

E-DITTO 8





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E-DITTO #8 May 2011. A perszine from Eric Mayer
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E-DITTORIAL

It occurs to me that my initial idea for this perszine was pretty darn self-indulgent -- a little thing I could zip off whenever I felt the urge. But these days I guess that's a blog. Maybe I should finish the rest of this zine's year-long run at a more leisurely pace so I don't kill my correspondents. However, this month I am still indulging my whim to publish, and to make matters worse, I'm including an old ditto/hecto cover from GROGGY.

It seems to be increasingly popular to scan long runs of fanzines for posterity but I am ambivalent about the practice. Although old zines fascinate me from a historical perspective, I find little if any of the material intrinsically worth preserving.

I have no desire to see the snapshots of my personal life, which formed the basis for GROGGY, stuck up on the Internet. They served their purpose of allowing me to have some spontaneous fun communicating with other fans about what was going on at the time. I never intended to write for the ages and I think I succeeded brilliantly in avoiding doing so.

However, there may be some interest, if only from a fanhistorical viewpoint, in what the covers -- drawn on ditto masters and printed on a hectograph -- looked like. So perhaps I will reprint a few.

For those who may be curious I will go into detail about my peculiar (maybe unique?) method in some future issue, when I can steel my nerves to withstand the horror of the memory. Suffice it to say that tracing a drawing through a sheet of paper and several ditto masters,

with a ballpoint pen did not lend itself to precise draftsmanship, and printing on a slab of homemade gelatine did not yield technically polished results.

Sometimes the designs I tried, turned out not to be suitable to the medium; other times my tracing went awry; often the printing didn't go well. One batch of gelatine would print better than another for no discernible reason. The old ditto masters stocked by stores back in the seventies and eighties were unreliable. One or more of the colors in a drawing could be lost when it failed to register properly, which led to some strange effects.

The cover I used this time printed more faintly than I had hoped, but the effect did not entirely displease me.

Whether the covers "worked" or not, there were very few fanzines being produced during the seventies and eighties that featured solidly colored covers. Hard to imagine, isn't it?

TIME TO GET MOWING

Since I mowed the lawn for the first time this year, it must be the first week of May. We're surrounded by trees, casting shade, sending thirsty roots out into the soil. The desiccated earth is choked with rocks. What little parched grass we have is fighting a losing battle with weeds, moss and ferns, so there's never any reason to mow during April. It's always the first week of May before I need to unlock the shed where the mower's been hibernating. Never earlier. Never later. In the spring, I could set my calendar by the height of our lawn.

This year, the gasoline can needed filling. At \$3.89 per gallon it cost me \$10.89 cents. For years I could never manage to squeeze \$10 of gas into the tank of the Chevette I drove. What does it say about the economy when it costs more to fill a gas can than it used to cost to fill a car? We have to fight for survival like our grass.

I leaned over and started to pick up the filled gas can and my back *went*!

Oh the joys of spring.

By the time I got home I was going through all the curse words I knew for the third time. After enough painful contortions for a circus act I got both myself and the gas out of the car and crept, Quasimodo-like, to the shed.

The shed's rusted padlock still worked -- better than my back. The wobbly door didn't fall off its hinges, like my back apparently had done.

Better yet, it was too early in the year for the giant spiders that usually occupy the inside of the door, and too cold for the wasps to have started building their nests. I noticed that the patch I'd put on the roof had kept the winter snow and rain out, although, like me, the roof looked pretty hunched.

The mower's old. It is on its last legs, or would be if it had legs instead of wheels. The corroded holes all around the engine platform are sealed with duct tape to keep me from being stained green by a backwash full of clippings. I noted gratefully that the tape had not been gnawed off by mice during the winter. The way my back was keeping me bent over, I would've had a green face until next January.

Every summer mysterious bits of rusty metal fall off from underneath the mower. Guards for the rotary blade maybe? Sometimes I leave screws in my wake. I can only speculate as to what they are supposed to secure. As long as the contraption still runs, who cares? The lawn has so little fight, it only needs to be knocked down ten times a season.

I filled the tank, primed the engine, gritted my teeth and gave the cord a mighty yank. Or as near to "mighty" as my distressed vertebrae would allow. The mower roared to life the first try. Can you believe it?

Yeah, it'd be funnier if it didn't start, but the hell with that.

I leaned on the handle. The mower is not, unfortunately, self propelled. My back remonstrated with me. Surely I did not intend to mow in my current condition? Of course, I did, I replied. It's the first week of May. I have to mow. (Amazing what you can mutter using nothing but four letter words.)

Staggering forward, supporting myself on the handle, I pushed the mower in front of me like a noisy Zimmer frame. Which, essentially, it was.

Back and forth I lurched, avoiding rocks, ferns, stumps, the remnants of old woodchuck holes and fallen branches I was not about to try to bend over to pick up, for fear I might have to crawl back to the house if I tried.

At last I was done. Nothing fell off the mower, not the wheels, not the engine, not the blade. Good news. Perhaps the ancient machine will make it through another year. Then again we've been having a lot for rain. Seven and a half inches during one four day period alone. And grass, even enfeebled, harried, grass like we have, does love rain.

A WAY WITH WORDS

Clark Ashton Smith had a way with words, mostly words I have never heard of.

I just finished rereading his tales set in his fantasy world Zothique. Although Smith wrote for *Weird Tales* and similar pulps during the nineteen thirties, I encountered his work in the early seventies when Lin Carter collected four volumes of Smith's stories for the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series.

Zothique is a world at the end of time where malevolent sorcerers, debauched kings and countless varieties of demons, apparitions and nameless horrors prey upon one another beneath the sanguinary glow from the dying ember of the sun. Its ancient crumbling cities squat athwart forgotten ruins, older still, but in whose subterrene vaults, you can rest assured, lurk enough monstrous beings to bring any number of protagonists, good and evil alike, to inventively horrifying ends.

With Smith it is not a question of whether the story is going to end badly for all those involved, but in exactly what fiendish manner it is going to end badly.

Delightful stuff, and then there are those words he uses. His prose is decked out, like his kings and pagan gods, in gaudy jewels -- verbal jewels -- ancient, forgotten words, plundered from libraries whose books have mostly turned to dust. What a treasure trove of words the man had. His stories coruscate with words I know but would never think to use, words in vaguely recognizable archaic forms, words whose meaning I might venture to guess and others which are as exotic and mysterious as strange shadows glimpsed in the catacombs or the glowing gems in the eyes of an idol.

Consider some words from a single short story, *The Black Abbot of Puthuum*: drear, ululation, candent, daymare, debouchment, acclivitous, sepulchral, cachinnations, hebetude, dubitation, crisping, dolorously, eidola, shamfast, fantasms, cacodemons.

Or these from *The Voyage of King Euvoran*: flagitious, fulgurations, louted, malapert, adytum, gonfalon, divagation, oupire, piacular, Stymphalian, magniloquent, terraqueous, chryselephantine.

I don't know how those struck you but they reduced my spell checker to gibbering madness.

Most modern readers would consider Smith's style overblown and pretensions. And, although it is apparent from reading Victorian era

books that readers in the past had larger vocabularies (or at least very different ones) I wonder how many pulp magazine readers in the thirties understood all of Smith's verbiage?

I happen to love words. Ever since I came across a platypus delightfully described as "roly-poly" (in *Rabbit and His Friends* by Richard Scary) I have had a weakness for perfect gems of words. I used to tackle the Word Power quiz in every issue of *The Reader's Digest*, hoping to add to my personal linguistic collection. Alas, my rote memory is so poor that my vocabulary never grew appreciably. I can only remember things by repetition and it is pretty hard to work fulgurations, or cacchinations or cacodemons into one's day to day conversation. Maybe if I lived in Zothique and dealt with sorcerers and demons on a more regular basis.

Probably it is just as well for my writing that I don't have Smith's vocabulary at my disposal. Gustave Flaubert admonished writers to find *le mot juste*. But what if *le mot juste* is, say, *chryselephantine*? And nobody knows what it means even if it is a more precise description than "made of gold and ivory"? (Damn right I had to look that up!)

But my own personal idiosyncrasies aside, I think Clark Ashton's Smith's exotic language mirrors his exotic stories perfectly. His mysterious, archaic, only partially understandable words help to capture the atmosphere of Zothique with its lost past. I guess I am arguing that his words function as interesting objects, in a concrete way, even when readers like myself might not be able to discern the meanings they convey.

I would never try to emulate such a style. In fact I never turn to a Thesaurus unless I discover I've repeated the same word about twenty times and need some alternative. If a word doesn't readily come to mind, I don't use it. Even so, I have had people remark that I use big words. Well, they never read Clark Ashton Smith.

His stories are collected at: <http://www.eldritchdark.com/writings/>

IN THE SOUP

A cold front moved through the other afternoon bringing with it fifty mile per hour wind gusts. Or so the National Weather Service had predicted. That can mean power outages, so I filled a big pan with water and Mary and I saved our documents frequently as we wrote.

The day passed without so much as a leaf blowing by the window, let alone unsecured trash bins, tree limbs, power lines, small vehicles or anything else that we were warned could be affected by the gales. When early evening arrived, we gave a sigh of relief.

Which is when the lights went out.

Maybe we exhaled too hard.

As it happened the lights (and computers, well pump, and furnace) were only out for three hours, a minor matter this time of year when temperatures are above freezing. As it grew dark Mary and I discussed books we might or might not write. This is difficult because I invariably veer towards fantasy despite knowing nothing about the genre's modern form (except the few modern fantasies I've tried I haven't been able to read) and we both tend to be repulsed by anything currently popular. Repulsed like a vampire from a crucifix.

There's nothing for working up an appetite like failing dismally to decide on a future project.

Night had fallen and the office was illuminated only by a scented candle when I said, "I'll make some soup. There's that packet of instant egg drop soup. I can make that without a lot of light."

Mary suggested I take the candle but I reckoned I could see well enough in the kitchen by the light of the gas burners. Actually I couldn't see down into the shadows of the saucepan but I could hear when the water started to boil. I poured my beaten egg and seasonings into the water, stirred for a minute, and then managed to get the soup into bowls without spilling it.

I carried the soup up to the office. A candlelight dinner!

"It has a very delicate flavor," Mary remarked.

"Yes," I agreed. "Excellent. Not too salty."

We slurped contentedly. (Well, I slurped. Mary has more manners, but then she's English.) Nothing takes the chill out of a power outage like hot, nourishing soup. We could almost imagine we were in one of those dimly lit hole-in-the-wall restaurants in some Chinatown or other.

We didn't have any fortune cookies, but we knew what our cookies would say: "You have a bright future."

Indeed, not long afterward the lights returned and I took the pan off the stove to clean it.

There was something lying in the bottom of the pan!

A gray lump. Like a drowned mouse.

No, not quite that bad, I realized, just before the soup made it all the way back up my throat. It was only an undissolved mass of flavoring.

"More or less the entire packet," I admitted to Mary.

"So what we ate was hot water and egg."

"It had a delicate flavor," I reminded her.

"No wonder it wasn't too salty," she reminded me.

"And it's economical," I pointed out

And it was. The next day we used the leftover seasoning to make a stronger batch of soup.

PURPLE PEOPLE

THE READERS SPEAK

The editor's comments are in red.

DAVE LOCKE

Speaking of Brad Foster's neat cartoon, which you were, I'm afraid I've yanked down Danger's trousers too many times. Now that I'm old and tired and too slow to run away afterward, I tend to avoid that. Well, most times.

I can't even reach Danger's trousers these days let alone yank them down.

Cincinnati developed quite a street people problem. One fellow would walk along the streets and at the top of his voice he'd do his impression of a tent revival preacher. Another had no legs and would scoot himself along the streets on a board with wheels, often following people for a block or two while whining and begging for money.

Then there was the day the psycho showed up where I worked (as head of member services for a Cincinnati-based OH/KY/IN HMO) because he'd been released from Long View mental hospital back in the 80s when Reagan had a silo-load of mental patients turned out on the streets for citizens and the police to deal with instead of medical professionals.

It was my job to contain him until the police showed up. He was wearing a godawful lime green polyester suit and his hands were dipping into and out of every pocket like he was playing some kind of pocket shell game. I wanted no distance between us, and I was on him like glue in case one of those hands came out of a pocket with anything more than the dirt on them. I had no intention of giving him any room to maneuver. I wasn't interested in pulling down his lime-green trousers, either.

One of the more frightening beggars (or should I say freelance solicitors) I encountered was a legless fellow who rolled through the subway cars, slamming his tin cup against the poles and seats, and shouting, "Vietnam vet! Vietnam vet!" I've rarely seen anyone who seemed so angry and I reckon he had a right to be.

I remember snow forts and snowball fights, but we never embedded rocks in the snowballs. Being much more safety-conscious, we embedded pieces of ice...

We never used rocks or ice in our snowballs. However in the summer we sometimes threw rocks at each other. My best friend left me with a scar in my scalp just past the hairline. Unfortunately as my hairline recedes the scar is coming ever closer to appearing in my forehead.

"I also can attest to becoming disoriented at conventions. The first and only convention I went to -- for an hour -- I became so disoriented I married the first woman I spoke to." That's funny... The first, but hardly the last, convention I went to I was 18 and propositioned by a middle-aged ugly woman. No, I wasn't interested, but it gave me perspective on all the nice-looking younger women who would roll their eyes when propositioned by some middle-aged ugly man.

I guess I missed my chances by never going to conventions.

I'd forgotten about Mike Glicksohn, long ago, having a boa constrictor. Wasn't the only weird pet he had, though I never visited him in Toronto and thus never saw any of them. I'd hear about them in correspondence with Mike, but didn't see any. Did encounter a boa constrictor one time, though. Was living in an apartment complex in the LArea in the early '70s and decided to take a dip in the pool. I knew a couple had moved in who had a boa constrictor, but hadn't expected to encounter it staring at me from maybe two feet away when I surfaced after having initially dived into the water.

Not a pleasant experience. And they are not harmless either. They can, and will, constrict you given the proper circumstances and they also bite. I remember one of the zookeepers in Rochester had a hideous bite in the middle of his forehead thanks to the boa he handled all the time,

usually without any problem.

Presumably you didn't yank the boa's trousers down.

Back over a decade ago I believed that it wasn't really a fanzine unless it was on paper. Like altogether too many things I've believed at one time or another, fortunately I got beyond that.

But this isn't really a fanzine. It is just a figment of your imagination.

"[T]here are things that are unknowable. In a sense, everything is unknowable because we can only see the universe, whatever it is, in the manner that our brain is able to see it. Our minds actually create the universe we live in and what lies "behind" it all is impossible for us to ever know." There are things which are unknown at present but I'd hesitate to say that they'll always be unknown. Omne ignotum pro magnifico est; Everything unknown is thought to be more difficult or challenging than it really is. And blind faith is an ironic gift to return to the Creator of human intelligence...

William James said, "Our science is a drop, our ignorance a sea."

ENDITTO

Modern technology makes fanzine publishing too easy. Before you know it you're publishing every couple weeks. Not like the old days when it took some elbow grease to pub your ish. Then again, it isn't the effort that counts but the result. I didn't choose to publish with a hectograph and a hand cranked spirit duplicator. I simply couldn't afford to publish any other way. If I could have composed GROGGY with Open Office Writer, which I use for E-DITTO, I would have.

Not that there isn't some effort involved. Do you know what a pain it was to download 151 mbs worth of Open Office on dial-up? Not to mention, trying to figure out how to suppress numbering on the first page? Man, that is as frustrating as trying to stop hecto gelatine from developing bubbles.

And, of course, there is that business about needing to write something.

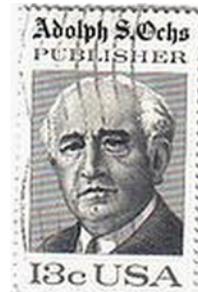
Speaking of writing, Mary and I sent the manuscript for our next Byzantine mystery to our publisher, Poisoned Pen Press, a few weeks back and now the book has been cleared for take-off. All that's left is for Mary to read the galleys when the time comes.

Yes, Mary has kindly -- and wisely -- taken sole possession of the mind-

numbing job of checking the galleys for errors, so I'm done! Woo hoo!
However, due to the distributor's time frame we will need to wait a bit.
NINE FOR THE DEVIL will be published in March 2012.

"I will argue that magazine making is the single most fascinating aspect of fandom with its infinite permutations of words, images and styles -- and for those who discover its joys, an endlessly refreshing form of mental play which we will probably have with us for centuries: unlike science fiction."
--Richard Bergeron

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Occupant
Fanzine Fandom
Planet Earth