Sid's protégé, Alan Guth. Unlike the other great discoveries

of cosmology (the Hubble expansion, the 3 degree background radiation), Guth puzzled out inflation from a theoretical calculation that drew on Sid's work. Sid advised him on how to exploit this, and within months Guth became a professor at MIT, passing up an appointment at Harvard Sid had engineered for him.

Guth will certainly win a Nobel for his work. Sid should share it, I feel, though he missed the big brass ring of inflation. Alan is sympathetic to this view, though it is an emotional one, not a logic that will convince Stockholm. Worse, Sid is now beyond communication with us, deep in advanced Parkinson's. My friend at UCI, Fred Reines, also barely made it onstage in Stockholm to receive his Nobel for detecting the neutrino; not a pretty event.

But Sid's reviews still reward a reading, and I urge you to do so. We shall never see his likes again.

'I am of course a skeptic about the divinity of Christ and a scorner of the notion that there is a God who cares about how we are or what we do. ... Religious skeptics often become very bitter towards the end, as did Mark Twain. ... I know why I will become bitter. I will finally realize that I have had it right all along: that I will not see God, that there is no heaven or Judgment Day.'

-- Kurt Vonnegut Jr., address at Twain's home in
Hartford, Conn., April 30, 1979.

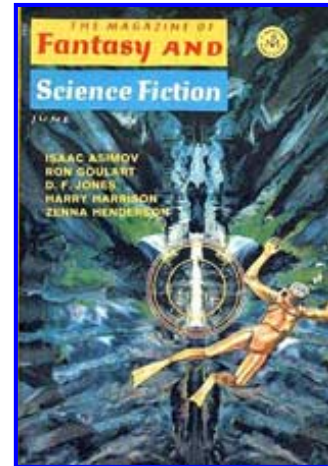
F&SF Book Reviews*

By Sidney Coleman

1 June 1970

***Masque World*, by Alexei Panshin, Ace**

Rarely has so little happened so delightfully as in *Masque World* (Ace Books), the third of Alexei Panshin's novels about Anthony Villiers. Much of what passes for humor in science fiction runs on the same action-at-any-price formula that powers the cheap melodrama inflicted on us in the name of adventure; the only difference is that in place of the characters facing another meaningless menace every thousand words, they face another meaningless custard pie.



Masque World is constructed on different principles altogether, by a man who realizes that a comic novel is something more than a comic book without pictures. The story line is almost invisible: Lord Semichastny of Delbaso plans a costume ball, and for a while it seems as if it might be a failure; Villiers experiences a small delay in receiving a letter; various characters become involved in the celebrations of the Xochiti Sodality, a fraternal organization of middle-aged men; Lord Semichastny's party is a success after all. Panshin stops the story entirely now and then to deliver brief philosophical essays. The closest thing to an action-packed climax in the whole narrative occurs on page 149, when Tove the Trog kicks Sir Henry Oliphaunt in the leg.

In the void left by the absence of the usual hullabaloo, Panshin has placed wit, ingenuity, intelligent observation, and good writing. An example:

'I'm a pragmatist,' he would say, meaning that he had no education and was selective about his principles.

Another example:

As a self-protective device, all his senses were filtered so that he shouldn't be swamped by more data than he could safely handle. His hearing was miserable.... For him to hear music, it had to be loud enough to annoy. He would turn it on for a time, let it irritate him and his neighbors, and then turn it off again convinced that it must have some purgative value, since he could detect none other. He had a regular time marked on his schedule.

The subject of this last quotation is an inept bureaucrat. This is a conventional figure in humorous science fiction, but please note that the treatment is unconventional. Panshin

is interested in the insides of his character, the fears and drives that make him such a nebbish. This gives him a field for comedy denied an author for whom The Inept Bureaucrat is a standard ingredient, with as little interior structure as a potato, to be taken off the shelf whenever needed to fill out the plot.

Oh, yes. One last point: *Masque World* is not just better than the competition; it is, by any standards, a very funny book, and a joy to read.

#

***To Live Again*, by Robert Silverberg**

Robert Silverberg has had two careers. This would be no oddity for a writer, were it not that both of them are writing careers. Silverberg began writing science fiction in the mid-fifties and soon established a reputation as The Compleat Hack. With astonishing facility, he would churn out science fiction, children's books, dirty books, whatever was ordered. (During this period, he was observed at a Milford Science-Fiction Writer's Conference complaining that he was suffering from a severe case of writer's block—he had not written a word for a whole week.) The peak of the old Silverberg's career was reached when, with the aid of Randall Garrett, he sold to John Campbell of *Astounding* an endless skein of stories that managed, with admirable accuracy, to push every one of Campbell's many buttons, and also managed, with admirable economy, to have no other detectable qualities whatsoever.

A few years ago, Silverberg announced that the old Silverberg was dead. He had invested his income wisely, and now he would never have to think of markets again; he could devote himself to serious writing. To almost universal astonishment, he did just that. Beginning with *Thorns*, the new Silverberg has produced eight novels, some very good, some not so good, but all clearly the product of a genuine individuality, as different as could be from the old bland hackwork.

To Live Again (Doubleday) is Silverberg's latest novel. It is set in a world in which it is possible to record a man's personality, the total content of his nervous system, and to implant this record, after his death, into another human mind, where it becomes a kind of secondary personality, a persona. The donor gains a form of immortality; the recipient gains the knowledge and insight of the persona. The complicated and ingenious plot centers on the struggles of two capitalists, Mark Kaufmann and John Reditis, to obtain the formidable persona of Paul Kaufmann, Mark's uncle.

In another sense, though, *To Live Again* is about the corrupting effects of power. All of the major characters in the book are monsters, desiring only power, not for any purpose, but for its own sweet sake. Their wealth is of value to them only as a badge of power. Immortality is desirable only because it offers an opportunity to extend power (they all plan, upon reincarnation, to become dybbuks—to oust their host personalities and gain true immortality). The sexual act is to them one of the highest forms of human pleasure only because it offers an unparalleled occasion for humiliation and manipulation of

another person.

This last, by the way, is characteristic of the new Silverberg. Just as, in the fifties, Theodore Sturgeon wrote a long series of stories that were all concerned in some way with the uses of love, so has Silverberg written a series of stories all concerned in some way with the misuses of sex. Indeed, collectively, the works of the new Silverberg represent the most disgusted view of human sexuality around since the passing of the late bishop of Hippo.

It is a mark of Silverberg's skill that this monstrosity is never stated explicitly. At the close of *To Live Again*, his characters are in various postures of triumph or defeat, but they are all convinced they have lived life to the fullest, and have striven after that which is worth the striving. Only the reader is left in horrified fascination, as if he had just witnessed feeding time at the cannibal cage.

One complaint: Like a persona trying to go dybbuk, the old Silverberg sometimes rises to the surface screaming clichés while the new Silverberg's attention is wandering. Thus, *To Live Again* is spotted with limp phrases like "She slipped the little card into the deep valley between her breasts." Not *that* valley again! These same breasts (those of Elena Volterra, Mark Kaufmann's mistress), are elsewhere described as: (1) high, bulky, (2) pounds of flesh, (3) heavy (and "artfully cantilevered by a wisp of sprayon support"), (4) ripe, lush, mounds, (5) majestic, (6) heaving ("the dark-hued nipples erect"), (7) a soft mound (left one only, this time), (8) massive, (9) meaty mounds, (10) heavy mounds, (11) huge globes, and (12) a soft hill (one only, again). Now, no one expects a hard-working science-fiction writer to devote hours to perfecting the art of mammary description, but surely even a plain undescribed breast is better than this numbing collection of bromides.

#

***The Long Twilight*, by Keith Laumer, Putnam**

There are many people who like the sort of stuff Keith Laumer writes; they think he writes it very well, better than almost anyone. If you are one of these, the only purpose of this review is to tell you that Putnam has published Laumer's *The Long Twilight*. However, if you do not know the sort of stuff Keith Laumer writes, the following may help.

The main action of *The Long Twilight* is set in the near future and takes place in less than a day. Interspersed with this day, though, are flashbacks telling the background of the main story. These are spread over a thousand years. Only at the climax of the novel is the final piece of the background revealed. This construction is to build suspense; it keeps the reader in ignorance not only of how the story is going to end, but also of how it began. The near-future story begins with a man named Grayle in a prison in Florida. It turns out that he has been handed down from one prison to another since the Civil War. This is peculiar, since Grayle does not seem very old, but nobody in the story knows how long Grayle has been in prison, because his records have been lost. Not even the warden

of the prison knows why or when Grayle was sent to jail. This does not disturb him. In fact, he is planning to arrange for Grayle's release in a short time, because he sees that Grayle is a nice man.

Now, you may think this warden is some kind of lunatic, but that is only because you do not understand the sort of stuff Keith Laumer writes. The real reason Grayle is in prison is so he can escape from prison, overpowering two armed guards and breaking steel bars with his bare hands. Also, having escaped from prison, he can have many hairsbreadth escapes from stupid and vicious cops, in the course of which he can pick up a girl sidekick whose unquestioning faith and undying loyalty he can win in ten minutes of laconic conversation. Also, after saving the world, he can be gunned down by one of the stupid and vicious cops, and can die nobly, saying, "Even the longest night ...ends at dawn."

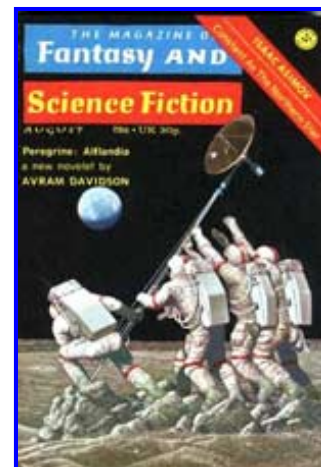
The background story is pretty much like the near-future story, with lots of heroism and nobility and loyalty and bloodshed. The final revelation is that everyone's troubles are due to a cunning and vicious villain named Xix, who wants to destroy the world for no good reason. Now, you may think this Xix is some kind of lunatic. This time, you are right; Xix is a lunatic. He is also a computer. Mad mechanical earth-destroying villains are the sort of stuff that is liked by the people who like the sort of stuff Keith Laumer writes. The title, *The Long Twilight*, does not seem to have much connection with the story. I like to think that it refers to the present age in science fiction, when there are many people who like the sort of stuff Keith Laumer writes, and think he writes it very well.

#

2 August 1973

***Three Trips in Time and Space*, by Larry Niven, John Brunner, and Jack Vance. Foreword by Robert Silverberg, Hawthorn, \$5.95**

Nothing can stop a dumb idea whose time has come; *Three Trips in Time and Space* is yet another collection of original stories on a set theme. Ever since the ill-fated Twayne Triplets, this has been a known method of getting bad stories from good writers; nevertheless, its popularity continues to grow. Maybe it's just that publishers, a race subject to childish superstitions, believe that a book needs a gimmick if it is to sell. Perhaps at this very moment, another theme anthology is being born, in a conversation something like this:



Editor: Sam, give me some money. I'll put together a collection of original sf for you.

Publisher: Sf? Oh, you mean sci-fi. What's the gimmick?

Editor: You'll love it. Listen to this: *Strange Fruits*. The blurb is "All New Tales of Alien Effeminacy."

Publisher: No good. We bought the same idea from Elwood last month.

Editor: That's all right; I've got a million of them. How about *Wine of the Dreamers*? Four giants of science fiction accept the challenge of writing a story while dead drunk.

In the case at hand, the challenge is less exotic; as posed by Robert Silverberg, it is to write a story about the social effects of an inexpensive system of virtually instantaneous travel to any point on the earth's surface (and to any point in time, if the author wishes).

This would seem to be a natural topic for Larry Niven. Teleportation networks have figured in his past work, and he has published an ingenious essay on the subject. "Flash Crowd" is thus a large disappointment. Niven's best work is as tightly organized as a Feydeau farce. Plot twist is piled on plot twist, revelation upon revelation, until the whole thing ends in an explosion of wonder. "Flash Crowd," in contrast, is slapdash and flaccid. The hero is a newsman, a graduate of journalism school, working for a television network that is devoted almost exclusively to news programs. Under the stated conditions, one would expect him to be reasonably well informed. Yet he has to spend the larger part of "Flash Crowd" scurrying about discovering elementary facts about the transportation system that has shaped his world, facts he should have known before the story began. As a final clumsy touch, his education includes a twelve-page guided tour of the Wonders of the New World, conducted by the inventor of the teleportation system in person. This is the true manner of Edward Bellamy ("And now, stranger from the past, let us show you the Great Steam Grommet Works"). We usually get better than this from Niven; maybe he's just tired of teleportation.

John Brunner has chosen to invert Silverberg's premise; his transportation system is expensive, inconvenient, and ineptly managed. This last is no surprise, for the world of "You'll Take the High Road" is a garden of ineptitude. Brunner's protagonist is pure shmoe, willing to go wherever he's pointed, and the subsidiary characters are a collection of lackwits any one of whom would lose at tic-tac-toe to a Christopher Anvil alien. All of this is done for comic effect, which is enhanced by sure-fire boffola routines involving collapsing chairs, officious bureaucrats, and malfunctioning automata. To this is added broad burlesques of hucksters, organization men, and various status seekers.

Yes, it's true. In 1973, the author of *Stand on Zanzibar* has published a perfect replica of a mid-fifties *Galaxy* lead novella. As a feat of re-creation, this may well rank with the re-breeding of the extinct auroch. Unfortunately, since the duplicate is just as dull and unfunny as the originals, it is hard to see why Brunner bothered.

'Rumfuddle' is a good average Jack Vance story, ie, a marvel. Vance's version of the miraculous transporter is a method of building portals to alternate worlds ("cognates"). These are infinite in number; some are cognate to our world in the present, some to our world at various times in the past. (Travel to future cognates is forbidden by the

necessities of the plot, thinly disguised in the text as the law of conservation of energy.)

The large-scale social effects of this are sketched in with great skill (*e.g.*, private homes are replaced by private worlds, but the original earth remains as a locus for communal activities like the schooling of children), but Vance's primary concern is with small-scale effects, moral effects. Vance has always been sharply aware of how much technology (which, for Vance, includes magic) influences morality, how changes in human powers produce changes in human judgments. This is one reason why Vance's far-future societies are so convincingly alien; his people are true citizens of the future, not just twentieth-century Americans in fancy dress.

In "Rumfuddle" the changes are just beginning. New powers are giving birth to new vices, or reviving old ones in new forms. I won't spoil Vance's surprise by telling you what rumfuddlers do, but I will tell you that the Countess Elizabeth Bathory enters the story in two ways: explicitly, as a character, and implicitly, as an example, someone corrupted by easy power, descending the ladder from beating peasant girls to bathing in their blood. Cognates.

"Rumfuddle" is written in Vance's unmistakable style. It is a strange style for a writer of exotic adventures, a man who treats subjects we are used to having described in the lush tones of A. Merritt and his epigones. Vance's style is anything but lush; he seems to have a hatred of simile and metaphor; his voice is dry, particular, witty, precise. He wants us to see his wonders new and fresh, not bedazzle us with borrowed glammers. Here is an example; an obsolete town is being dismantled; the debris is being dumped in an ocean reserved for this purpose on a pre-Cambrian cognate world:

Six hours a day, four days a week, he guided a trashing machine across deserted Cupertino, destroying tract houses, service stations, and supermarkets. Knobs and toggles controlled a steel hammer at the end of a hundred-foot boom; with a twitch of the finger, Duray toppled power-poles, exploded picture windows, smashed siding and stucco, pulverized concrete. A disposal rig crawled fifty feet behind. The detritus was clawed upon a conveyor-belt, carried to a twenty-foot orifice, and dumped with a rush and a rumble into the Apathetic Ocean.

"The Apathetic Ocean." Just right! As marvellous as "the Pacific Ocean" must have been, when the words were new. But Vance has made them new for us again, which is one of the things that science fiction is about, or poetry; I'm not sure of the difference sometimes.

#

***Beyond the Resurrection*, by Gordon Eklund, Doubleday, \$5.95**

Gordon Eklund must love hard problems, because he sets himself so many of them. In *Beyond the Resurrection* he tries to do the damndest things; sometimes he fails, but he succeeds often enough to make this a fascinating and rewarding book.

Beyond the Resurrection is set in the near future in a small, failing experimental school. One of the students, a colorless, withdrawn boy named August, suddenly becomes the origin of an epidemic of transcendence. He physically merges with another student, a literal sharing of flesh. After a time, the doublet divides into its components; August is as before, but the second student has changed. She has been transformed, reborn into something like a state of mystical transcendence. The story follows the consequences of this remarkable event for three days, until August's destruction by agents of the state.

Rebirth into a higher form of being occurs often enough in science fiction, but usually only at the end of the story, where it can be masked in clouds of smoke and rhetoric. Indeed, this is one of the standard cop-out endings; the paraclete, in one form or another, is the sf equivalent of the U.S. Cavalry in westerns, always ready to descend and save the plot. Eklund has chosen to use rebirth as a subject rather than a gimmick; we see his Reborn close-up, both inside and outside views.

This is one of the hard problems referred to above. The inside views are among Eklund's failures; the more we learn about the experience of rebirth, the more ill-defined and fuzzy it becomes. (A related failure is the artificial and unconvincing explanation of the origin of August's power.) The outside views, though, are something else altogether. *Beyond the Resurrection* is told from many viewpoints; Eklund switches among four main characters and several minor ones. This is another hard problem, and one that is handled brilliantly. Each of the viewpoint characters is a fully realized individual, with a complex inner life that affects his response to the events of the story. Chapter Four, told from the viewpoint of a near-madman, is especially dazzling, but just as good, in a different way, is Eklund's perception of how, for a man in a certain emotional position, even the Coming of the Messiah is just another damned thing to worry about.

There is a lot in this book, and a lot to be said about it. I could tell you, for example, that the New Morning School is based upon an eccentric system of psychotherapy, and that the reader is gradually led to realize that this system is a failure, and that he equally gradually realizes that this system bears quite a few resemblances to Scientology, and that all this is done with such cunning that the result is not a parody of nut-cults but a touching and sympathetic meditation upon them. Or I could tell you that Eklund's prose is usually beautifully flexible and evocative, but sometimes becomes over inflated. (One chapter is called "When Is This Time Called Now?" If this is not a quotation from Rod McKuen, it should be.) Let me put it this way: Barcelona contains the masterwork of the architect Gaudi, the Cathedral of the Holy Family. The building was never finished; wonderful towers encrusted with multi-colored tiles leap out of bare iron frameworks. It is not a complete work of architecture, but any visitor to Barcelona who refuses to see it for that reason is a fool. Just so for *Beyond the Resurrection*, with one exception: Gordon Eklund is a young man, and growing in his craft with each book he publishes. I think that someday he will give us a complete cathedral.

#

***The God Machine*, by William Jon Watkins. Doubleday, \$5.95**

At the beginning of *The God Machine*, the reader finds Dr. Welsh, the book's hero, in a complete dystopia, a vicious police state that conducts mass purges, bugs its citizens, pollutes the atmosphere, and flies SSTs. Dr. Welsh occupies an ambiguous position in this society. He is a good guy and a lover of freedom, but he is also a Government hero, for it was his pioneer studies of non-verbal behavior, "the subtle persuasive powers beyond speech," that led to the awful thought-control methods of the dread Rehabilitation Squad.

When I reached this point in *The God Machine* (p. 4), I thought I knew what to expect. Dr. Welsh would join the underground and use his superior knowledge to help them smash the state. I also thought that this might be amusing; it's a nice idea—Erving Goffman as James Bond. What I was not prepared for was this:

He stiffened the first two fingers of his right hand and drove them upward through the socket of the man's left eye. He uncoiled his body with the blow and hooked his fingers upward as he felt them go through the flimsy bone at the back of the socket. The tips of his fingers anchored themselves behind the forehead and he snapped his arm back, drawing the thug forward by the inside of his skull.

It goes on more or less like this for the whole book. From a long loving description, near the end of the book, of the destruction of an army of bad guys:

The mixture of gasoline from the broken gas tanks and blood from the broken bodies made them look more like squashed tomatoes thrown from a passing car than like trucks.

Pornography is a slippery term in criticism, but it's a well-defined category of commercial fiction. The mark of commercial pornography is that the plot functions only as an armature on which the author can place erotic incidents. *The God Machine* fits this description, if "erotic" is replaced by "homicidal"; it is an example of the pornography of murder.

I can think of two possibilities: (1) William Jon Watkins is a hack; he produced this book because there is a ready market for kill-porn. (2) William Jon Watkins is sincere; this nasty and repellent little book was written by a nasty and repellent little man. Either way, it's a sobering thought.

#

3 November 1973

***An Alien Heat*, by Michael Moorcock, Harper and Row, \$4.95**

There are at least three Michael Moorcocks.

Moorcock 1 is a prolific hack, author of an unending stream of sword-and-sorcery novels. Moorcock 1 is a close student of the market; he recently discovered that his books sold

better if they had “sword” in their titles, and, drawing the obvious conclusion, has begun loading his titles with phallic code-words, producing books with names like *Sword of the Bull Tower*, or permutations thereof.

Moorcock 2 is the energetic promoter of avant-garde speculative fiction. As editor of *New Worlds*, Moorcock 2 transformed a conventional science fiction magazine into an impressive large-format journal with advanced graphics and even more advanced contents, the house organ of the British New Wave. The editorial policy of Moorcock’s *New Worlds* could be roughly described as unlimited enthusiasm for everything John Campbell loathed. This led to the publication of large amounts of pretentious garbage, but also to the appearance of some very fine, though highly unconventional, science fiction (e.g., *Camp Concentration*, large parts of *Barefoot in the Head*). Before *New Worlds* died at the hands of malicious distributors, it had played a major part in the Great Redefinition of the late sixties. (An anecdote of this period: An American visitor once said to Moorcock, “Mike, I should really subscribe to *New Worlds*. Half the stuff in it I can’t understand, and of the part I can understand, half I hate, but it looks so impressive on my coffee table.” “I know,” Moorcock said. “So many of our readers have that attitude that we give away a free coffee table with every subscription.”)



Moorcock 3 is a talented writer of science fiction, the fellow who wrote *Behold the Man* and *The Dark Corridor*.

Of course, there is really only one Michael Moorcock. This is the problem, for Moorcock 1’s slovenliness and Moorcock 2’s weakness for functionless countercultural razzle-dazzle keep infecting Moorcock 3’s novels. An example is Moorcock’s latest book, *An Alien Heat*.

An Alien Heat is set in the very far future. The universe is in bad shape; the End of Time is approaching. On Earth, though, everyone is having a high old time. *An Alien Heat* opens with a quotation from a *fin-de-siecle* decadent poet and a dedication to a rock group; this is fair warning, for the inhabitants of Moorcock’s future Earth, heirs to millennia of human culture, masters unlimited power, virtually immortal, turn out to be curious combinations of *fin-de-siecle* decadents and rock groupies: languid party-goers, bored sensualists, practitioners of the peacock-show and the put-on. One of them, Jherek Carnelian* decides on a whim to experience the antique sensation of falling in love; as the object of his affections, he picks an involuntary time-traveller from Victorian England, Amelia Underwood.

Now, this is as silly a plot-premise as any seen recently, but this time the silliness deliberate; Moorcock is not playing the End of Time for awe and wonder, the usual practice, but laughs. Most of the time he does this with deftness and ingenuity and

sometimes he is able to work some wonder into the comedy for good measure, notably in a description of a grotesque party given by the Duke of Queens (Moorcock's futurians have unfortunate Funny Names.) Unfortunately, Moorcock is not careful enough in fitting together the pieces of his imagined society; the result is that it begins to slip out of focus as the book progresses, and Moorcock's clever jokes begin to lose their point.

For example, at the beginning of the book, Jherek, who fancies himself a student of history, discourses on the difficulty of understanding the ancients, who "divided their sensations into different groupings— categories of sensations, some of which they did not find pleasurable, it seems." Jherek, of course, finds all sensations pleasurable. This strikes just the right nineteenth-century decadent tone, somewhere between middle J.-K. Huysmans and early Max Beerbohm. Alas, it is impossible to motivate a novel whose characters really think like that, so Jherek is soon pursuing pleasant sensations and avoiding unpleasant ones, just like those incomprehensible ancients.

Again, Jherek and his friends have as fuzzy a concept of history as the late C.B. DeMille. This is the basis of many jokes, such as:

Lake Billy the Kid was named after the legendary American explorer, astronaut, and bon-vivant, who had been crucified around the year 2000 because it was discovered he possessed the hind-quarters of a goat. In Billy the Kid's time such permutations were apparently not fashionable.

In the same vein is a long list of scrambled famous lovers ("Romeo and Julius Caesar. Windermere and Lady Oscar. Hitler and Mussolini"). Yet, when Jherek takes a time-trip to Victorian England in an attempt to find the missing Mrs. Underwood, he is sent off with this speech: "Speed through the hours, my Horos!...as Hitler sped to Eva. As Oscar sped to Bosie!" This is funny, but, in addition to being something of a repetition of the previous joke, it is also a contradiction of it; the two are not the product of the same imagined culture, and don't belong in the same book, unless it is a joke-book, not a novel.

For all its slovenliness, though, this book is full of good things, and original ones, too; Moorcock (at least in his incarnation as Moorcock 3) is not much like other science fiction writers, and his books are not much like others' books. So I suppose, on balance, that I would rather have *An Alien Heat* with all its flaws than not have it at all. But still I cannot help wishing that Moorcock would just once sit down and take his time and work things out more carefully and less flashily, and write a book I could praise with fewer qualifications.

The story of time paradox is a very special form of the story of time travel. In a typical time travel story, time is really just another spatial dimension; you go to the Byzantine Empire to have adventures, just as you go to Andromeda. The characteristic paradoxes of time travel, the closed causal loops, the events that cancel themselves out, are ignored or papered over, or perhaps invoked on rare occasions to give a jolt to a flagging plot. It is strange that there is not a richer literature of hard-core time paradox stories, stories in which the paradoxes are central; after all, there is nothing like a closed causal loop for

making your head feel funny, and making your head feel funny is one of the main functions of science fiction. Perhaps the subject is an inherently limited one; whatever the reason, the literature of time paradox consists of two monuments erected by Robert Heinlein ("By His Bootstraps" and "All You Zombies"), a handful of lesser stories, and vast amounts of drivel and trivia.

#

***The Man Who Folded Himself*, by David Gerrold, Random House, \$4.95**

There is now a new addition to the small canon of good time paradox stories. It is *The Man Who Folded Himself*, by David Gerrold. (Yes, David Gerrold the tribble-monger. The world is indeed full of surprises.)

The Man Who Folded Himself is dedicated to Larry Niven and shows his influence strongly. Niven has stated that ingenuity is the prime virtue for a science fiction writer; for Niven, the development of a science fiction story is primarily the development of idea, the exploration of variations, the working-out of unexpected consequences. This is the principle on which *The Man Who Folded Himself* is constructed. Gerrold has started with one of the standard models of time travel, and has sent his protagonist looping through time systematically demonstrating its consequences. Most of the time Gerrold is rigorously fair to his premises, and most of the time he is nevertheless able to draw surprising conclusions from them.

I'd like to expand a bit on that "most of the time," because I think there is one point where Gerrold has tripped over his own feet while criss-crossing time; readers uninterested in the theory of time travel may skip to the next paragraph. Gerrold's world is one in which you *can* change the past; that is to say, the universe does not have a unique future. In accordance with common experience, though, it does have a unique past; nobody walks around with two contradictory sets of memories. This leads to the standard picture of the branching universe: The universe develops in time in its steady way. Until a time traveler arrives from the future, whereupon it splits into two universes, identical in every respect except that *one* contains the time traveler and the other does not. A map of the whole thing would look like a tree, branching more and more as one moves futureward. (Actually, Gerrold says his universe doesn't branch; the time traveler arrives in a completely different universe with an identical past to his own. But this is just a novelty of nomenclature; if the two universes are identical, we might as well say they are the same, with no loss to anything.) So far, this is standard stuff. But what happens if a time traveler leaps into the future, beyond a branching point? One possibility would be for him to be duplicated, and for a copy of him to appear on every appropriate future branch, just as would have happened if he had traveled to the future like the rest of us, at the dull rate of one second per second. This seems to be the way things work for most of Gerrold's book; his hero can visit the future and see the effects of the changes he has made in the past. However, it is crucial to one part of Gerrold's plot that this is *not* what happens; here he says that a time traveler returns like a homing pigeon to his original branch. I don't think these two phenomena can be reconciled.

The Man Who Folded Himself is written in flat, declarative, prose, with lots of one-line paragraphs, rather like an old-time Hearst editorial. Since all of the book (except for a few interpolations and a frame at the beginning and end) is purportedly the journal of a callow young man named Danny Eakins who never matures emotionally, this is a perfectly appropriate voice, although it does get a bit embarrassing sometimes, as in the following, when Danny contemplates his own death:

Cease to exist.
Cease to exist.
The words echo in my head.
Cease to exist.
Until they have lost all meaning.
I try to imagine what it will be like.
No more *me*. The end of Danny.

At this point it is a tolerant reader who will not say, “the sooner the better.”

Emotionally, time travel has two faces: the bright multiverse of infinite possibility, and the grim infernal machine of closed causal loops. In the two stories I mentioned earlier, Heinlein looked at the dark face; both “By His Bootstraps” and “All You Zombies” are solipsist nightmares, the first implicitly, the second explicitly. *The Man Who Folded Himself* starts out full of bright exhilaration, but gradually darkens into another version of the solipsist nightmare. With all of time at his disposal, Danny spends most of his life looping back and forth over the same few months, filling a small portion of space-time with duplicate Dannys, in order to play with himself at a life-long party punctuated by auto/homo-erotic orgies. Danny has one great tragic romance; it is with the only woman he could ever love, an alternative version of himself, born female on a distant branch of the time-tree.

I said this story has a frame; at the end of the book, we learn that the journal we have read has been taken by old-Danny from dead-Danny and given to young-Danny, along with the wonderful timebelt. Young-Danny has read the journal and, unlike us, he is not horrified but deeply touched. He says, “I feel a wonderful empathy for that beautiful old man.” Of course; what else *could* he feel? Even in a multiverse of infinite possibility, you only get out what you put in.

Despite the frequent patches of bad writing, this is an astonishingly successful book. Maybe Larry Niven is right; maybe all you really need is ingenuity.

#

The hero, a man of our time, awakens from suspended animation to find himself in a drastically altered future society. Its inhabitants are at first strangely reticent, but after a few chapters, when the reader is safely hooked, they change their ways, and give the hero long lectures, with slides and demonstrations. By a strange quirk of fate, the hero finds himself the focus of contending forces, each of which hopes to use him to resolve its long-

standing power struggle with the others. At first he is as innocent as a newborn duckling, ready for imprinting by the first mother-duck surrogate to waddle his way. As the novel progresses, though, he masters the situation, outwits the contending forces, wins the love of a good woman, seizes control, and begins the salvation of the world.

***Final Solution*, by Richard E. Peck, Doubleday, \$4.95**

This is the basic plot of *Final Solution*, by Richard E. Peck. It is the Volkswagen of science fiction plots. Unchanged in basic design for many years, aesthetically uninteresting, clumsy, and under-powered, it nevertheless offers great advantages: it is cheap, sturdy, reliable, simple to operate, and made of widely-available mass-produced parts. It can carry whatever you want (if it is not too large nor too heavy) wherever you want to go (if it is on a good road).

In the case at hand, what is being carried is a satire on certain trends in American life, mainly in American academic life. (The principal setting of *Final Solution* is a university of the future.) Among Mr. Peck's targets are student violence (assassination is an occupational hazard of university presidents), "third world" consciousness (faculty members are "expected to speak a fossilized version of contemporary Black English), the rage for relevance (among others, there is a professor whose "pioneering work in Engine Repair had drawn accolades from progressive educators throughout Detroit"), and, in the larger world, the awesome autonomy and power of the Director of the FBI (who is still, by tradition, called "Mr. Hoover").

As you have probably noticed, these are hardly current trends. The campuses have been quiet for several years, Black Studies courses are in deep trouble, enrolment in freshman physics and chemistry courses is skyrocketing, and the autonomy of the Director of the FBI has been fed into a paper shredder. One might say that this is just Mr. Peck's bad luck; books take time to write and publish, and the world changes. I think not; *Candide* is still fun to read, and *Dr. Strangelove* to see, for all the world has changed since they were made. Good satire cuts to the bone, but to cut to the bone you must first see the bone beneath the flesh. Good satirists see deep; this is why their works are so funny (since deep insights are surprising, and surprise is important in humor), and why they do not date easily. Bad satirists see clichés; this is why their works are dull, and why they are dated on the day of publication. (They write clichés, too; *Final Solution* has characters that hover like mother hens and rooms that are riots of colors).

One last thing: In a review of this kind of book, there is always a suspicion that disparagement of style is a mask for disagreement with content. Therefore I should state that, like Mr. Peck, I teach at a large urban university, and that I agree with most of his opinions, as do many right-thinking persons. Unfortunately, right thinking is not satire; if it were, Norman Cousins would be Jonathan Swift.

Yes, just like Jerry Cornelius in *The Final Programme*, or Jerry Cornell in Moorcock's spy spoof *The Chinese Agent*. What is this obsession? Don't ask me; I'm Jewish.

#

4 August 1974

***To Die in Italbar*, by Roger Zelazny, Doubleday, \$4.95**

Maybe the Joe Blotz test will help.

The test is used by honest editors considering stories by famous writers: "What would I think of this if it were a story by somebody I had never heard of, by Joe Blotz? I think I would give *To Die In Italbar* by Joe Blotz an ecstatic review, "Blotz writes well; he can describe fast action and strong emotions with equal skill; he has a fertile imagination and creates colourful characters. Joe Blotz is clearly one of the most promising new writers to appear in a long time. Perhaps he is too much influenced by Roger Zelazny, but..."



No, it doesn't help. There is no avoiding the shadow; it is impossible to write about late Zelazny without comparing him to early Roger Zelazny.

In 1963 Roger Zelazny published "A Rose for Ecclesiastes"; in 1969 *Lord of Light* won the Hugo. These dates define Zelazny's prime; *sans peur et sans reproche*, he was the darling of science fiction. I remember asserting publicly in 1967 there was more real science in a page of Zelazny than in the collected works of George O. Smith; at about the same time, Harlan Ellison wrote that Zelazny was the reincarnation of Geoffrey Chaucer. I quote these statements as evidence of the spirit of the age rather than of critical acumen; either of them could be translated as "Wow!" with negligible loss of content.

But we were wowing with good reason. In an important sense Zelazny really was without fear and without blame; he would try the most daring tricks, and bring them off.

Zelazny's famous skill as a culture-magpie is an outstanding instance: He would cast a computer as both Faust and Adam, mix grail legend with electric psychotherapy, work a line from the *Cantos* into a story whose basic plot was the old pulp chestnut about the white hunter and Miss Richbitch. ("For a Breath I Tarry," "He Who Shapes," "The Doors of His Face, The Lamps of His Mouth".) Any fool could have tried these things, and, maddened by Zelazny's example*, many did; for a time we had myths like some people have mice. But Zelazny was not his epigones; he made it work.

How did he do it? We can get a clue by looking at one of Zelazny's favorite devices, a rapid shift of viewpoint, or, better yet, shift of values. In the simplest case, this is a shift from a noble view of heroism to a comic one. An example: In *Lord of Light*, a band of heroes is planning an assault on Heaven. One of them, Tak, has been incarnated for much of the book in the body of an ape. Great deeds are being plotted, and conversation is in Zelazny's best high-mimetic tone, full of noble vows and Homeric epithets, ("I have always wanted to go to battle at the side of the Binder.") After the strategy meeting,

refreshments are served. Tak requests a banana. Blackout. Another: In “...And Call Me Conrad”, the Black Beast of Thessaly is about to annihilate Conrad when it is annihilated itself by a bolt from stage left. The bolt has been fired by Conrad’s wife Cassandra, whom he had believed to be dead until this moment. His first words to her are, “Uh—hi, Cassandra. How’ve you been?” (The editor of the book version (*This Immortal*) changed this line to “Cassandra!” He felt the original text was inappropriate. Indeed it was; that was the point.)

This is an old device. It is a form of internalized comic relief—not the porter in *Macbeth*, but Hamlet in *Hamlet*. It is even an old device in our world; Fritz Leiber has used it systematically since the beginning of his career; *Adept’s Gambit* is permeated with it. It is sometimes called irony, but this is not quite the right word, for the comic vision does not undercut the heroic one, but underlines it. Wit is a better word, if we remember that wit is the root of both witty and witting. The double vision is richer than the sum of its parts, because each part illuminates the other.

This method of multiple vision, of playing one aspect of a thing against another, is characteristic of much of the best work of Zelazny’s high period. It occurs in more complicated forms than the one I have described. For example, any moderately well-trained English major could write pages on the way Frost is played against Faust in “For a Breath I Tarry.” Parts of the story are direct parody; Frost makes Faust funny. This leads to an implicit comparison between Faust’s sophistication and Frost’s naivete; Faust makes Frost funny. The endings of the stories illuminate each other; Frost succeeds where Faust fails because it is better to seek humanity than divinity. Etc.

Another approach to the same statement: There are worlds in science fiction that stick in your mind; they are solid. Hal Clement’s Mesklin, Frank Herbert’s Dune, Ursula LeGuin’s Winter are very different places in most respects, but they do have this in common. They extend beyond the books that contain them; one feels that there is more to be said. Typically, Zelazny’s worlds are not like this. They have no physics, no ecology, no sociology. They are intricately patterned and brightly colored, but they are flat, stage-sets, cartoons. But they do not need to be solid; for Zelazny’s purposes, a solid world would be as useless an object as a solid violin. The function of the thing is to resonate.

This is one great advantage of working with multiple visions, of being both witty and witting. It enables the writer to assimilate material that would be too thin, too inappropriate, or simply too silly to handle in any other way. Consider the problem of the Hero. Science Fiction deals frequently with large actions; large actions are done by Heroes, people larger than life, and most readers over the age of fourteen find such mighty doers of great deeds ludicrous. The problem is to keep the man who saves the world from being preposterous. One solution is to humanize him, show him as being sometimes afraid, confused, tired, and wrong-headed. This is the solution favored by a writer like Ursula LeGuin (*The Lathe of Heaven*).

Another solution is to root him firmly in an imagined world, so his heroism is seen as a natural outgrowth of his social and psychological background. This is the solution

favored by a writer like Samuel Delany (*Nova*)**. Zelazny's solution was not to eliminate the preposterousness, but to exploit it. Conrad Nomikos is an immortal man who experiences high adventures and ends up owning Earth. You find this hard to take seriously? So did Zelazny. It's one of the things he plays against in "...And Call Me Conrad," and this play is not only interesting in itself, it makes the heroism more acceptable. Conrad the admirable real hero and Conrad the preposterous comic-book hero define two surfaces; in the space they enclose Zelazny creates his resonances.

(I except from most of this "He Who Shapes" (*The Dream Master*). This marvelous short novel is in many ways a direct contradiction of the main themes and method of Zelazny's early work. A sign: "He Who Shapes" is as full of myth as any Zelazny story of the period^ but the myth is here explicitly identified with psychopathology. It occurs to me that this may be meta-wit: Zelazny playing against Zelazny.)

Of course, this is a paradigmatic Zelazny I have been describing, triple-distilled essence of Zelazny, Zelazny as Zelazny, hero, if you want. The real Zelazny was more complicated and requires a lengthier analysis with many more qualifying phrases. Nevertheless, I think I have the essential outlines right; this is how he did it, how he made it work. But this makes what happened in the late sixties very strange. For, about this time, Zelazny abandoned his method but retained the material that made sense only when coupled with the method. *To Die in Italbar* has flat backgrounds: Italbar itself has the social and economic structure of an American town, for all that it is set on an alien planet and has a few pieces of futuristic machinery and a pet lizard or two stuck here and there in the foreground. It has gigantically larger-than-life protagonists: Two of the main characters have literally god-like powers, another is a highly successful one-man commando army, fighting an interstellar state from his private fortress, another is a paranoid prostitute redeemed by love, another is a living dead man. You find it hard to take seriously? So do I but Zelazny has no qualms: everything in *To Die in Italbar* is viewed straight on, with a single vision, as dead serious as *Children Of the Lens*.

I do not know why Zelazny began this process of reverse alchemy five years ago, why he put away his magician's tricks and turned his gold into lead. Maybe he simply ran out of steam; it happens often enough in literary careers; being a genius is a profession for the young. Or it might have been the pressures of the market. Zelazny began free-lancing full time about five years ago, and the economics of sf writing are not such as to allow time for tinkering with the elaborate and delicate machineries of wit. I don't know why; all I know is that we once had something unique and wonderful, and it is gone, and what we have in its place is only a superior writer of preposterous adventures.

Still, I enjoy reading preposterous adventures as much as anyone, and I enjoyed reading *To Die in Italbar*, for it is a superior specimen of the type. It is well written; fast action and strong emotion are described with equal skill, the author has a fertile imagination and creates colorful characters. Pity it wasn't written by Joe Blotz.

#

Like Roger Zelazny, Larry Niven is a writer with deep literary roots; it's just that we don't notice them so much, because they are so much our own. Niven's stories invoke not Pound, Goethe, and Marlowe, but Arcott, Wade, and Morey; Larry Niven writes astounding stories of super-science, and he writes them very well. In the late thirties, when American science fiction was beginning to establish momentum, there was a feeling that science fiction was getting better, and would continue to get steadily better for a long time. This has held up better than most anticipations of the period; however, something has gone wrong with the details. If you were to go back by time machine to the first World Science Fiction Convention (Frank R. Paul, guest of honor) and present to the thirty-two attendees at the banquet Thomas Disch, say, or Barry Malzberg (winner of the John Campbell Award), and tell them, "This is the superman of the future!" I imagine they would recoil in horror. "Not this," they cry in my fancy. "This is some degenerate mutant, not the true path of evolution!" Larry Niven though, ah, that would be something else; Larry Niven they would understand.

***Protector*, by Larry Niven. Ballantine, \$1.25**

Protector is two long novelettes passing as a novel. The first half of the book is Niven's famous story of six years ago, "The Adults." In "The Adults," as you may remember, it was revealed that we are not earth-bred at all, but are in fact the mutated descendants of a failed colonization attempt by an alien race, the Pak. Indeed, we are not only aliens, but neotenic aliens. Our adulthood corresponds to a larval stage of Pak life, the breeder. At a time corresponding to human middleage, a Pak metamorphoses into a new form; it becomes a protector, sterile, nearly immortal, highly intelligent, driven by genetic programming to protect its young at any cost. We do not undergo a similar metamorphosis because the biochemical trigger for the change, tree-of-life root, does not grow properly on Earth; this is also the reason the original Pak colony failed. "The Adults" dealt with the arrival in the solar system of a Pak spaceship containing tree-of-life; by the end of the story, one man, Jack Brennan, has been changed into the first human protector. He is the Brennan-monster, not human, but not an adult Pak either. The second half of *Protector* is a sequel set two centuries later; it has no characters in common with "The Adults," except Brennan.

"The Adults" has been slightly revised for the book version. Some of the revision has an obvious function—it plants clues developed in the sequel—but much of it is minor rewording.*** This is puzzling; either Niven worries more than one would think about small points of style, or someone at *Galaxy* did some heavy editing of the original manuscript.

In any case, either the old or the new version of "The Adults" fits smoothly onto the all-new part of *Protector*. Both halves of the book are permeated with the ingenuity that has been the driving energy of Niven's stories since his earliest work. For Niven, the development of a novel is the development of ideas, much more than it is the exploration of character, or the creation of an imagined world, or even that old pulp standby, the resolution of conflict. The primacy of ideas links Niven to the super-science writers of the thirties, an age when concept was king and *Astounding* would trumpet new stories as

“thought variants” or “novas”; the deemphasis of conflict separates him from them. There are no Blackie DuQuesnes in *Protector*; indeed, there are no human villains at all. Everyone we meet is intelligent, benevolent, and likable; you couldn’t ask for a nicer bunch of guys. The Paks are an alien menace of sorts, but they are resolutely offstage, except for Phssthpok, the pilot of the Pak ship. And even Phssthpok is handled very unconventionally, by the usual standards of adventure fiction. The defeat of a villain is a big scene in any novel really organized around conflict; Phssthpok’s defeat is so underplayed that we don’t even see it directly; we just hear Brennan’s laconic report of the event.

The deemphasis of detailed world-building separates Niven from the writers with whom he is usually grouped, “hard-science” writers like Poul Anderson or Arthur Clarke. For example, a long section of *Protector* takes place on a wonderland, an artificial planetoid named Kobold. This sort of thing, *A Tour of Strange*, is part of Anderson’s or Clarke’s stock in trade; either of them would have shown us, to some extent, how it works, and thus given it verisimilitude. (This is one of the important things hard-science writers use their hard science for.) Niven’s treatment is very different; he is interested, not in verisimilitude, but in ingenuity; Kobold is a collection of unexplained marvels. It is exactly what one of Niven’s characters facetiously calls it, “a Disneyland.” (*A Coney Island of the Mind* is a great title that is now wasted on a book of bad poems by Ferlinghetti; it would serve better attached to Niven’s collected works.)

Indeed, to find parallels to Niven’s work we have to go outside sf altogether, to the locked-room mysteries of John Dickson Carr or the bedroom farces of Georges Feydeau. Here also we have the uninterest in verisimilitude, the deemphasis of conflict, the overwhelming importance of ingenuity. (The great moment comes when we discover that the murderer had no legs, that Clemenceau has been looking through the window.) Writers like Carr and Feydeau are sometimes called mechanical, and I suppose the metaphor could be extended to Niven, but when I use it I mean nothing pejorative. The machine I think of is not some ugly device stamping out malformed plastic flowerpots, but some great astronomical clock somewhere North of the Alps. It has sixteen dials on its face and a thousand hand-made moving parts inside, and every year at high noon on Annunciation day it rings bells, and a gilded angel comes from behind a door to bow before a gilded Virgin. It may not be the highest form of art, but it’s pretty wonderful after its fashion, and I’m glad I live in a world that contains objects like it, and objects like Larry Niven’s books.

*and those of Samuel R. Delany and Cordwainer Smith, who were mining some of the same veins, though with different tools.

**In this sense, Delany (another darling of the sixties, and also with good reason) was Zelazny’s opposite. Typically, Delany would strive to maintain a single vision, work for solidity, carefully develop detailed scientific, cultural, and psychological background. Even Delany’s deliberate homage to Zelazny, “We, In Some Strange Power’s Employ, Move in a Rigorous Line, “ shows the difference; nothing could be less like Zelazny than the meticulous anatomy of Delany’s imagined global power network.

***e.g., “There was risk in being the first to meet an alien species,” is changed to, “There were risks in being the first to meet an alien species. “ When I say minor, I mean *minor*.

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Think a little! Don't be afraid of straining your brains. They won't break.
-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*

Reflections On an Old Interview

By Gregory Benford

It is odd indeed to reread an interview 35 years old. I recall the day when Paul Turner and Bill Rotsler turned up with audio gear and Sid Coleman, midday on a bright Sunday in Laguna Beach. We taped the interview in our yard, with Bill snapping photos. The work over, we opened an oblong red, got stoned, and went out to dinner with my wife, Joan. Life was good, the world was young, the dinosaurs had recently left the stage.

Some odd notes resound right away: *Who anticipated real-time television communication with the first man on the moon?*

BENFORD: *One is influenced more by dreams than by realities.*



Paul Turner, William Rotsler, and friends. Los Angeles, November 1969.

I didn't know it then, but in fact about half a dozen stories did that, some from the 1940s. Then Sid says,

I assure you, one of the reasons for doing science, especially the kind of science I do (elementary particle physics, high energy theory) is that it makes your head feel funny, Goddamned strange. That's also the feeling I get out of SF.

I recalled just that sensation, plus the deeper one: for a brief time, there's something about how the universe works that you know and know it true; it's yours. So when I read this:

Sid: *Now you have to ask, why did people think of these strange ideas? They thought of these ideas because they were under external constraints. In the case of relativity it was the constraint of explaining experimental reality. It seems to be a fact of the way the human mind works that your imagination functions better if it is constrained than if it is free.,., It serves the same function that the rigid metrical structure of the sonnet does in poetry.*

—I felt a shock of recognition. That led to my standard line: If you've written a twelve-line poem that doesn't rhyme, you haven't written a bad sonnet, because you haven't written a sonnet at all. Constraint matters. I didn't know I felt that way then, and much of why I did lies with Sid. I learned a lot of what it means to be a scientist by listening to Sid.

Sid: For example, one of the writers who does this for me most frequently, who gives me the same sort of pleasure that I get from understanding a great scientific discovery or making a small one of my own, is R.A. Lafferty.

For me, it was Larry Niven. So it surprised me to read:

VERTEX: *From your special point of view, as scientists, do you think hard-science SF is more important than soft-science SF?*

BENFORD: *No.*

That surprises me because I feel quite differently now. Then I thought social issues dominated scientific ones; now I think they're impossible to untangle. Space, weapons, biotech (which I'm working in as an executive now; I'm no biologist!)—all entwine science and society in ways hard to unravel. Starting in the late 1970s I became an advocate for the view that hard sf was central to sf, the true core, even if small in compass. In this I'm a hardliner, and my general coolness toward fantasy emerged from my perception that it embodied much that was bad for our society as a whole—a distraction from the gathering clouds that I could see, particularly the impact we have on the environment. (*Timescape* I've always thought of as an environmental novel. Indeed, it's under development at Warner Bros. for just that reason; as it was once before in the mid-1990s.) So I became a hard sf type, though I've written some fantasy (in fact, my first published story in *F&SF* was). That all started here, in the interview, for Sid discussed off-mike the whole landscape of sf, and I learned a lot from that.



VERTEX: *What is that special turn of mind that attracts people to begin with?*

COLEMAN: *One answer is superior taste. Maybe superior neuroticism. I suspect the truth lies somewhere in between, but just where I don't know.*

BENFORD: *I don't think it is superior anything. It is just a quirk of taste. Taste is basically inexplicable.*

Pretty much true, I think. I read pretty widely and don't find much of interest in mainstream novels, but sf and mysteries hold their charm. But it's a matter of taste.

Lastly, it's good to see your obvious errors in prediction. I said:
If the rate of change declines, then SF will probably decline. Certainly, I think one of the major things that will acclimatize us to change is SF.

I didn't see coming the rise of fantasy, which I think is largely a bad sign for an advanced

society. We're losing our technological edge, the strong suit of the USA, and a powerful reason why modern sf came from us. But now... The highest circulation sf magazine in history is now coming out monthly at 400,000 copies/month (with three companion magazines) in ... China. I met the perky young editor, a woman around 30, at the Tokyo WorldCom this last September.

Sid should have been there. It's good to meet the future in person.

I have been a soreheaded occupant of a file drawer labeled "Science Fiction" . . . and I would like out, particularly since so many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a urinal.

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons*, "Science Fiction"

Vertex Roundtable Interviews

Dr. Sidney Coleman and Dr. Gregory Benford*

Interviewed by Paul C. Turner

Photographs by William Rotsler

Despite the fact that he is only 35, Dr. Sidney Coleman has been teaching at Harvard University for over ten years, and he is now Harvard's Professor of Theoretical Physics. Originally from Chicago, he received his doctorate from Cal Tech. His specialty is the origin of particles, and Greg Benford (see below) says "He is known as Counter Example Coleman, for he has destroyed a lot of theories by finding counter examples, showing where the ideas have failed." Dr. Coleman travels a great deal, both for pleasure and to lecture throughout the world at various universities and scientific conventions, and he is a very well-known personality in the science fiction field.

Dr. Gregory Benford, a frequent contributor to Vertex, received his Ph.D. from the University of California at San Diego, then went into research while holding the position of Associate Professor of Physics at the University of California's Irvine Campus. He is currently engaged in research on controlled thermonuclear fusion for the Atomic Energy Commission. Dr. Benford has had two science fiction novels, 30 short stories, and many science articles published, and is the co-author of the forthcoming textbook, Astronomy and Life in the Universe.

VERTEX: How do you, as scientists, feel about science and SF?

COLEMAN: There are a lot of things to say about science and SF, but I think the important thing is that they are very very different sorts of things. Of course, SF uses science, but it uses it for all sorts of complicated purposes and transforms science in the process of using it much as I transform food in the process of using it. I think there is a terribly naive belief, a really awful error, that in some sense the science is in SF like a passenger is in a car—that just ain't so.



BENFORD: Yes, I agree that it is not a passenger; it is actually part of the mechanism. Good *scientific* SF is like an iceberg. Ninety percent of the background is not showing, but you can sense it if the writer has failed to provide it. That is why I think that, although SF is not didactic, you don't learn

things about nuclear physics or biology from it; you can certainly get a feeling of what the scientific process feels like.

COLEMAN: I think that's a great point about the tip of the iceberg, because one function science can serve in SF is giving the writer that invisible background necessary to give his imagined world a feeling of solidity. It's true you can do this with imagination and hard work by just inventing an enormous background that doesn't appear in the story, as Avram Davidson is doing for his *Virgil Magus* stories, but you can also use the existing body of scientific knowledge as that invisible remainder of the iceberg that gives the feeling of coherent validity.

VERTEX: Can you boil that down to about a sentence and a half?

COLEMAN: An SF writer can use science the same way Dante used the world of medieval theology. . . .

BENFORD: To infuse every particle of the work without being obtrusive.

COLEMAN: Tolkien did that sort of thing with the languages he created for the *Lord of the Rings*. He created them by working backward, which he was quite competent to do, since he is a philologist.

BENFORD: World-spinning is a thing which is common to all fiction, but it is most strongly seen in SF and fantasy.

COLEMAN: One of the effects SF can give—that is almost impossible to do outside of SF—is the cosmogenetic game. The game of giving birth to a created world at least as rich and coherent as the real world. That's a kick!

VERTEX: I have heard SF writers referred to as prophets.

COLEMAN: I deny SF as prophecy. Prophecy *qua* prophecy has a bad track record.

BENFORD: They are prophets only in the sense that the man who operates a shotgun is a marksman. You can try to anticipate the possible range of futures, but you can't predict *the* future. *The* future is only one thing. The game of SF predicting the future has had a track record so bad that it didn't even anticipate the social circumstances or outcome of the space program.

COLEMAN: Who anticipated real-time television communication with the first man on the moon? There must have been a thousand stories written about the first moon landing, and in not one of them, to my knowledge, were the people on the moon being watched by a million families on their home television sets. Who anticipated the Russians sending up Sputnik? That was something not anticipated in the United States—that the Americans would not be the first in space.

VERTEX: It is interesting to note that the *way* we went to the moon wasn't anticipated either. No one thought of a lunar landing module, for instance; it was always one space ship. SF spaceships landed on the moon's surface and then returned to land on Earth. I don't know of a single story where it was a modular approach, or one where systems analysis was anticipated, even though systems analysis was the tool used to develop space flight.

COLEMAN: There are exceptions, such as Arthur C. Clarke's *Prelude to Space*, which understands that any moon project will be a very very large scale, necessarily bureaucratic endeavour. On the other hand, there is *Rocketship Galileo*, by Heinlein, which, as I remember, involved three boys and their uncle building a rocketship in their backyard and flying to the moon. That was written when—1947?

BENFORD: One is influenced more by dreams than by realities.

VERTEX: But isn't that one of the major functions of SF? To blow the mind, to really expand all the senses.

COLEMAN: That's another correlation between science and SF. Some of the pleasures that you get out of science you also get out of SF. This is something probably very special to me and Greg and other people who are actually working scientists; but, I assure you, one of the reasons for doing science, especially the kind of science I do (elementary particle physics, high energy theory) is that it makes your head feel funny, Goddamned strange. That's also the feeling I get out of SF.

There's a great saying: The future is not only stranger than we imagine, but stranger than we *can* imagine. For example, something like quantum mechanics or the theory of relativity are much stranger, much more mind-twisting, than anything in the way of philosophical speculation. Truth, in fact, is much stranger than fiction in a funny way.

Now you have to ask, why did people think of these strange ideas? They thought of these ideas because they were under external constraints. In the case of relativity it was the constraint of explaining experimental reality. It seems to be a fact of the way the human mind works that your imagination functions better if it is constrained than if it is free. One of the functions of trying to make an SF story consistent within itself is that it seems to inspire people to heights of disciplined imagination that they just can't get to without these constraints. I think that is an important function of science in SF. It serves the same function that the rigid metrical structure of the sonnet does in poetry.

In at least one sense there is a peculiar point of tangency, in that some of the pleasures of actually doing science are also some of the pleasures of actually reading good SF. Not necessarily *scientific* or *hard-science* SF. For example, one of the writers who does this for me most frequently, who gives me the same sort of pleasure that I get from



understanding a great scientific discovery or making a small one of my own, is R.A. Lafferty.

VERTEX: Dr. Benford, when did you begin reading SF?

BENFORD: 1948 or '49. I was seven or eight.

VERTEX: Do you think it influenced you in your choice of profession?

BENFORD: Oh, yes. One of the first things I ever read was *Rocketship Galileo*, by Heinlein, and it seemed to me that it had a larger dimension than the other books I was reading, which were all set on farms or were about people taking streetcars to places. It just had a larger canvas, and I found it more interesting.

COLEMAN: I started reading SF in early 1951 when I was 13 years old, and I have been reading it steadily ever since. The first thing I ever read was *Needle*, by Hal Clement, and I thought it was a marvellous book. The second thing I read was *The World of Null A*, by A.E. Van Vogt, and I thought it was a *fantastically* good book. . .

BENFORD: And you were wrong

COLEMAN: Well, I've modified my opinion somewhat. I still think it is a fantastically good book in many ways. The third thing I read was *The Big Eye* by Paul Erlich, and I thought it was lousy.

VERTEX: Dr. Coleman, did SF have anything to do with your choice of profession?

COLEMAN: No, I had already decided at that time that I wanted to be a scientist. I don't think that my reading of SF has had much influence on my professional life. Of course, my general interest in SF has had an enormous influence on my personal life. I don't think you can feed that much of any kind of literature into your head without it influencing you in indirect and subtle ways. I wouldn't be sitting here talking with you, or have half the friends I have, were it not for SF.

BENFORD: Same here, about the friends.

VERTEX: From your special point of view, as scientists, do you think hard-science SF is more important than soft-science SF?

BENFORD: No.

COLEMAN: That would lead us to the ludicrous position of saying that Hal Clement is a more important writer than A J. Budrys, which I don't think any of us, no matter how fond we are of *Mission of Gravity*, would want to say. Surely that's not true.

BENFORD: I think that, as a writer, clearly Budrys was superior.

COLEMAN: Yes, I agree.

BENFORD: But as a person who influenced the thinking of a lot of people, Hal Clement may be more important, simply because most scientists that I know were influenced by SF at an early age, and they read people who wrote hard SF.

COLEMAN: You mean that's what turned them into scientists, or made them interested in science?

BENFORD: No, I don't know if it's causal. I do know that there is a clear correlation.

VERTEX: Perhaps they read science fiction because they are interested in science, not the other way around.

COLEMAN: I was interested in science more than enough to become a scientist long before I ever read an SF story.

BENFORD: Probably most often the events occur simultaneously. SF is a way to get at the ambience of science—the thrill of discoveries. The kind of feeling of the way things work in distant fields, shall we say. That is: what is the balance of the facts that one learns in science? What is their impact on human beings? And it is necessary to have the science more or less correct if you are going to make the right guesses about the impact of science and its resultant technology on people.

VERTEX: What about most of the scientists you know—do they read SF?

COLEMAN: No, many of them read it when they were teenagers, but they've abandoned it now.

BENFORD: I might add that most scientists I know have abandoned almost all reading.

COLEMAN: Some I know are quite literary and cultured people, but I would say only a small proportion read SF. SF is a genre that makes a tremendous first impression, because of these ideas which have been developed within the community of SF. All the little twists and turns of time travel or how to make up faster than light spaceships or how to run a galactic empire. They're all there. They're common property. But if you've never heard of SF and you pick up a copy of *Amazing* or *Analog* or *Vertex*, all of these things burst upon you WOW! FANTASTIC! Very rich. Thousands and thousands of new ideas. It comes back to the thing that Moskowitz was always yammering about: the sense of wonder. SF is very good at giving you that sense of wonder. To the people in this room, of course, these aren't new ideas. They are clichés with maybe tiny little twists on them. But when you first read them you don't realize that they're the product of slow development by many minds and it's very exciting. After you have read it for a year or



two and find these same ideas coming back again and again, then, unless you have a special turn of mind, you're going to get bored by it. The sense of wonder has disappeared. So you stop reading SF.

VERTEX: What is that special turn of mind that attracts people to begin with?

COLEMAN: One answer is superior taste. Maybe superior neuroticism. I suspect the truth lies somewhere in between, but just where I don't know.

BENFORD: I don't think it is superior anything. It is just a quirk of taste. Taste is basically inexplicable.



COLEMAN: There is a lot of SF that is very good by anybody's standards. Not just by our standards, but by F.R. Levenson's standards, by Edmond Wilson's standards.

BENFORD: Why is it that these gentlemen have never recognized it?

COLEMAN: SF has a bad name for a lot of complicated reasons that we all know about. In a lot of people's minds, SF is still Creature Features, Buck Rogers, and comic strips, although that is beginning to disappear.

VERTEX: Pulp. That was its original bad name—pulp fiction.

COLEMAN: Also, finding good SF requires a certain amount of investigation, a certain amount of patience. If I just tell someone, "There is very good stuff in SF," they say, "Okay" and go down to the drugstore and buy the first SF novel they pick up, probably *Candor and the Three-Breasted Queen of Calistro*, or something like that. So they decide that I am crazy and their original opinion was right. You have to be very careful. If I give them *The Left Hand of Darkness*, or something like that, they will agree—this is very good stuff. I have become the SF connection for some people. Whenever I come into town they say, "What are the good SF novels that have been written since we last saw you?" They have no intention of ploughing through all that garbage themselves to find out which the good ones are. Most of it is terrible.

BENFORD: I think any flaw in a work of fiction, any flaw visible to a reader, tends to discredit the work.

VERTEX: You're talking about fiction in general?

BENFORD: Right. In SF you have the odd circumstance, as you do also in mystery fiction, that some small fraction of the populace will be specialists in the area. In the true

lit-biz sense of the word, this doesn't matter. On the other hand, for a small minority of the populace, a scientific flaw is a disturbing element and destroys some of the enjoyment of the story. This is unavoidable, but there's no point in not admitting it.

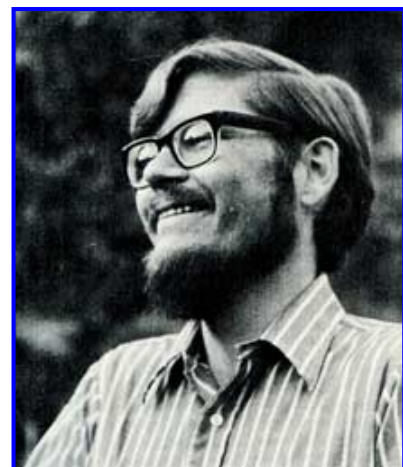
COLEMAN: Oh, on that level I agree with you. For example, if you know any biology you will find James Blish's *Seedling Stars* extremely disturbing. Or if you know any physics you will find Poul Anderson's *Tau Zero* extremely disturbing. But that's not the point. The writer is not writing for that narrow specialized audience. I think he's writing for a larger audience, and for that larger audience it is quite legitimate to fake it. I think it was E.M. Forster who said, in the introduction to one of his short story collections, that one of the largest parts of the writer's art is the art of faking it. That's really true. Of course, it would be wonderful if a writer were omniscient and knew everything about everything he touches on, but most writers are not in that position and the idea is to arrange the story in such a way that his ignorance doesn't disturb the reader.

BENFORD: But even the ordinary reader of SF can find large holes in a number of prominent works of SF. Non-specialists I know could destroy, and did destroy within a few minutes, the entire background of such popular novels as, say, *The Andromeda Strain*.

COLEMAN: But *The Andromeda Strain* is something different. There the problem is not scientific accuracy, but ordinary sensibility. The worst thing to be said against *The Andromeda Strain* is not that it tells you lies about biology, but that it tells you lies about how people behave. *The Andromeda Strain* is a bad book because the characters' behaviors are not rationally motivated.

VERTEX: Why do you read SF?

BENFORD: I read SF because it has the capacity for changing one's head around in a way conventional fiction seldom can. It can reach states of metaphor which are unreachable by any other method. Perhaps the eventual impact of any SF piece is dependent not so much on how *much* correct science it has in it, but on how much it incorporates this into some other literary values we could name. It is more the mix in SF that is important. It is certainly not the hard science element itself that people read it for. I don't read SF for the hard science, though it is an interesting game to play, to find the author's mistakes. Larry Niven's *Neutron Star*, for instance, was very well plotted, but it had a large scientific error in it. The hero defeats the titled stress placed on him by the neutron star by, I believe, getting into the middle of the spaceship, which, in fact, is a completely invalid trick. The only way to relieve titled stress is to roll up into a ball, and even that wouldn't save you.



COLEMAN: One of the few circumstances in which assuming the fetal position is a rational response to danger.

VERTEX: Who do you feel are the best SF writers today?

COLEMAN: Ursula Le Guin, Tom Disch, Bob Silverberg in his good moments, although he has many bad ones, Ted Delaney. . . .

BENFORD: I don't like to make lists of SF writers, because everybody in the field is relatively even except Ursula Le Guin. Certainly, for people currently practicing now, I would have to subscribe to Sid's list.

COLEMAN: Throw in Joanna Russ.

BENFORD: Right, though she's probably the most uneven of the top-flight crew. You might notice that all of the people we listed are not those that you might classify as hard science SF writers.

COLEMAN: There are some people that you might classify as hard science SF writers that I would put in the list of very good second rank writers.

BENFORD: Poul Anderson, Larry Niven. . . .

COLEMAN: Yes, and in that list I'd stick people like R.A. Lafferty.

VERTEX: Of the SF writers, who do you feel have the best science in their fiction?

COLEMAN: Hal Clement is usually impeccable.

BENFORD: Yes, but he's not a very interesting writer.

COLEMAN: *Mission of Gravity* is a remarkable work of discipline and imagination, even though all the characters in it speak in the same voice.

BENFORD: Poul Anderson. He knows when he is throwing the game, when he is making a mistake. He knows when to fudge the science to make his plot work better, and that's the only important criterion you can place on somebody's science: that you keep it straight unless it conflicts with important literary elements. Poul Anderson has very good taste in this way. What's more, his sense of the poetry of sciences is, I think, a very important element both in his work and in the whole role of science in SF. People like the poetry of science. There is a great deal of wonder to the natural universe, and the ability to convey this in a piece of fiction is an obvious asset.

COLEMAN: Arthur Clarke, I think. Of course, Arthur Clarke has two modes of writing. There are stories like *Earthlight*, and there are stories like *The City and the Stars*, and it's the former mode I am discussing. In that mode his science is usually very good.

BENFORD: Heinlein, particularly in his juveniles.

COLEMAN: Yes, the Heinlein juveniles are outstanding examples of good science for SF, but to take something from physics, which both Greg and I know well, the treatment of relativity in *Time for the Stars* is ludicrous. That doesn't keep *Time for the Stars* from being a good book. It is a good book.

BENFORD: But the important thing in that book is that Heinlein at least knew something about relativity, and he was able to create a verisimilitude which made people accept what was going on in the pages of that book. If Barry Malzberg had done it—he may, in fact, know more about relativity than Heinlein did or does, but Malzberg would make it appear intrinsically unreal for his own purposes. It is that which I think a large number of people who read SF won't accept, because they want to believe that what they're reading could be real. They accept fiction that talks about the future as a real place, as a real metaphor.

VERTEX: Let's talk about the future of science in SF and about the effects on SF of our present technologically oriented society. Where do you think it is going?

COLEMAN: I don't know. The more I learn the harder I find it to predict the future. I just refuse to discuss the point. Maybe Greg is bolder than I.

BENFORD: Well, I have my own ideas about the future. I think that if the on-going feeling of optimism continues, the basic feeling, say, that there is a future and that the future is a realizable prospect which we can determine now—if that persists, then SF will persist. And it will probably have a fair technological component because the rate of change of the technological background is getting more and more rapid. If the rate of change declines, then SF will probably decline. Certainly, I think one of the major things that will acclimatize us to change is SF. There will ultimately be a social change, instituted either because of technological change or because of inherent social events, say the collapse of the United States, with its high-technology society. That sort of thing would spark and continue the need people have for adjusting to events.

VERTEX: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

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*Reprinted from *Vertex*, December 1973, with the permission of Diana Coleman, executor, and Gregory Benford. Special thanks to Gregory Pickersgill for discovering this article and furnishing OCR'd text and cover and photo scans.

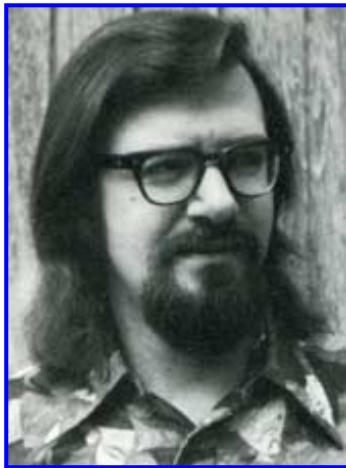
On writing: "Still and all, why bother? Here's my answer: Many people need desperately to receive this message: 'I feel and think much as you do, care about many of the things you care about, although most people don't care about them. You are not alone.'"
-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Timequake*

Something About Sidney*

By Terry Carr

December 7, 1970:

Sid Coleman was in town one weekend and he told a marvelous story which I'll now re-render weakly. I had just told him Walt Willis's anecdote about getting a transatlantic phone call from Harlan while Ken Bulmer or someone was visiting, and Ken was most impressed; he asked Walt if he often got calls from the States and Walt replied, "Only when it's important."



Terry Carr photographed
by Barbara Silverberg,
circa 1973.

Sid said the best chance he'd ever had to be impressive like that was once when he'd been invited to speak at a physics conference in Europe and they'd asked him for the title of his talk and in typical Sid fashion he'd forgotten to reply. So one morning there's Sid, happily asleep with this young lady he'd been dating for a couple of weeks, and the phone rings. "Will you answer it, please?" he asks her, and she does. Mutter mutter on the phone and her eyes get wide and she says, "It's long distance, from Geneva." Grumpily Sid sits up and takes the phone; the caller is the head of the physics conference, and he says he *must* have the title of Sid's talk right *now*, he's frantic. Sid says, "For Christ's sake, Carlo, it's seven o'clock in the morning here—call me back at noon!" and he hangs up.

"Now *that* was one impressed girl," Sid chortled.

December 21, 1970:

Sid Coleman was visiting us one weekend early this year when Damon and Kate Knight came over for an evening's visit. It happened that Damon and Kate left before midnight, with the result that we, and Sid in particular as I recall, sat and fretted intermittently for hours afterward about what bores we must have been to drive them away so early. It turned out later that they really did have to leave when they did, and a subsequent weekend visit to The Anchorage produced much more satisfying late-night conversations, but Sid will no doubt appreciate the following true story more than most anyway.

We were invited to the Dillon's for dinner last weekend, and arrived to the pervading scent of a beautiful leg of lamb. The conversation over dinner had that magical brilliance that only a touch of madness can confer. We heard the latest stories about Leo's family and the people who lived in the neighborhood, and we countered with scandalous tales about *you*, probably. Outrageous fantasies were conjured—including a deaf and dumb man who became a Freudian analyst so that no one would notice—and ridiculous ploys were detailed.

“You know,” said Leo, “I’ve been looking forward to tonight all week long. Next week’s Thanksgiving, but the hell with that—*this* is the celebration I knew I’d enjoy the most,” “Yeah,” said Diane, “he even told the kid we weren’t going to celebrate Thanksgiving at all this year. He said we’d get a great big turkey and cook it with lots of stuffing and cranberry sauce and all, and then send all of it to the poor people in Africa and we’d just eat baby food and beans.”

“Right,” said Leo; “*tonight* is when we *enjoy* ourselves!” Then he fell asleep.

So did Diane.

Leo’s head hung over the back of his chair; he snored softly. Diane had slumped forward on the table, her head in her arms. “I get so sleepy after dinner,” she murmured.

Leo snapped upright, blinking. “*Boy*, I really feel so groovy tonight; it’s so good to—” And he fell back, snoring.

Carol and I looked at each other, and at them: they didn’t move a muscle. Carol shrugged; I shrugged. We got up, put on our coats, left a note, and tiptoed out. We were home by 11:30; Carol watched a Bette Davis movie on television and I read some terrible science fiction magazines in my faithful search for good stories to reprint in *World’s Best SF*.

The next afternoon Leo called. “Hey, we really feel lousy about last night. What happened, we wanted to be sure everything was clear and free and we wouldn’t have anything nagging at us the least bit, so we stayed up all night the night before getting out a couple of jobs. Neither of us had slept since two nights before.”

Naturally we forgave them, especially when Leo invited us over again for this weekend. Naturally we believed them; we know it’s common practice with them to stay up all night to finish a job at the deadline and many’s the time I’ve picked up the cover for one of the SF specials at their place at 8:00 in the morning, on the way to work. And naturally, as Sid Coleman will understand, somewhere inside we were convinced that all that was irrelevant, that if only someone with a sparkling personality had been there they’d have been up talking animatedly till dawn.

Well, that’s water under the bridge; new challenges constantly arise. Monday Leo called again, to cancel out for this weekend. “Have you ever had chicken pox?” he asked us. Carol said yes; I couldn’t remember. “Well, don’t give up hope; if you haven’t had it before you may get it, because I just came down with it. The kid had it all last week. I must’ve been already contagious when you were over here Saturday night.”

So now I have fourteen more days to wait to find out if I’m going to come down with chicken pox. In a way I’ll be disappointed if I don’t—after all, how many 33 year olds have the chance to get both tonsillitis and chicken pox the same year?

February 1, 1971:

Sid Coleman came to town to spend New Year's Eve with us, and we took him over to a small party at the Dillons'. We entered to find Leo and Diane sitting around the kitchen table in semi-darkness rapping with a few friends from the neighborhood. This is the typical scene at their place; sometimes I think it must go on at all hours of every day, though I know that couldn't be true else how would they have got their cover paintings in on time? Not that they usually did, of course. Anyway, we came in and sat down, and someone said to me, "We're talking about ghosts."



Sidney Coleman in 2001.

"What about ghosts?" Carol asked.

Leo said, "He was telling a ghost story—go on, man, tell the story for them." So the guy told an A-number-one ghost story complete with mysterious moanings and deaths in the house and all.

When it was over, Leo asked me, "Did you believe that story?"

I temporized, then said, "Well, sure, I believe those things happened, but I don't necessarily think the explanation of ghosts is necessary."

"Uh-huh," said Leo. "Well, what about you, Dr. Coleman? You're a *physicist*, for chrissake. What's your opinion of this ghost story?"

"Yes, Sid," I said, leaning forward, "what does a representative of hidebound, repressive, orthodox science say when he's presented with evidence of supernatural phenomena?"

"What do we say?" said Sid. "Why, we just say, 'Feets, do your stuff!'"

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"Turk is always co-opting famous people from the past as fellow Turks," said Sid. "He told me, 'Attila was a Turkish name, you know'. I said, 'Ah, you think anybody who rode a horse and was an enemy of civilization is a close relative,' He turned to his wife and said perfectly deadpan, 'We don't know anyone named Geronimo, do we?'"

Sid also told me that the Israeli word for headlight is "silb." That's the singular, of course: one headlight. Two headlights are called *silbim*. (Isn't that trademarked? Will the makers of Sealbeam headlights try legal action to remove this word from the Hebrew language, as Coca-Cola tried to suppress "Coke" as a generic word for colas?) In return I told him the derivation of the word *silhouette*: it was named for Etienne de Silhouette, Minister of

Finance in Paris in 1759. He was very strict in economic matters and anything done cheaply and sparsely was nicknamed “a la Silhouette.”

Refreshed by our lunch and the intelligence of our conversation, we continued our hike—and “turned left at the wrong pine tree,” as Sid later put it. We got lost in the middle of a manzanita forest, had to force our way through the trees by breaking down branches, and were soon descending a steep slope through endless pines and ferns. The forest seemed endless, and eventually we realized we weren’t going to get out of it till we’d gone all the way to the bottom, to the town of Stinson Beach. We ended up following a fast and rocky creek whose falls were frequently rather clifflike, forcing us to cross and recross the creek, chancing a slip and a broken leg every time. But we got out without mishap, coming out in the back yard of an old woman who was tending her garden and seemed a bit nonplussed to see two sweaty strangers emerge from the trees. We hitchhiked back up to the car and got home only an hour and a half late.

“It was an Adventure,” I told Sid.

He agreed: “The only thing that can be said for stupidity is that it leads to adventure.”

So we arrived late but contented at Lou and Cynthia Goldstone’s for dinner. Also there that evening were Tim and Jewel Lobdell, old friends of Steve and Grania Davis with whom the Goldstones have become friendly. Sid was a bit worried about the possibility that he might have picked up a dose of poison oak during our hegira, but Jewel explained that some people are immune to it. “If you haven’t had it by your age, you’ll probably never get it,” she said.

“That’s what all the girls tell me,” said Sid.

At another point Tim was telling us that he’d grown up in a section of Brooklyn where all his classmates were Jews. “I didn’t even know I wasn’t Jewish myself,” he said. “When did you find out?” Carol asked him, and Sid was abruptly thrown into a fantasy: “It was at the age of thirteen,” he said. “His father came to him and told him, ‘Boychik, there is something I must tell you. Ve are goyim.’ *Oy gevalt!*”

We weren’t able to go hiking the next weekend because the rains came back, so our recreations had to be indoor ones. Friday night we had dinner out with Sid’s brother and sister-in-law, at a local steak-and-lobster house where our waiter confessed rather queasily that he was a vegetarian. (He also said to Sid as we were leaving, “Pardon me, but has anyone ever told you that you’ look remarkably like Albert Einstein?” Since *everyone* has told Sid this, he gave his standard reply: “Actually, the effect I was aiming at was more like Ringo Starr.”)

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Saturday afternoon Sid and I sublimated our energies with a game of Scrabble. Let me warn one and all: don’t play Scrabble with Sidney Coleman if you have any particular ego

investment in winning, because he plays the game like Jimmy Connors plays tennis. At one juncture, while the game was still close, I mentioned to him that he'd added his score wrong and given himself an extra ten points—so he took off the ten points and then scored 160 points on his next two moves. Aargh. The hell of it was that he did it using letters none of which was worth more than three points. (I once did beat Sid at a game of Scrabble, but that was solely because I made a 90-point play on the last turn of the game; I'm sure if Sid had had another move and seven vowels in his hand he'd have scored 200 points by forming the name of some Hawaiian flower.)

September 1983:

Patrick and Teresa don't believe in the existence of Sidney Coleman, that fannish bon vivant about whom I've been telling stories for twenty years. Every time I begin to launch into a new anecdote of Sid's exploits, a cynical expression appears on their faces and they say, "Ah yes, Sidney Coleman—how's his grandmother in Sacramento?"



Sidney Coleman in 2001.

But Sid really does exist, and there are now documents on file in the Alameda County Courthouse to prove it. Yesterday, you see, he was married there—to Diana Teschmacher (now Diana Coleman), a distant relative of the legendary 1920s jazz clarinetist Frank Teschemacher. Sid and Diana came out to the Bay Area a week or so ago for a visit, scheduling their marriage during their stay here because Sid's family lives here.

They had to get blood tests first, of course, and Sid was directed to the County Health Clinic for these. "We walked in and found that everybody working in there was Hispanic," Sid told me. "I didn't know whether to ask for blood tests or the

number three combination plate. The walls were covered with pictures of Third World families with carefully limited numbers of well-fed, healthy children. After the blood tests, they gave Diana a wedding present of a diaphragm."

They were married yesterday in the Alameda County Courthouse, and last night Carol and I had dinner with them to celebrate. Afterward we came back to our house and proceeded to get sercon, as *PONG's* editors would put it. We talked of many things, among them the method by which Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle collaborate on their novels. "They both have word processors," Sid said, "and they're connected by telephone lines so that each of them can feed his day's writing to the other's word processor, then the other one makes suggestions for changes and they arrive at a final draft that way."

The Silicon Valley industrial espionage scandal is big news in the Bay Area right now, and this gave me an idea. “Literary espionage via computer-tapping programs!” I cried. “You plug into their word processors and steal the text of their next novel and then sell it for publication before their book comes out! Then you go back to your computer tap and *rewrite* their book, so they won’t be able to sue you!”

Sid seemed to feel that this idea was sound, and we went on to talk of other forms of technological manipulation. It started when Diana said she thought *Star Trek* fandom was a blight on the face of science fiction. “If only it had never gotten started, things would be so much better,” she said.

“That’s it!” cried Sid. “What we need is a time machine. You know the old science fiction theme of going back in time to murder Hitler—instead, we as true science fiction fans will go back to kill Bjo Trimble before she could organize *Star Trek* fandom! Only Bjo had the contacts and the organizational abilities to get that movement going. We’d be doing a great service for contemporary esthetics!”

Well, maybe. Sid went on to expound upon the concept of kitschmeisters. “It’s a tightly controlled guild,” he said. “For your rite of passage they send you alone into the forest with nothing but a penny, which you have to change, using nothing but your teeth, into a souvenir cable-car token. Even then, before you’re accepted into the guild, they give you a gross of ashtrays and you have to paint Taiwan telephone booths on the bottom of each of them.”

It was, as you can see, a high-level intellectual conversation. But all good things come to an end, and at 11:00 Sid told us he and Diana had to leave. “We newlyweds have certain obligations,” he said. “There must be blood on the sheets and all that. Sorry, but we have to make these sacrifices.”

“For God’s sake, Sid, don’t slash your wrists!” I implored as we ushered them out the door.

I’m sure he didn’t. So remember, Patrick and Teresa, Sidney Coleman lives!

July 4 and 5, 1982, were the dates for the first Berkeley Writer’s Conference, organized by Debbie Notkin and Lizzy Lynn and held in a two-room suite at the Marriott. Despite its name (chosen for obscure purposes) and the presence of a number of writers, this was basically just a non-con, occasioned by the fact that absolutely no one from the Bay Area was interested in attending the Westercon in Phoenix. “Phoenix in July?” we cried, remembering how hot it had been during Iguanacon. (Miriam Knight had set off barefoot across the baking plaza to go to the huckster room but had to turn back when her feet began to blister; those of us wearing shoes hadn’t fared much better.)

Carol and I arrived at the suite about 9:30 the first night and found the rooms packed with people: Debbie, Lizzy, Grant Canfield, Rebecca Kurland, Patrick Mason, Steve and Grania Davis, Lisa Goldstein, Larry Verre, Jim Killus, Tom Whitmore, Dave Stout,

Rachel Holmen, Jeff Frane, Ellen Leverenz, Dick and Pat Ellington, Mikey Roessner-Herman, and a flock of people from last year's Clarion conference, at which Lizzy had taught.



Terry and Carol Carr in the early 1970s.

I was greeted with much enthusiasm. “Oh, Terry, I’m so glad you’re here! Where’s Sid Coleman?” Everybody expected us to bring Sid with us, but I had to explain that Sid and Diana had sublet an apartment for their stay here and Sid would be along later. “Oh well,” said Lizzy; “it’s nice to see you anyway.”

Debbie said, “I wonder what will happen when Sid and Rebecca are in the same room. Will the Ultimate Joke be made, and the universe die?”

“There’s no nitrous in here,” I pointed out, glancing meaningfully at Larry Verre. “The universe is safe, for tonight anyway.”

I began meeting the new Clarionites. “What year are you?” I would ask, and eventually it struck me that we should designate different symbols for each year, so that I could ask instead, “Oh, you’re from Clarion? What’s your sign?”

I mentioned this to one of them, Terry Boem, who said, “Oh, you mean like The Year of the Killer Flu, the Year of Nervous Breakdowns....”

“That’s every year,” I said. (I’ve taught at Clarion three times, and I know that the amount of work done in just one week by an instructor is harrowing; it must be a lot worse for the writers who are there for six straight weeks.)

I wandered into the other room, where I found Clarionites from somewhat earlier years—Mikey, for instance, and Cherie Wilkerson who’d come up from Long Beach. There were other out-of-towners too: Sherry Gottlieb, Jane Hawkins, Jon Singer. The latter two were busily chatting when I said to Jane, “You came all the way from Seattle to talk with Jon Singer?”

“Well, we do live fifteen hundred miles apart,” said Jon, who lives in Boulder, Colorado.

“Yes I know, but you’re omnipresent, as befits a legend,” I told him. He seemed bemused by this: Jon Singer, the Legend. A bit later I found myself sitting next to Jon during a lull;

he said, "I've been learning some interesting things lately."

I can recognize a topic sentence when I hear one. "What things?"

"Well, I've been studying Ericksonian hypnosis. Do you know about that?" I said no and he proceeded to tell me about it at length. It was very interesting, but I kept being distracted by the feeling that I was reading an issue of *Mainstream*.

Debbie came by, and I asked her what she'd thought of the latest *Universe*. "Gee, Terry," she said, "I really wasn't crazy about it,"

I said, "That's what I figured."

"Really? Why so?"

"Because you didn't make it a point to tell me how terrific you thought it was, which you've always done before. Listen, you have to tell me what you didn't like and why. Everybody tells me in detail about why they like my anthologies, but nobody gives me any negative feedback. Tell me all about everything you hated."

She looked faintly nonplussed. "Let me smoke some more first," she said, and went away.

Sid came in, there were loud hosannahs, and after a while I got to talk with him. No ultimate jokes were made (Rebecca was in the other room), but we did make plans to go hiking the next day.

And that was what I did on July 4th: I joined Sid, Diana, and Ellen Leverenz for an eight-mile hike at Sunol Wilderness. I could've sworn six of those miles were uphill, but it doesn't compute. Sunol is one of the local parks set aside for picknicking and nodding politely to resident cows and cruising hawks. The scenery is beautiful, and the weather was perfect: not a cloud in the sky, but not too hot for climbing thirty-degree trails.

We even encountered a couple of the less often seen creatures of the fields. We came to a watering trough for cattle and found two ground squirrels trapped in the water, which had evaporated to so low a point that they couldn't reach the rim. One of them was desperately lunging out of the water over and over, unsuccessfully. Diana got a fallen oak branch and put it in the trough leaning against the side so that they could climb out. The one that had been making frantic leaps quickly scurried up the branch and disappeared into the tall grass, so drenched that its tail was matted and it looked like a rat. The other one glanced at the branch, shrugged, and continued to laze in the cool water.

When we stopped for lunch a few minutes later we watched hawks circling; I munched my sandwich and said to Diana, "That one up there looks awfully contented; I'll bet it just caught the squirrel you freed and had it for lunch. ...Hey, don't look so stricken; you've merely aided in God's Plan."

We continued our hike, and Sid and Diana told us stories of their trip out here from Cambridge. “We stopped at the Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota,” said Sid. “It’s a building filled with tourist attractions, a full city block square—except that Mitchell, South Dakota isn’t a full city—and the roof is decorated with minarets with buffaloes painted on them and American flags flying atop them. All of the walls are richly inlaid with corn cobs. ...After one has seen the Corn Palace, one is never the same again. That which was formerly obscure becomes clear, and vice versa.”

He showed us a picture of the building; it had been printed in Australia.

As we climbed on up the hills, we began to fantasize about how to meet women in Marin County singles bars. Sid said, “A good opening line is, ‘Say, didn’t we meet in an earlier incarnation?’”

“And the clincher,” I added, “is, ‘Your ashram or mine?’”

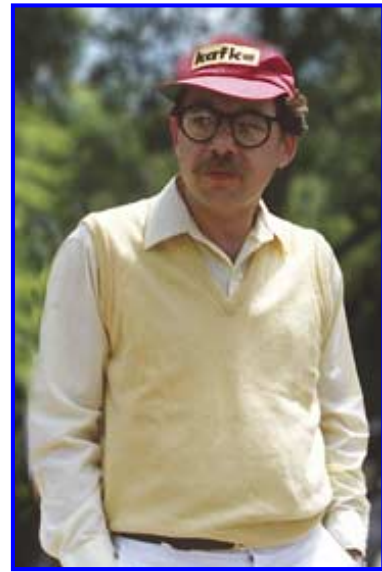
The hike took longer than we’d figured; we didn’t get back down out of the hills till 5:30, and had to hurry back because a big fireworks display was scheduled that evening on the Berkeley Marina near the convention site and nobody would be able to drive in after 7:30. On the 45-minute drive home, Sid explained to us all about the current big news in physics, magnetic monopoles. Theoretically, it seems, there’s no reason all magnets have to be bipolar, but till recently no one’s ever discovered a monopole; now someone at Stanford claims to have found one, but everyone in physics is very dubious. A hoax? “More likely experimental error,” Sid explained.

By this time they were dropping me off at home, where I showered, changed clothes, and ate dinner, but Carol and I decided it was too late to make it to the Marriott before 7:30, so we waited a couple of hours before setting out. I sat down and read a bunch of *Universe* submissions while waiting, putting my tired feet up to rest them a bit.

Good thing I did, because at 9:30 Carol and I still couldn’t drive all the way to the Marriott; we parked across the freeway and hiked in, a twenty-minute walk through hordes of people streaming out from the fireworks display.

When we got to the convention suite, we found a room full of people with balloons. “All right,” I said, “where’s the nitrous tank?”

It was in the corner, and we began to partake of it. Mikey Roessner-Herman had evidently been working on it for a while; as she took a hit, I saw her slip to the floor near me.



Sidney Coleman in 1987.

“Aha, hitting the deck already,” I said.

Her grin didn’t fade a bit. “But I landed *centered*, you’ll notice. I am always centered.”

“I know. When you die, the tombstone will say, ‘Here lies Mikey... dead center’.”

Which was enough to send all the nearby balloonists into flights of laughter. (Larry Verre smiled, like he does.) Aha, I thought, this augurs well for the party: cheap jokes will work. A little later, according to the flaccidity of my balloon, Grania Davis did her Jewish Mother Trip for the ‘80s on me: “Now Terry, be sure to take in some air with it. Think of all those little brain cells struggling for life.”

“What cells?” I muttered. “What brain?” I wandered back to the nitrous tank and found Carol standing next to it, between inhalations conducting a high-level conversation with Steve Davis.

“You know,” I told her, “at any other convention you immediately head for the bar and stay there all weekend; here I find you ensconced next to the nitrous.”

She chortled. Good party.

In the other room I passed by Ellen Leverenz as someone asked her, “Do you know any monopole jokes?”

“Sure,” she said. “In fact, I know two of them.”

I chalked up a mental point for her and made my way over to Rebecca Kurland. “So listen,” I said, “here you are in the same room with Sid and the world hasn’t come to an end. What happened?”

“Oh, oh jeez, Terry, ever since somebody brought up that I’ve been afraid to get near him. I mean, people would just be disappointed; we have such different styles....”

“That’s true,” I said. “Sid is clever, witty, knowledgeable....”

“And I’m brilliant. No, we wouldn’t mesh.”

Rebecca constantly underestimates herself in this way, I reflected as I drifted on. In fact, I drifted a lot, and the party did too. I ran across Debbie Notkin, who said she was in no condition to tell me why she hadn’t liked *Universe 12*. “The responsibilities of running a convention...” she said vaguely, and went away.

I felt a little vague myself, and merely watched bemusedly as Ellen Leverenz met Jon Singer. “You made that monopole joke,” he said. “Are you a physicist?” “No; actually I’m a biologist I’m working on a study of frogs’ ears—they’re very interesting....”

Jon waved a hand. "Let's not get started."

Debbie's eyes grew wide. "Jon! I didn't think you even *knew* those words!"

And indeed, a little while later, as Carol and I were looking for someone to drive us back to our car, we discovered Ellen busily telling Jon all about the peculiar qualities of frogs' cilia and such. Poor fellow, he still has too many brain cells, all of them inquisitive. A Faust for the '80s; he'll end up selling his soul to somebody wearing Spock ears for the secrets of Vulcan cuisine.

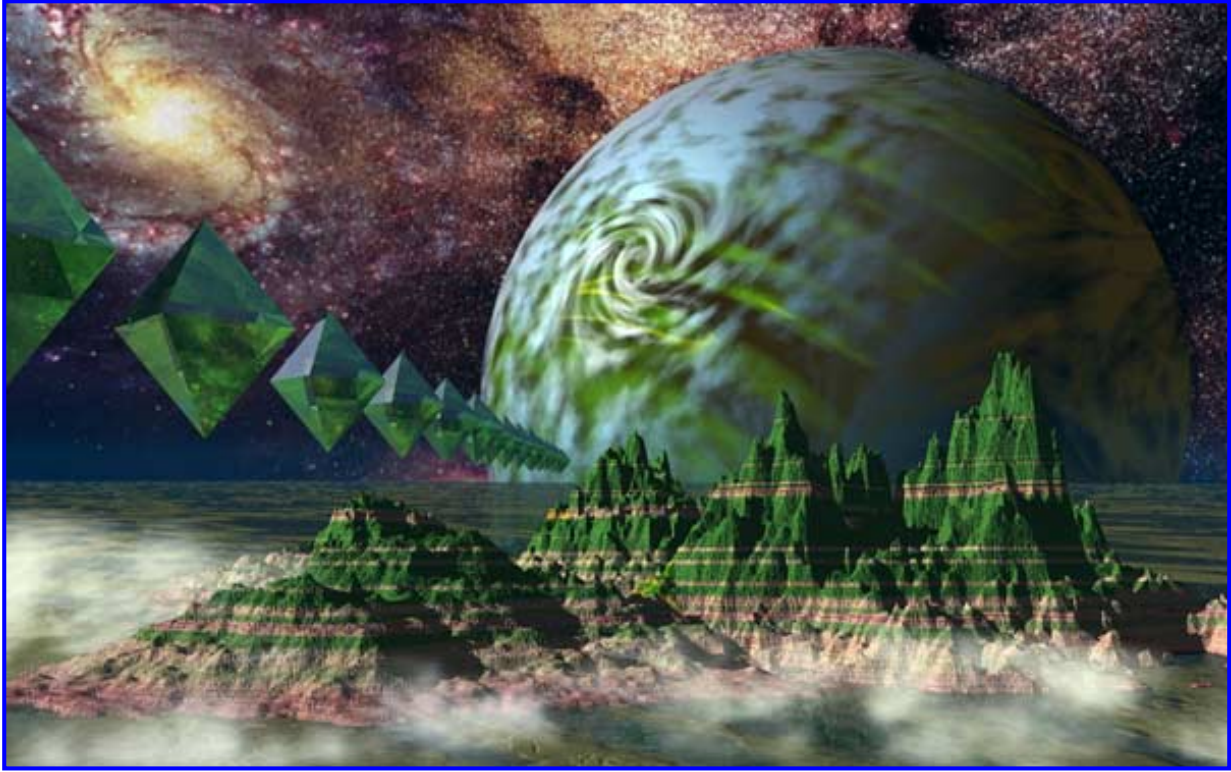
But eventually Carol and I got a ride back to our car, and we left. The party was fading anyway: nobody had made the Ultimate Joke, Jon Singer still had his soul, and I still didn't know what was wrong with *Universe 12*. Hell, *I* thought it was terrific.

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*Excerpted from *Fandom Harvest* and reprinted with the permission of Carol Carr, executor, and John-Henri Holmberg. Special thanks to Ian Maule for suggesting it and to Robert Lichtman for providing the text and a scan of the Grant Canfield cartoon used on the front cover of this issue of *eI*. All photos in this article Courtesy Carol Carr Collection.

I wish that people who are conventionally supposed to love each other would say to each other, when they fight, "Please, a little less love and a little more common decency."

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Slapstick*



Ditmar: *Wide Starry Mist*