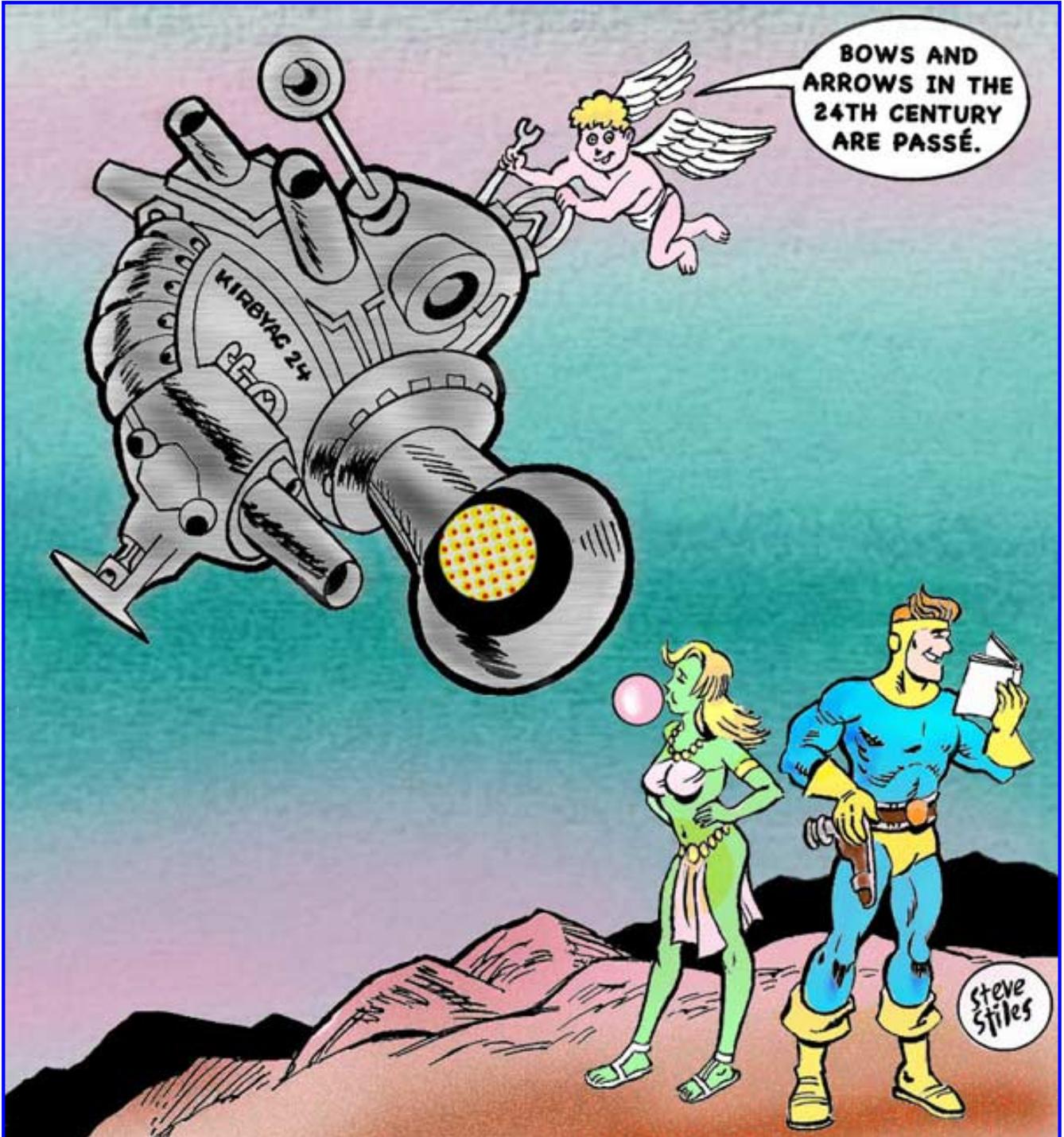




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Writing is the hardest work in the world. I have been a bricklayer and a truck driver, and I tell you—as if you haven't been told a million times already—that writing is harder. Lonelier. And nobler and more enriching.

—Harlan Ellison

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**THIS ISSUE OF *eI*** is for Harlan Ellison on the occasion of his being named recipient of the 2011 Eaton Award for Lifetime Achievement in Science Fiction by the University of California, Riverside.

In the strictly science fiction world, it is also in memory of Ruth Kyle.

#

**SPECIAL THANKS** to Melissa Conway, Rob Latham, and the crew at the Eaton Collection for their help in preparing this special Harlan Ellison tribute issue of *eI*.

#

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 [earl@earlkemp.com](mailto:earl@earlkemp.com) 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, Bruce Brenner, J.D. Crayne, Jacques Hamon, John-Henri Holmberg, Earl Terry Kemp, Rob Latham, Hope Leibowitz, Robert Lichtman, Dave Langford, Lynn Munroe, Richard Lupoff, Linda Moorcock, Michael Moorcock, Christopher M. O'Brien, Patricia Rogers, Robert Speray, R. Laurraine Tutihasi, Bud Webster, Ted White, and Jerome Winter.

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

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The ability to dream is all I have to give. That is my responsibility; that is my burden. And even I grow tired.

—Harlan Ellison

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## ...Return to sender, address unknown.... 44

### The Official *eI* Letters to the Editor Column

By Earl Kemp

We get letters. Some parts of some of them are printable. Your letter of comment is most wanted via email to [earl@earlkemp.com](mailto:earl@earlkemp.com) or by snail mail to P.O. Box 369, PMB 205, Tecate, CA 91980 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.

#### **Monday December 6, 2010:**

**Chris Garcia:** I love this issue (*eI53*) and will have more to say and after I've written that I'll have even more to say and so on and so on. This is a magnificent issue, possibly the best of the last couple of years and that is saying an absolute lot.

First: Len Moffatt. He was, most likely, the oldest fan who I would talk to with any regularity. He was a good guy, supported me during my TAFF race, and would tell me great stories of days and folks long gone. I'll miss him and his shirt made of Empire Strikes Back sheets like the ones that were on my bed when I was a kid.

Sadly, while I think I met Donald Tuck when I was young, I can't say I ever chatted with him.

Second: *The City & The City*. I have read it three times. The first time, I was disappointed because I read it as a mystery. Yeah, it was all Mieville, who is likely my favorite author, but it wasn't a great mystery. I guess I've been soaking in Westlake and Faust and Max Allen Collins for too long. Anyhow, I'd have said it was merely okay after that read. I came to it again and read it following a bunch of very heady SF. This time, it blew me away as a thought experiment. I mean seriously, there were times when I would have to stop and think out the problems that a single paragraph would present. How would this affect that something that was not on the page. When I was freed from the plot, I think I came unglued from the need to view it as a mystery and it quickly became my favorite novel of 2009. Gorgeous writing, better thinking. The third reading and I think I finally put it all together, came to the point where I could see that one played off the other, the mystery off the thought experiment. This was a book that was constructed like the world Mieville shows us. There is more hidden in the other side than you can view when you are only looking at it as a mystery or a fantasy/science fiction novel. This is the kind of book that not only rewards multiple readings, but forces you to re-read and re-think with each trip through the pages. It won the Hugo for good reason.

Third: Steve Stiles is a stud. There is no other word for it. His stuff is awesome and your portfolio for him is great. I feel truly honored to have run as many pieces as he's given me over the years. Thank you, Earl and Steve. The two of you rock.

I love the way that Moorcock looks at Mieville, he'd let us run that *Guardian* piece in *The Drink Tank*, I think, and it said exactly what I'd hope it would say: China did good.

You know, that Rudolph cartoon could be the perfect metaphor for almost any sport/entertainment tradition. Think about it: Santa's the big guy, the bull of the woods, the one who runs things, but Rudolph, a young up-start he found, polished, made into a star, he wants his place in the Pantheon, he wants to wear the big boy pants, and so he takes the seat. It's Joe Montana/Steve Young, Margo Channing/Eve Harrington, Ric Flair/Lex Luger. Steve Stiles does it again.

I don't have any memory of Cuchuma, though I know I've been there. Mexico has a place in my heart, and 3/8 of my blood, but I've only made a few trips there. Other than Lucha Libre Arenas like Arena Mexico or Plaza del Toro in Monterrey (where they've been doing wrestling since the 1950s), the place that I love most in Mexico is a small town in the Sonora desert where my Grandpa apparently slunk off to after being chased out of Texas for less than savory reasons.

The Border Patrol is a mixed blessing/curse for most of my family. Grandpa was born in Texas. Grandma in California (she's 1/2 Ohlone Indian, and she'd smack me if I called her Native American) and both went to Mexico in their teens for varying reasons, came back in a race against the clock to give birth to my Pops. Talking to Grandpa, he'd say that in the old days, it was a dirty business, the Border Patrol. They'd more likely take your money and let you walk away then send you back. Now, he complains that they are too clean, too much into following idiotic rules. Me? I dunno. I don't look like a Mexican (my cousins, bless 'em, all look like they are straight off the streets of Nogales) so I've never had problems, but all of them have, including one who basically had the scenario from *Born in East L. A.* played out in real life. It's a weird world in which we live. The shame of it is that to Homeland Security, nothing is sacred, and that seems to show in their treatment of Cuchuma.

Victor Banis. Damn, that man can write. I'd love to see him put out a Hard Case Crime book because he's got that sort of touch.

Lawrence Block!!!! That's all I can say: a name and a bunch of unsatisfactory pieces of excited

punctuation. The man is a legend and since I embarked on a voyage of Crime reading, he has a deep place in my heart of reading hearts. *Campus Tramp* is a book I've seen for sale at a local bookshop in their front glass case. I've never asked to look at it, largely because I figure if it's up there, the price is too high for me.

I didn't know that the *Gutter and the Grave* was Hard Case's best-seller. I would have assumed it was Stephen King's *The Colorado Kid* or maybe Christa Faust's *Moneyshot* (which was up for the Edgar and if you haven't read any Faust, Earl, you should get right on that!). It's a great book, perhaps a notch below *Memory*, which isn't as much a crime novel as a deep and heavy look at what *Memory* means. I've got to read *A Diet of Treacle*. That's on my list.

On *The City & The City again*, China Mieville, likely my favorite author not named Stephen Baxter or Christa Faust at the moment, is an author who works so well in so many different areas, though works like *Perdido Street Station* (a Tim Powers-style steampunk novel) and *Kraken* (a Tim Powers-style Urban Fantasy) are high water marks in their berths. Those two works alone make China the most important author of the last decade in my eyes, and others will argue that they aren't even his best works. If there is any novel I'd like to see made into an HBO mini-series it is *Kraken*. *The City & The City* is, sadly, unfilmable, which may actually be the greatest compliment to the author: he has created a world which can only live on paper.

Alan Marshall was Donald Westlake? I had no idea. I used to have a Marshall, and I spent the better part of a year getting Brian Morley pieces for my Dad to enjoy before he passed. I love that cover for *Convention Girl*, though I don't think I've ever read it.

Why isn't anyone doing a Soft-Core re-birth line? Hard Case Crime has proved it can be done, creating a line to restore interest in legendary writers as well as introducing new ones. I think it's time someone tried with softcore!

Sadly, I don't have much a touch for the work of Jack Gaughan. I certainly have seen some of his stuff, but he was gone by the time I really started paying attention. That *Algol 11* cover is one of my all-time faves.

Wonderful issue and one that I know I'll be spending a lot of time with over the years.

### **Sunday December 26, 2010:**

**Lloyd Penney:** The presents have all been opened, and chocolate's been mostly eaten, the Christmas breakfast is a fond memory, and we've had a day of relaxation, and phone calls to and from family and friends. We're had a lovely day of sloth. (Deadly sin, only if you make it a habit.) And now that Boxing Day is here, it's right back on the treadmill, lose some of the accumulated weight, and get some more letters written. Here's something on *e153*.

I'll shift my comments on the Stiles cover to the portfolio, which I'll also make comment on. Always fun to read, and there are visual reminders of his comics days. I will definitely agree, the reasons why there is no silver rocket with his name on it is beyond explanation. Once again, he will get my nomination for Reno, and I hope the portfolio will get him some more.

Hey, Chris, don't be hard on yourself when it comes to the NFFF. The executive of the club is scattered all over the US, so I imagine that makes it more difficult to operate than a local club. I think what we need to see is an article from Heath Row about his own presidency, and compare how you did. I've got a copy of *The Immortal Storm*, Chris... while it is as others say, a dry read and an objective view, it

provides an interesting if skewed report on the beginnings of fandom.

My own loc...I need a trip to Mr. Batta's store in the new year, and bring home some more good quality paperbacks. Of the whole pile, the most difficult book to get through was *Apocalypses* by R.A. Lafferty; difficult but rewarding.

Fences don't necessarily make for good neighbors. I see the fence along the US-Mexico border, and the similar fence along Israel's border with Palestinian territories. Every so often, I am reminded of some Republicans who have said in the past they'd like to see a similar fence along the US-Canada border. I daresay some Canadians would see it not as a wall to keep Canadians out, but to keep Americans in. Such fences reduce the humanity of people on both sides. The current escapades of the TSA in scanning for records of your suspected nudity under your clothes, to groping those who don't care to flash for national security, make me, and I suspect all non-Americans, leery of heading to Reno for the Worldcon in 2011. Do all who put up the least objection or resistance to being recorded or groped end up in a special list for the TSA to employ next time I might want to cross at Niagara Falls for a convention or a visit?

(I probably mentioned this is a loc years ago...the proud tradition of authors writing soft core porn to pay the bills carried on into the modern day. Dark fantasy/horror writer Edo van Belkom is a Canadian author, and I think he's wound down his career as an author. For many years, Edo wrote under the name Evan Hollander, and got plenty of soft core stories into print in magazines like *Gent* and others. Are there any modern authors who are doing the same thing today?

Great article on Jack Gaughan...we read so much about our favorite authors, but never much about our favorite artists. A pleasure to read and learn about them.

The Stiles Portfolio! Great technique, and always a smile-maker. Take the Elevator and Last Exit...I am certain someone took a picture of an illustration that blocked the entire doorway to a room party. I think the illo showed deep space or something that Escher might have been impressed by. Might have been based on either of Steve's illustrations here. Then again, I've seen other Stiles illos that show how dangerous it can be to simply walk into a room party. Your next stop might be...the Twilight Zone... Steve, I am certain a silvery rocket shall be yours in the next few years...just have to remember not to go to the stage and start rollin' them in the aisles in advanced Gibberish.

**Tuesday December 28, 2010:**

**Mike Deckinger:** I wonder if "Home for Christmas" by Victor J. Banis might have been inspired by the real life exploits of the Mitchell Brothers. As you may know, they were California pioneering porno-makers (*Behind the Green Door*) who always had a difficult relationship with each other, sparked by moments of affection and bursts of ambivalent aggression. All this culminated in the death of Artie, at the hands of Jim during a disputed altercation in 1991. Jim went to prison and later died in 2007. The film palace they founded, the O'Farrell Street Theatre, lives on and flourishes.

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Like a wind crying endlessly through the universe, Time carries away the names and the deeds of conquerors and commoners alike. And all that we were, all that remains, is in the memories of those who cared we came this way for a brief moment.

—Harlan Ellison

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# Introduction:

## The Last Dangerous Visionaries

Recycled artwork by William Rotsler

by Earl Kemp

I just finished my last piece...it's 15,000 words. It's the longest piece I've written in a long while, and it's called "Riding the Rails in Atlantis." And somehow, somehow or other, the book is all together. And *The Discarded* is going to be my last book. --Harlan Ellison, *The Daily Page*

The first thing I did after I realized I couldn't be in two places at the same time, was to make a wide, broadcast announcement that I was seeking material about Harlan Ellison for my ezine from anyone who had anything to share about that feisty fellow. It was the Eaton Collection that did it to me...and after all the things I've done for them at that. They had the audacity to schedule their annual honoring event on the same weekend as the sf fanzine editor's convention, Corflu. And, it goes without saying that I feel more at home with my Corflu compatriots than the crew at UCRiverside. Allegiance counts!

As soon as I sent out that announcement, I began receiving responses and, as I had expected, those responses were not at all what I had in mind. Those first messages were brief, hastily composed, and all ominous: "You'll be sorry." "You have no idea what you're getting into." "Are you prepared to endure a long, agonizing lawsuit?" "He won't like what you're doing." And more along that same vein.

Then there were the definitely nos, complete with detailed examples of why they would not be contributing material for the issue. Here, of course, were many of the usual fables about Harlan Ellison, the often-told tales of exhibitionistic rampage and arrogant disattention. All of those got immediately dumped into the Cyberspace round file. My intent was never to continue with any of those descriptions of The Man, but as far as possible to focus on the positive elements surrounding him that are, at times, almost obliterated by his better-known public personality.

And, would you have thought it, two of those (unnamed) people with such emphatic nos, in spite of what they said and their reasons why, proceeded to write two very nice pieces for this issue.



Bill Burns and Earl Kemp. Photo by Dave Langford, Corflu Cobalt, Winchester, March 2010.

In fact, I have done this before a few times during the run of *eI*, tried to say nice things about Ellison. As examples, there are a number of articles in <http://efanzines.com/EK/eI11/index.htm> telling of Harlan's adventures while working for William Hamling in Evanston between 1959 and '61. Most notably "HE's A Jolly, Good Fellow" (and especially the "Good Harlan" portions), "Fear and Loathing in Evanston," and "Harl 'n Neverland." These should be incorporated into and considered a part of this

special Harlan Ellison tribute issue of *eI*, coinciding with the Eaton Collection's honoring of Sherman Oak's most visible, volatile recluse.

And, none of the people who had worked with Ellison in Evanston, Illinois, would write for this issue. Signifying \_\_\_\_\_?

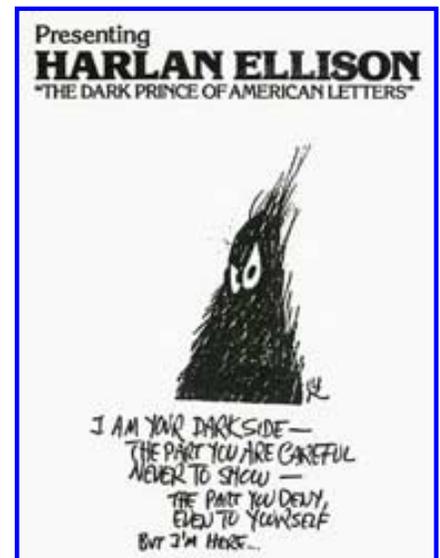
Simultaneously with the writing of this piece, a magnificent tribute to Ellison, a brilliant Hitler vs. Ellison homage, was posted at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0Tl8H-i2jA> and viewing it is not only recommended but mandatory. It is a great piece of work...quality all the way...from concept to execution. Honor without limits.

Then there were responses from those most bothered by the events surrounding *The Last Dangerous Visions*. A few of the writers who had written pieces for that disastrous anthology blasted away with the now familiar complaints about the way they, and their writings, had been treated, especially with their futile and frustrating attempts at reclaiming rights to their unused properties.

Much to my surprise and delight, a number of the pieces furnished for this issue of *eI* came with email covering letters. Some of them began this way: "While writing this I had to force myself not to include the interesting story about the time Harlan and I were at..." and then went on to relate that interesting story to me, with or without a Do Not Quote attached to it. While, without exception, those stories were delightful, they were not what I wanted to include in this tribute issue.

Perhaps some day in the distant future, the collected Ellison stories—real and imaginary—will appear for all of us to admire and appreciate to the fullest extent possible.

I'll not be the person compiling that rather large book. As it is I now know much, much more than I ever could have wanted to know about Harlan Ellison. My thoughts are, unfortunately, filled to the brim with those perhaps DNQ stories right now. And I don't want them. I'm doing my damndest to wash them out of my mind and dispose of them where they belong, in the round file, before I do something with them—my God, what a horrible temptation—that I would certainly regret for a long, long time.



Things were much easier way back when we were all young and...dare I say innocent?...when Harlan and I, and many more of the intimate family group were producing, regularly, SF fanzines of great and lasting significance. How unfortunate that many of us have turned into those Dangerous Visionaries of the title, for whom the love/hate relationship will remain, forever, floating around in uncontrollable ambivalence.

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The truth of what's going on here is that I'm dying...I'm like the Wicked Witch of the West—I'm melting. I began to sense it back in January.

—Harlan Ellison, *The Daily Page*

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# A Touch of Ellison

by Earl Terry Kemp

[An in-depth review of the tales comprising *A Touch of Infinity* (ACE D-413, 1960, .35¢)]

(Contained within: “Introduction,” “Run for the Stars,” “Back to the Drawing Boards,” “Life Hutch,” “The Sky is Burning,” “Final Trophy,” and “Blind Lightning”)

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## “Introduction” (Pp. 5-6)

One and a half pages wherein the author puts himself in the same league as Joseph Conrad, Ernest Hemingway, and Immanuel Kant.

Quite a range! If only it were true.

Liberally peppered with the hipster, hep-cat, cant of that long ago era that he affects to throughout the following stories, he relates the tale of his first encounter with science fiction, *a la* Tom Lehrer:

“I will never forget that day....”

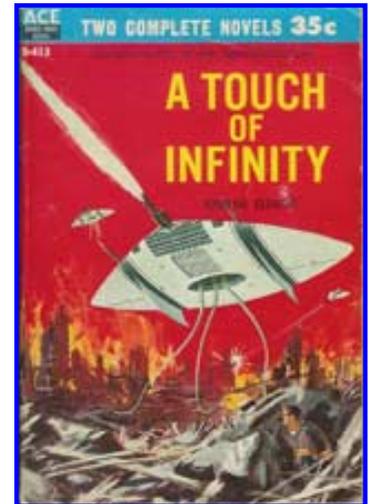
Although no tale of plagiarism, it still has the same resonance of the song with the same lyric. Replete with those special “Ellisonian” (his word, his definition) touches those more familiar with his works have come to know, such as “brass-bra-enclosed broads,” which echoes the misogynistic theme inherent in much of his writing.

Other lifelong themes are echoed in a few choice words: his “voracious” appetite; that he was “hooked”; that he progressed “through stages of virulence.”

This last theme causes pause. The dictionary carries many meanings. In the most obvious sense Ellison is using the word virulence to describe, in brief, his transition from fan, to publisher, to writer. Yet, in a more specific sense, a more accurate one, he is neither an actively poisonous, highly malignant disease that spread through these stages as an infection, nor is the medium a contagious disease. Ellison truly means this word in its final sense, that he himself has a malignant quality that progressed with venomous hostility and intense acrimony through the field.

As Ellison finishes off his concise introduction he admits as much by admonishing the reader not to question him, but to read his words and determine the answers therein.

“That’s the most direct method.”



Earl Terry Kemp

**“Run for the Stars” (Pp. 7-48)**

(*Science Fiction Adventures*, Vol. 1, No. 4, June 1957, 14,000 words)

Ellison begins with a one-paragraph introduction to the tale. By far, these short quips are better than the subsequent stories. As in a movie blurb, Ellison tries to capture the essence of the story with a word. This one is bastard.

And the protagonist is one, and everything else vile, as well as being one of Ellison’s favorite people, if we can take Ellison at his word.

The good guys are murderers.

The bad guys are like you and me. So we are all bastards.

So Ellison must like all of us. One can only hope.

\*\*\*

Benno Tallant (good talent—a self reference?) is this particular bastard. Among all his vile characteristics, he is also a junkie. He is “hooked.” His drug of choice is dream-dust, which seems to be just another contrived name for heroin. Oh, well...

So it begins.

Tallant is taken prisoner by the good guys (remember...they are the bad guys) while he is rifling the body of a dead man for money. Why he is looking for money is never capably explained. Tallant tells his captors that he is going to use it to buy food. But why? It also seems that his real motive is to buy drugs. Once again, why?

As the story quickly develops, the entire planet is about to be abandoned by the handful of survivors remaining, thus there is no one to buy anything from, no reason for money. Drugs would be everywhere, free for the taking.

So, the story begins with a logical absurdity.

Let’s continue. There’s more ahead!

It seems that the entire planet is under siege by the Kyben. The good citizens of Deald’s World kill looters. Why? The planet is about to be abandoned, and over two million are already dead. Why kill another living person? Yet, this introduction to the main character is the key lynch pin of the story and for all action, including the main characters’ motive and transformation.

Yet, the few survivors, already boarding ships to flee, have time to hunt, find, and kill looters. Even though they are going to abandon everything, all the money, food, and drugs. Right...makes good, clear sense to this reader.

Tallant is afraid for his life. He is also seeking death. Perhaps this duality can be forgiven, it is not too



Cover: Ed Emsch

extreme. It is possible. Yet, this also flies in the face of this characters subsequent behavior.

Tallant, it seems, will do anything to live. The entire story deals with his unrelenting efforts to survive, at any cost.

Being afraid of death, and seeking death, is just not sufficient enough of a motive to hang this tale on. Hate would have been sufficient, and hate does figure into the motive, but as a weaker theme.

Is Ellison trying to tell us something about his own ambivalent characteristics, his own duality? Is it intentional on his part, and thus a fiction? Or, as is more likely, unintentional and thus informative about the writer.

It would seem that even here we can find another basic duality of Ellison as expressed in his characters. Live or die. Face reality or get “hooked” on something, or someone. Hate the people you can’t control, use the ones that knuckle under your hate.

And always the hate, the “virulent” hate. And hate leads to control. And only control allows acceptance of others. Hate. Control. Acceptance. A very juvenile equation.

To continue with this sad, hate-filled tale.

Tallant awakes after surgery. A bomb, a sun-bomb to be exact, has been sewn up inside his guts. Parkhurst, head of Resistance, thinks the cowardly, gutless Tallant will make a good runner. Tallant will run and hide and stay away from the Kyben because contact with them will set off the bomb, destroying Deald’s World (and incidentally all of the invading Kyben).

So the Resistance (a very pretentious capital R) is hanging the hopes and fate of all their people on this coward who simultaneously embraces death and fears it.

Why a Resistance is needed at all is never specified. Again it seems more of an unconscious attempt to rebel against authority or government in any form, rather than as is truly meant in this case. After all, these are the survivors of an invasion, not a resistance to an oppressive regime. This is yet again another Ellisonian theme: us against them. The little guy against the big man.

Nonetheless resting all their hopes and prayers on Tallant doesn’t seem to be a very good idea.

The Resistance plan is simple. Tallant will stall the invading hordes, who will look for him in order to disarm the bomb (they’re told that they can disarm it), but which will really go off if they get near it. Right! Follow the thread so far....

The Resistance will evacuate a few thousand people. All that remains from the sneak attack. Remember, these are the people Tallant was afraid would kill him for looting for money to buy food, when food must be available everywhere for the easy picking, especially after the death of over two million people, most all of the inhabitants of the planet.

But who needs logic?

The Resistance (the good guys who are really bad) don’t seem that bad, just utilitarian. They have selected one to save the many. The only ethical problem is that they didn’t give Tallant any choice. This enables Tallant to hate them for making him a walking bomb while they all flee to Earth to warn of

impending invasion.

Even the most vile worm would turn knowing the stakes. Once again the basic motivation fails; Ellison's story becomes ever weaker.

The Kyben, who seem to be all-to-human, are given an ultimatum. They are to let the survivors flee, and then they can find and disable the bomb. The more Tallant runs, the longer he lives, and the further the survivors can flee, before the Kyben find him and disable the bomb. Pretty neat so far.

The Resistance, true to form, convinces Tallant that the bomb will go off if the Kyben touch it. Either way, Tallant is toast.

They all leave. Tallant is "the last man on Deald's World." (Of note: this was Ellison's original title for this story.)

Tallant quickly finds enough medicinal dream-dust to keep him happy until the end. He also sees his first Kyben warrior. They are very human, even better looking, only golden skinned. That's all Ellison tells us about the alien menace (or yellow menace, as it seems this story thread comes from an earlier pulp-related type of series). The reader doesn't know how alien they are, or how closely related to humans.

This is one of the most critical issues with the development of Ellison's early stories. His aliens are painted humans. This theme was further developed in the *Star Trek* series. All the Kyben (Klingons) lack is pointed ears. Ellison found Hollywood and what would appeal to the mass reader early.

He failed to develop as a good writer, with credible action scenes and color, and to become a great writer, with credible characters with realistic motivations.

For a writer who had at this point written "hundreds" of stories, this is unforgivable. Especially considering the stature he rose subsequent to and because of these stories.

It was such a cliché in the contemporary writing of the time, aliens that looked, acted, and were to all extents and purposes, human. These aren't aliens. They are cowboys and red Indians (ah, golden ones in this case).

Any sense of wonder is entirely lacking.

Thus his entire story, and all the others using the Kyben as a foil and backdrop fail.

They are not really science fiction at all. And if Ellison ever really read Conrad, he never showed it in his characters' motivation.

Instead, everyone hates Tallant. He hates himself. The entire population of Deald's World hates him (even the dead, one would imagine) and has abandoned him to his fate at the hands of the invading Kyben. The Resistance hates him and has set him up as their pawn. Even the last guard who throws him out into the streets hates him, because some junkie, ah—a "dustie," killed his woman. It seems everyone hates Tallant, including himself, because he is a junkie, not because he is either lovable or not. It is a hate based on a behavior, not any other observable characteristic, i.e. junkies are bad.

Tallant will overcome his addiction and use it to turn the tables on everyone. This is the ultimate

triumph, also extremely unbelievable. But let's see how Ellison works toward this end.

So, the red Indians, that is golden Kybens, have surrounded the fort, that is Deald's World, and are getting ready to scalp the last survivor, the rearguard hero, that drunken reprobate, or in this case the drug using Tallant.

His first plan is to avoid capture by the common Kyben warrior and find and offer his services to a highly placed officer, one who is able to remove the bomb without harming Tallant. Of course, the Kyben will readily want to use this human refuse. As written, what could Tallant possibly offer anyone in any regard? He is entirely worthless, without any redeeming qualities, or talent. His first plan is also worthless.

Tallant spends a lot of time getting high on dream-dust, and avoiding the pursuing Kyben. Cornered on the ragged edge, his last high spent, he lashes out and kills a group. His blood lust is up. He likes it. It's better than the drug. Killing is better than the pleasure the drug gives him. This is a marvelous conclusion. Quite a lesson to learn, especially for someone who fears death and wants to die, who finds he likes killing more.

Thirty kills later, Tallant discovers they have golden blood. This is no trivial point of color added merely for effect. Foreshadowing the coming events, it is an integral detail.

He is nearly killed by the next Kyben warrior. Narrowly avoiding death, he finds his hatred of all living beings, Kyben and human, has transformed him. He is now the perfect killing machine, with a new plan evolving in his consciousness. (Although, it is really just the original plan, now dripping with one emotion, hate.) He is also missing his arm (which one is not specified, yet this is an important event). Ellison tends to gloss over key details while painting his canvass. He is more interested in color and theme, than in logic or realism. One can begin to see that Ellison as a writer is like an impressionist painter who sees the world through glasses made by Salvador Dali. The end result is that his creations only make sense to the creator, and are in need of virulent defense of all details.

With incredible ease, the worthless Tallant kills all in his way as he boards a handy Kyben landing craft, and captures a handy Kyben medic. At gunpoint he forces the medic to remove the bomb. And then...graft the bomb to his stump.

In order to force the Kyben medic to do this, he gives him a packet of dream-dust. So, now the alien, golden-blooded, human looking creature will be instantly addicted to a human drug. This is more than quite a stretch, it is quite unbelievable. And if this isn't a stretch, then these so-called aliens really are just humans, yellow-skinned savages that the tricky, wily Tallant has tricked by giving them whisky to drink, or in this case dream-dust to sniff.

Now the transformed Tallant realizes at long last that he does not hate the Kybens. The Kyben are good because they take what they want. (And do what he says, even though it takes guns and bombs.) He hates humans more than ever, because in their attempt to save mankind they used him. (And they don't do as he says, but make him do as they want.) Now that he has survived, taken control of the sun-bomb, had it grafted to his stump with a control so he can detonate it at will, he is ready to take his revenge for being used.

And what revenge it will be, one that only an immature adolescent could imagine or want. With the sun-bomb as leverage Tallant believes that the Kyben will readily become his allies, and together they will invade and destroy Earth. Of course, Tallant will be their acknowledged leader, ruler, governor... dare we say it...God!

Tallant will use the Kyben to exact his revenge against all mankind. What kind of conclusion is this?

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Such is the stuff of dreams, or dream-dust, but not of any thoughtful reality.

Essentially, this story is an adolescent fantasy. The powerless youth, escaping reality by using drugs, who hates everyone and everything especially himself, transforms his hate. With the power of his hate, he will find allies who will willingly do his bidding, or else he will kill them and himself (maybe with a pout, or in a tantrum). By hate alone he triumphs. This is the victory of “virulence.”

Not one iota of realism is contained within this overly long tale. Not one redeeming quality in any character. The plot is so thin that it is porous.

What sold it? A good question. Maybe it was Ellison’s friendship with editor Larry Shaw, or the force of his personality. It could have been one of several colorful passages that demonstrated potential, albeit an exasperating potential of what this tale could have been instead of what it really is, a failed message of teenage angst.

**“Back to the Drawing Boards”** (Pp. 48-64)

(*Fantastic Universe*, Vol. 10, No. 2, No. 55, August 1958, 5900 words)

Once again, the brief couple of lines Ellison writes to introduce this story are better than the tale told. This intro is dense with self-references. First is his friendship with editor Hans Stefan Santesson, which is how he pre-sold this story when still unwritten. This is coupled with his military service, and his current wife. With this mixture of input, the idea for the story was formed. So here we have Ellison’s attempt at a “human” mad-scientist and robot story, with the added twist of a *per diem* gimmick added.

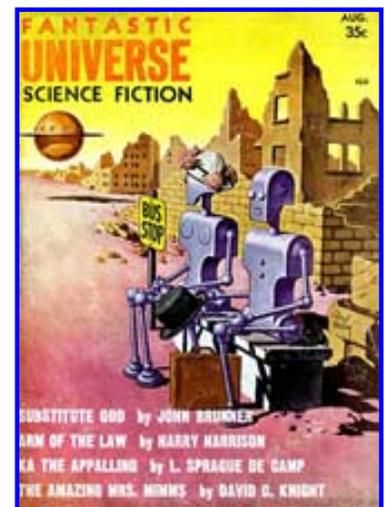
And once again, this reader finds himself stumbling over some of Ellison’s odd word choices. Instead of “human” Ellison most certainly means “humane” or perhaps sympathetic or likeable. A suspicion that he really wanted to write a Kuttner-Moore Gallagher story arises. This reader certainly hoped, against all odds, that Ellison had accomplished something like that or something as described in his intro, instead of what he did write.

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Leon Packett (Lewis Padgett?) is the result of “twisted eugenics” and has invented the perambulating vid-robot.

Gosh, what a dense coupling of ideas and words in the first two sentences of this story. So much so that it gives the reader pause. What twisted eugenics? This interesting subject is raised and as readily dropped. Why a “perambulating” vid-robot?

A quick glance in the dictionary adds a little insight. Ellison means a walking, traveling, or strolling vid-robot. Perambulate is a very nice, descriptive word. It is also old-fashioned, more descriptive of



Cover: Virgil Finlay

grandpa's Model T, than of an advanced machine, a robot.

The hook for this story attempts to bridge the gap between advanced genetics to a sentimental, almost archaic view of the robot. That's quite a lot of color to handle in one heap. Almost enough to miss the keyword "twisted," meaning mad-scientist. However, as the story progresses Ellison fails at establishing a mad-scientist character and instead succeeds in creating a disappointed, unsympathetic caricature. More of a man mad at the world than a man crazy mad.

Essentially the perambulating vid-robot is an autonomous remote camera, able to capture "tri-vid color with feelie and whiff" from any place that the "voracious idiot mind of the audience" wants. "Voracious" again, as a negative descriptor for "them." The adolescent stage is being set again. Us—the in guys. Them—the voracious masses.

In this case "us" is in the form of Leon Packett inventor of Walkaway, a precursor to the terminator of the movies. Walkaway is seven feet of metal construction, almost human, with a conscience. Walkaway can go to all those remote places where humans can't go, and film with his built-in camera. The robot is a tremendous success. After fifteen years of toiling, starving in a cellar, building his creature, Packett is almost on top of the world.

But it is not enough.

Now the military ("them") wants in on the action, in the form of a contract with Walkaway to help with space exploration, and Packett doesn't want to let them use his creation, he wants total control.

In Ellisonian vernacular, Packett (like Tallant) hates everyone, especially "them." In order to enforce his hate, in order to have power over "them," he enlists the help of his robot (or Kyben—take your pick). Only Packett is allowed to control events, either in the form of his creature, or over "them."

Yet, knowing "them" he prepares his creature, with secret alterations to its consciousness circuits, to do his bidding even if the military has its way.

As the story develops there is no need whatsoever for these secret alterations. What the alterations really are is not clear. The robot is autonomous from inception. The conclusion of the story does not hang on any action of the robot. The robot is not transformed prior to, during, or after. It is a prop, first, last, and always.

While Leon Packett nurses "his hatred of Authority and the Machine of Empire," that apparatus has built a starship. All it needs is an autonomous, ageless, robot, capable of enduring the centuries of travel and exploring the far-reaches of space, i.e. Walkaway.

All Walkaway needs is a return to the drawing board for some minor readjustments, just a little less autonomy. The military has taken Walkaway away from Packett (apparently there is only one model, no copies—which is entirely illogical, but let's slip past the lack of realism). Packett has degenerated into a drug/drunk bum living in a dive. The military drag the junkie back for these minor readjustments. He refuses. (His refusal seems in part to be a fear that they might discover his useless alterations.) In his hatred he declares that if they want to take his great creation from him (without paying him for it) they can take it as is.

They do.

This is the only time that the secret alterations impact the almost nonexistent plot. Packett is afraid

they might be discovered. The military wants a more controllable machine. How the military plans to control a machine that is not autonomous across the gulf of time and space is not explained. But then, this is merely a detail. Even though this detail flies in the face of the purported reason for using Walkaway in the first place...so that he can boldly go where no man can go. And requires autonomy in order to fulfill his mission.

It is after all “them” and they want to control things, even if they have no reason to do so, and couldn’t possibly exert any control at all. Control is the issue, the theme: Us against Them. Hate is the underlining theme. The military must do something in order for Packett to be able to exercise his virulent hate.

Packett commits suicide. Another Ellisonian theme: my way or the high way. If I can’t have it my way, then death is preferable. Once again it is the great suffering artist, toiling against all in order to preserve his artistic vision, even up to destroying his creation and himself if necessary. How Nietzschean...how Ellisonian.

Reading Ellison is like listening to a Wagnerian opera, played on a cheap tin harmonica.

But before he dies, Packett has arranged for Walkaway to become a private employee of the military, paid *per diem*. (Ha! Ha! Now Ellison will get his sweet revenge against the military for daring to use him. They won’t pay Packett, but they will pay Walkaway. Huh! Why? Why pay the machine and not the creator? Too logical a question to deal with, especially when the theme is the message.) Now Walkaway has become Tallant; the rebel against authority, the delivery device of Packett’s (Ellison’s) hatred for “them” (which is anyone not under his total control).

The so-called secret alterations were unnecessary for moving the plot along. Instead, the plot hangs on Packett freeing his slave and binding his creature in a legal fiction with authority. Like any legal fiction is ever truly binding, especially between a machine and people. This is tantamount to giving rights to a Model T. Just how does this work?

The inevitable happens (although it takes several unnecessary pages for Ellison to make his point—word hacks are paid by count after all is said and done) the robot returns to Earth, three hundred and sixty-five years later. As per Packett’s devious (mad) plan, hardwired in Walkaway’s circuits, the robot demands to be paid.

So much is owed that the robot becomes the owner of the Earth, the government, the ruler over all its inhabitants...God! (Just like Tallant—oh wow, oh gosh! How these points seem to be repeated *ad nauseum*.) This is so extremely unlikely that a two year old wouldn’t believe it could happen. Why would the corrupt “Machine of Empire” pay up and not renege? Because of a legal fiction...right...sure. It makes absolutely no sense.

Reading Ellison means suspending all logical faculties, not just suspending disbelief.

This tale ends with Ellison attempting a note of humor. It appears that this tale has been told by one of the future inhabitants of Earth, another Walkaway. Humans no longer live on Earth, and finally (I guess) someone made copies of the original.

Perhaps a “twisted eugenics” allows them to have live birth, which would have been a more interesting concept than the *tossed off* ending. Oh, well....

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This tale fails on so many levels that it is remarkable that it was ever published. First, it is not at all humorous. It is ugly at best, dripping with vitriol leveled against the masses, authority, the military, and any and all aspirations of mankind.

Secondly, it is very stupid. There are no reasons given explicitly or implicitly that Packett couldn't or didn't make copies of his creation, especially since this is the note the story ends on, a copy telling the tale.

Instead, Packett becomes a bum, and then a suicide. (Are all of Ellison's protagonists junkies?) Dying, or death, or suicide seems to be an essential aspect of Ellison's thinking. It is necessary and heroic. All his key protagonists embrace this aspect. It is beyond a theme, it is an undeniable feature to his writing. Ellison writes ugly. Hate. Death. Acid dripping from his pen. Nothing is good except total control at all costs.

How utterly dire and dismal.

If anything, this tale is an ode to hate (Ellison's number one theme), to the ridicule of "them" in any form (theme number two), to the total control of all no matter what the cost (theme number three); the agent of this control is the epitome of every adolescent fantasy (theme number four), either a rebel with total power over everything (Tallant in the previous tale) or an indestructible, immortal robot (Walkaway).

All of Ellison's protagonists either become God or embrace God. In other words, superstition as the lynchpin instead of concrete science as the foundation. Ellison's stories are all complete fantasies, peppered with colorful words, cute science-fictiony concoctions used to paint a thin veneer that these stories are something otherwise: "perambulate"; "vid-robot" (not just robot); "feelie and whiff."

Another juvenescent tale, told in an execrable fashion, a disjointed mash-up of narrative and dialogue squeezed awkwardly together. Clearly, as evidenced so far, Ellison never rewrites or revises, since this tale certainly should have gone back to the drawing board for extensive, careful attention.

There is no question that this story was sold, and published, solely on the merits of friendship, certainly not on any literary merits.

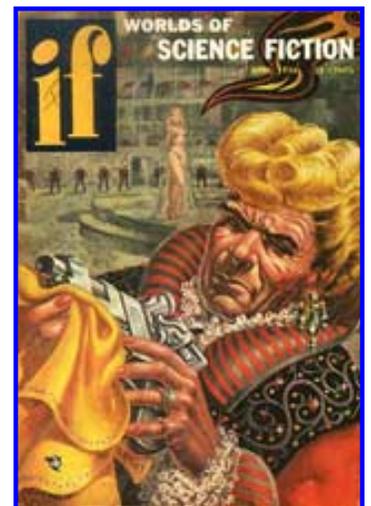
**"Life Hutch"** (Pp. 64-78)

(*If: Worlds of Science Fiction*, Vol. 6, No. 3, No. 33, April 1956, 4,500 words)

In his brief intro Ellison tells us that this was his second published story. He passes over the first with an aside, "I will never reprint the first, since Jim Blish winces in pain at the merest mention of it."

Oh, goody, this reader is already wincing, wishing this second one had never been published as well.

Ellison tells the reader that it is based on a juvenile belief in solipsism. Oh, goody, get ready...to cringe, squirm, and of course, wince.



Cover: Frank Kelly Freas  
- "The Executioner"

The protagonist, Terrence, is trapped alone in his life hutch with an out-of-control robot. This cliché is followed by yet another cliché. He is dying (of course—Ellisonian core belief). Terrence reflects that the cause of his dilemma is...ta da... “them,” politicians, technicians, anyone else who had a hand in placing an inferior robot in his life hutch.

For life hutch read survival pod, or escape craft, whatever else would have been preferable. “Hutch” has a rabbit warren-like sound to it. Not at all a militaristic sound, which it should. Terrence has been fighting Indians, i.e. golden-skinned Kyben warriors.

So, our intrepid hero has crash-landed on a planetoid and “high-leaped” (like a rabbit—maybe?) to the safety of the hutch. Ensnared, snug inside, Terrence spends a lot of time thanking God. Thanking him for the life hutch. Thanking him for the guy who placed it there, whereas he dumps on those responsible for placing an inferior robot there.

Just as he is coming up with another “God bless” the all-purpose robot housed in the hutch attacks him, severely injuring him with one blow.

Now don’t suspend disbelief, this is an Ellison story, you just need to suspend logic. Don’t ask why there is a handy “life hutch” on this even handier planetoid. And most certainly don’t spend one second asking why it houses an all-purpose robot. After all, it is all-purpose, so you never know what you might need one for. There’s dusting, and cooking, and cleaning, and playing Wagnerian tunes on his built-in stainless steel harmonica. Gosh, there’re all sorts of handy things for a handy all-purpose robot to do in the handy life hutch on the handy planetoid.

Injuring the protagonist, allowing him to vent his spleen of hatred against authority is a key element to an Ellison story, not the plot or character building. Pretty handy, huh?

Ellison’s writing is thematic based. The story is merely a vehicle for the essential themes, so a strong story doesn’t matter. After all, elucidating his major themes again doesn’t require rewriting or revising, or even rethinking for that matter.

Writhing in pain, Terrence reviews once again the cause of his agony. Those in authority have failed. The robot has failed. Authority is bad. The robot is mad. Only Terrence can think clearly. Too bad he’s not in charge, not in control of anything, especially his current predicament.

Although in retrospect, after all, it was his failure in the battle against the Kyben that has brought him to the life hutch.

Ellison’s characters are never introspective, never at fault. They are true rebels. The fault(s) always lie elsewhere. They are all essentially narcissistic, and only concerned with themselves. Us vs. Them.

Much of this tale is spent with Terrence reviewing his life and reviewing his current situation again. It turns out that he is an idealist who never questions authority, does what he’s told at all times, for loyalty (huh?) and patriotism (another vague juvenile ideal). But when the chips are down, he blames authority for his problems.

Once again, suspension of logic is required. Act first, question later when things go wrong. Drive first, kick the car when it runs out of gas.

There is a nice touch, the Kyben are described in further detail. It turns out that they are exactly like

humans, except they have bright yellow pigmentation, and tentacle-fingers. Exactly like humans? Tentacle-fingers! What about their toes? How many non-fingers is that? What about other organs? Exactly like humans and chimps are genetically similar, or just like humans because they have two arms and two legs and one head? Although Ellison doesn't mention how many arms, legs, or heads they have.

But we do know they are better looking, right? We can conclude that consistency is not one of Ellison's strong suits.

Although, this reader is still holding out for pointy ears...they're just so gosh-darned cute! Or maybe feathers for hair, so they'll look more like Indians.

We find that Terrence wants to "shack up with a silicon deb from Penares." Ah, don't we all, each and every misogynist among us. After all, who would want a real woman when a fake one will do?

Finally after all this solipsistic reflection, which seems more like narcissistic whining, Terrence figures out the solution to his problem. He has figured out how to disable the all-purpose robot. This requires yet another praise God. And even though he has been regularly thanking God, asking for His blessings at every turn of fate, he is "by no means a religious man." Huh!

It becomes apparent that Ellison doesn't even maintain internal consistency in his characterization from page to page, let alone in the same paragraph. Ellison's characters are so superficial that they are merely caricatures and only meant to carry his themes so that he fails to see these basic flaws.

By flashing a light on the spot housing the remote brain to the robot, the robot smashes at the light until it dies. So simple a solution, yet it begs the question again...why a robot is needed at all?

The all-purpose robot seems to serve no real purpose. It isn't even very menacing or scary.

Terrence has a final moment to bless God as he reaches the medicine chest and passes out, knowing he will live and is able to cry due to that knowledge.

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So, after several shudders, a few cringes, and a steady stream of wincing, this pathetic tale is over. Aren't you glad? Thank god....

It really should not have been reprinted. It would have been best to leave it buried, left in the trash heap of hackwork better forgotten. To dust it off, and try to fob it off on the public one more time is the height of arrogance, arrogance because it demonstrates a lack of fine discrimination, and a lack of shame over bad writing.

Ellison shares the same characteristics as his protagonists, he fails to see himself. He is not introspective and cannot see himself, or his work, from the viewpoint of someone else. It is clearly us against them, or better yet, him against others. Take it or leave it. Like the worst I can produce or....

Or what...he'll shovel more of it at you.

Guess what...that's exactly what he does with his next contribution to this collection of...(you can finish the sentence!)

## “The Sky is Burning” (Pp. 78-88)

(*If: Worlds of Science Fiction*, Vol. 8, No. 5, No. 47, August 1958, 3,400 words)

The introductions are getting shorter. Thankfully, so is this story.

Ellison professes to be such an expert having “published a few dozens stories” that he felt the need to “write a change of pace” tale. Here we see that Ellison can’t even keep himself straight, let alone his characters. In the main introduction to this collection he states he has written “over two hundred and fifty stories all published and a couple books under his belt.” Must be crowded in there, with all those books, ego, and....

So, which is it, a few dozen or a few hundred? It does make a difference. But we’re talking about Ellison here, and details don’t make a difference. It’s all in the color and themes. It’s not what he says, it’s how he says it that counts. And to a limited degree, he’s right.

Let’s continue to explore those limits.

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Frank (no last name—details—details) is an astronomer, Director of the Observatory (no place name—details...). He is the narrator of this tale, all told in the first person (this must be the change of pace). Otherwise it is the same as all the other Ellison stories in this collection (dreck).

First paragraph begins with death (overweening Ellisonian concept), ten thousand to be exact (a detail, hurrah). Second sentence details the screams, the third the futility, the horror of it, and the last, concerns flames in the sky, death and dying, thus the title.

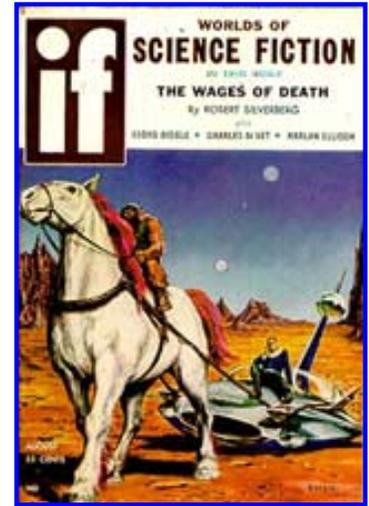
It is a Wagnerian symphony of words. One can almost hear the tin harmonica.

Frank is in the right place at the right time and quick to realize what is really happening. There’s no hesitation. He realizes that this meteor shower filling the sky is happening all over Earth, and after checking with his peers in other observatories finds it’s happening on Mars and Venus.

Early on Frank demonstrates another Ellisonian main theme: Us against Them. It takes the form of his antagonism with his second-in-command, Portales. Frank shoves him out of the way in order to see what’s happening on Mars. Frank orders Portales to check with their peers about Venus. Portales’ answer is sharp. Frank decides not to snap back. (Gracious of him.) He knows Portales is bucking for his job.

Frank goes to change the settings on the scope. An argument ensues with Portales. Over what? No details. Ellisonian. We get a description of the advanced telescope, then Frank goes to the short-wave to pick up news broadcasts from around the world.

Huh!



Cover: Ed Emsh - “Get a Horse”

And there we have it, essential Ellison. Advanced scientific descriptions are given in double-talk of transposed words and manufactured neologisms, and then we perambulate over to the short-wave, but it's okay, it's modern and made out of plastichrome, just like the way "five extra inches" are on the "tail-fin on a new copter."

"Five extra inches?" Why this detail from someone who can't specify how many fingers a Kyben warrior has?

Now, get this, the super-scientific extra-special telescope can take photographs, and on film. Two hours later Frank is again snapping at poor belabored Portales, afraid he might "fog up a valuable photo." So, Frank races down to the darkroom to do it himself. He doesn't need an all-purpose vid-robot, or for that matter trust the competence of someone capable of bucking for his job.

The devil is in the details, but the details are not in Ellison's work, nor consistency, nor logic.

Let the fantasy continue.

"They were not meteorites."

They are living creatures. Right! From deep space! Right! Great change of pace, now we've gone from red Indians (oops—yellow Kyben *née* Klingons) to glowing, telepathic, creatures with "seven-taloned hands." How come they got numbered fingers and Kyben's don't?

But the handy Project Snatch (sounds like the title of a porno book *à la* Paul Merchant) ship is able to bring one of these mighty lemmings to earth with ease, by using "a sucking mechanism." Right, sure! Preposterous in fact.

Clearly Ellison never considered reading a book on elementary physics amidst the Conrad, Hemingway, etc. Just how does a "sucking mechanism" work in a vacuum? At the very least he could have used a *Star Trek* tractor beam here. Or does it work by some method uncovered while undercover in the Tombs?

On the other hand, this reader was very intrigued by Project Snatch and the sucking mechanism and imagined it would have made a far better story than the one read so far.

Alas, we go on.

Of course, Frank, along with five hundred other scientists are summoned to investigate the creature first-hand. Why is an astronomer required? Are man and creature going to point at stars on a map and communicate? Why not a linguist and a biologist? And why five hundred? It is so specific as to be mystifying. Is some special numerological mysticism at play here? Were Tarot cards used to divine this number?

And of course (cliché), Portales, his nemesis, is among the group, having "managed to wangle himself a place." Frank doesn't wangle, obviously. But he is merely one out of five hundred, yet begrudges his long-suffering assistant a place at his side. How kind, generous, and considerate...how Ellisonian.

More mysticism comes into play, the creature resembles "the Egyptian god Ra," so, more superstitious nonsense, more gods, etc. *ad nauseam*. Ellison's so-called change of pace isn't, this is just another fantasy, maybe more so.

As the meeting and investigation progresses, Frank finds nothing but fault in poor Portales who is an “obnoxious pusher.” However, Frank is an equal opportunity hater, and is ready to turn his bile toward the military in charge. When the meeting begins, conducted by an Army man (not officer, mind you) there is “a slow silence, indicative of our disrespect for him and his security measures.”

Us against Them.

Why wouldn't security measures be necessary and welcome considering the nature of this interplanetary threat? Details don't count, hate is everything.

Note: “We have called you here—” pompous ass with his *we*, as if he were the government incarnate.”... “he went on and on, bleating and parodying all the previous scare warnings.” So, they were “scare warnings” and there is no true threat, and superior Frank knows this...how?

Frank, the superior man, the protagonist, is better than all others, including five hundred fellow scientists, and especially his assistant, that obnoxious pusher, Portales. Yet, Frank can wax lyrical, enchanted by the lemming god Ra (agents of death and destruction are good), while berating government officials in charge (agents in control are bad). Heaven help us, why isn't Frank in charge of everything? The know-it-all should be, just so the rest of us could admire the way he is cut down to size as he takes his fall.

Frank knows, somehow, that this creature is no menace. He tells us he does this by “ceasing my existence if *Cogito Ergo Sum* is the true test of existence.” At this, Descartes must be rolling over in his grave, trying to hide. Ellison does not know what he is talking about. To demonstrate the fact that Ellison is not competent to write on philosophical concepts, consider this: “I think, therefore I am” is not the test of existence. A rock does not think, yet it does exist.

Still by this method (!?) Frank is (somehow) able to telepathically commune with Ithk. Apparently the creature is all that is wonderful, and for some unstated reason has come with its kind on this lemming-like trek specifically to Earth to die. The group of scientists that were in communion with Ithk free the creature that transports itself to its glorious death.

After that, those that were in communion begin to kill themselves out of “a feeling of waste and futility and hopelessness.” When asked why by Portales, Frank tries to explain, knowing that Portales isn't capable of understanding (only Frank, those killing themselves, and presumably the reader are).

The creatures are lemmings and they do come to Earth to find their deaths. Obvious and trite.

They come to Earth because the Earth is “the end of the Universe.” More precisely, the dead end, because the nearly immortal lemming-race rules the rest of the Universe, except for the dead end (graveyard) that man inhabits. So...Gods rule! Yeah!

Still, this is not a satisfying explanation and the question; “Why Earth?” remains.

Those in communion are killing themselves because they know the final, fatalistic truth. There is no point of existence, for any striving, because man is doomed to remain bound to Earth without ever being able to rule the Universe. Control is everything

Why? This understanding is not sufficient. Ellison constantly disappoints with his lack of cogent reasoning. His superficial characters don't act in a realistic manner. The explained motives are beyond unrealistic; they are puerile, time and time again.

Ellison disappoints!

Frank has a bottle of sleeping tablets he is preparing to swallow. Without total control, death is preferable.

Poor mankind is consigned to the graveyard of the Universe, forever. How appropriate, how Ellisonian.

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Good God, thank Ra! It is over. This story is a dead end. It is not a change of pace. It is more rehashed sophomoric philosophical drivel written by someone with no background in either elementary science or basic philosophy. Whatever philosophy Ellison has acquired it seems most likely to have come from a bubble gum wrapper. It's something childlike, fit to be chewed and spit out as worthless junk.

This despicable tale has absolutely no redeeming merit to it, not in style, content, characterization, or what passes for its abysmal plot (for lack of a better word).

This entire piece can be analyzed by how he says things, because that's all it is about...saying things... and what Ellison is saying is a repeat of what all his protagonists say: death is good and preferable over life; control is everything and without total control death is preferable; there is no reason to live but there is every reason to hate.

Ellison would have been better advised if he had followed his own thinking and burned this manuscript. It would have made a nice miniature Wagnerian funeral pyre. He could have accompanied it on his tin harmonica.

While this pitiful story warrants more dissection, let's bury it now and avoid a nauseating *post mortem*. We know the reason it failed, stirring its ashes won't help make it better. Nothing will, except a burial, and a blissful attack of amnesia to wipe the slate clean.

We move on.

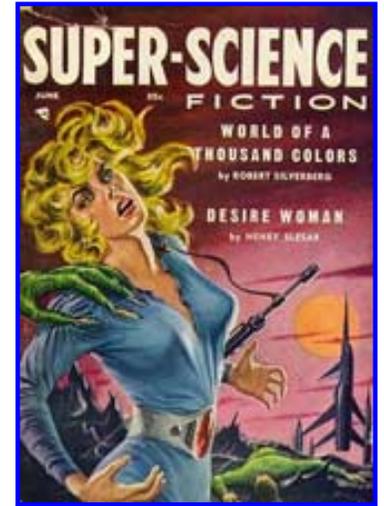
## “Final Trophy” (Pp. 88-104)

(*Super-Science Fiction*, Vol. 1, No. 4, June 1957, 5,400 words)

First, another short, enlightening intro, wherein we find Ellison is “high” on Hemingway. This reader didn’t know Hemingway was a drug. Oh, it’s hipster jargon, more of that junkie-druggie positive role model stuff he dug up while in the Tombs.

Ellison goes on to finish his cover blurb: “I’ve wondered, what if a bumbling ass of a pseudo-Papa type wandered into the wrong environment.”

This reader is sold, ready to read, despite constant disappointment. And that’s really at the heart of everything Ellisonian, isn’t it? Ellison is the ultimate salesman, the preeminent huckster. What he can’t accomplish by literary skill, he does by force of personality. After reading the blurb, this reader is ready to suspend disbelief, suspend logic, suspend every critical faculty, if only Ellison can deliver the goods.



Cover: Ed Emsh

Fingers crossed, with star-filled eyes, we descend into the abysmal abyss of Ellison again....

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Ellison paints another superb picture. Imagine a bar, under the Sign of the Burning Hart, or the White Hart, no matter. It could be something out of Dickens or Conan Doyle, with Sherlock Holmes stopping by for a pint with Mycroft. Hooked?

Nathaniel Derr, member of the Trottersmen club and intergalactic hunter, has left a bizarre legacy, a singular trophy, to hang in the club gallery. Only a select few are ever told the odd story behind his last trophy. The reader is among those select few.

If you haven’t already figured out the punch line...well, maybe Ellison is your cup of tea.

For those with a tad more discerning palate, they will have already cringed. The basic setting has been overdone in the genre, and by better, defter hands. It is typically Ellisonian as the setting is out of place, another perambulating anachronism. Not Hemingway, more of a poor man’s pastiche of David Keller. It is a fantasy setting, not a science fiction setting despite all the inserted “gosh-o-wow” science fiction terms.

The setting could have, and did, occur many times in Africa via London.

So Derr, the big-white-hunter, sets off to Africa...ah, Ristable...guess that’s somewhere in Rhodesia via “a liner out to the stars.” Bored yet?

The description of Derr is stolen...ah, pardon me...borrowed...ah...modeled after Haggard’s Quartermain. Enough said.

Pages of colorful nonsense follow his arrival while Derr reflects on his prowess as big-white-hunter, for example, “the szlygor he had bagged on Haggadore,” and other trite bromides and clichés, and all very hard to stomach.

Derr has arrived just in time for the big native ceremony “Kill Day.” How fortunate! What an amazing coincidence...just in time you say. Well, “shasir” Derr as the natives fondly call him, is ready for some action. (Sahib Derr?)

Many pages of colorful nonsense later Ellison introduces his first discernible Hemingwayesque detail. Derr is about to witness what amounts to a native bullfight. Derr is hot for it; he’s got “to get one of those animals for the collection.”

From a Hemingway setting we immediately return to Ellisonian basics as the native dodges the bull-like creature for an hour, and then sits down and lets it gore him to death. Ah, glorious death, glorious because it is willing suicide, thus somehow inexplicably noble, thus Ellisonian.

Apparently the natives always lose to the beast in this fashion, but Derr thinks he knows how to kill it and get his trophy. Of course, the protagonist is always more clever, superior in every way to “them,” which are the natives in this case (and the beast).

More pages of nonsense pass, ah...descriptive color...wherein the big-white-hunter waxes lyrical about his many kills and how he plans to preserve this trophy. The inevitable happens as Derr faces the beast mano-a-mano and kills it.

Derr is immediately taken prisoner by the natives, and the Headsman tells him he must die. Several paragraphs later Ellison finally gets to the point. The beast, the “ristable,” is a god. These creatures were the original rulers of the planet. They built the cities that lay in ruins everywhere. The natives were the underclass. Now as a part of their ancestral memory they still worship, take care of, and feed their god...with a weekly sacrifice.

Derr has interrupted this process and must be sacrificed. However...here it comes...the punch line...the Headsman likes Derr and will grant him his last request.

Derr’s request flies in the face of the very reason he needs to be killed. He must feed their god. That is the basis of the sacrifice, the need for food, not the act of killing. Except the ending punch line wouldn’t work if Derr had been eaten.

So, that’s how Derr becomes the final trophy in his own club after the beast, the native god, kills him. More noble in death than in life.

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This entire story was a waste of time. First of all, the pastiche was poorly done, overly filled with an inept attempt to make Africa seem like some alien planet. Yet Ellison was never able to get very far from the big-white-hunter model. Every attempt failed because none of the aliens were believable. They were all just lions, tigers, and bears...oh my!

Derr was not believable as a character because he was a caricature of so many better cast ones, such as Quartermain. Ellison consistently fails in his characterization because he is a painter with words. He paints a physical description, while failing to fill in the mental details. His protagonists are always

superficial, having no real depth, no insight, and no emotional grip on the reader.

Thirdly, Ellison has a peculiar facility that is apparent in this short story. It could be called the peppered plot, or scattered shotgun approach to writing. Without a real feel for the specific type of story he is writing, he introduces irrelevant “science fiction” color to make it seem like that type of story. Ellison will be writing merrily along, gets a notion that it’s time to make it seem “science-fiction” and will drop in some transposed word or idea to spice it up, and then back to whatever he’s pounding out.

This mash-up never works. This particular story is neither a turn-of-the-last-century African adventure, nor a space hunt. It’s not in between. It’s miscegenation, a Volkswagen body with a Rolls Royce front façade. Beyond disappointing.

Now Ellison as a writer finally becomes clear. He is a technician. From his bag of tricks, he handily pulls out broken pieces and hammers round pegs into square holes until he is satisfied he can sell his glass beads to the yokels. To his credit, he does it very well. To his detriment he does it at all

Ellison is much too facile for his own good. It interferes with his attempts to tell a good story. Sometimes he does get a great notion, but then his personality interrupts the process. His death wish comes to the forefront, enhancing his fear of failure, so rather than work at his artistry he is content to paste pieces together that he knows will work to some lesser degree.

It becomes evident that Ellison is terribly frustrated, thus the hate expressed time and again in his various protagonists. On some level Ellison must know how close he has come at times to writing something marvelous and enduring, and how dismally he has skirted this possibility and settled for something second-rate.

Ellison disappoints. Foremost, he must disappoint himself.

Yet another story best forgotten, best left in the trash heap, more kindling for that Wagnerian pyre. Select any piece for harmonica accompaniment.

Finally, at long last, the final tale in this star trek. Still looking for something worth recommending, worth appreciating, something worth salvaging...

### “Blind Lightning” (Pp. 105-123)

(*Fantastic Universe*, Vol. 5, No. 5, No. 29, June 1956, 6,500 words)

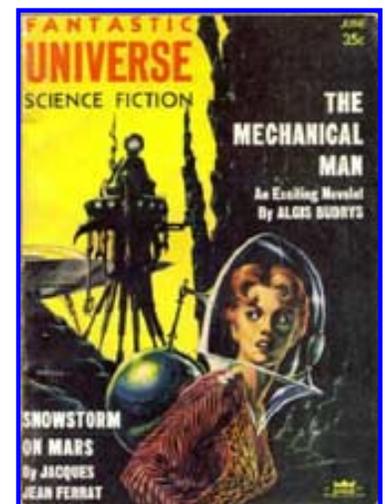
For such a long story, Ellison only has a one-line intro. Maybe he was as tired and frustrated and disappointed as his readers at this point.

Appropriately he writes, “There isn’t much to say about this one....”

Oh God Ra, help us...be merciful to us...kill the protagonist early and end our mutual misery.

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Ellison begins well, as usual. Kettridge is knocked down, unconscious,



on an alien planet by an alien creature. The creature, Lad-nar, is sentient and something or a cross between a bear, bull, and gorilla. Not too bad.

It was a hopeful beginning, God Ra almost answered our prayers and killed the bastard in the first paragraph. However the fink god reneged and let the creep live.

Then the alien creature prays to its god, the “Lord of the Heavens.” Not again, cringe, another human masquerading as an alien, replete with a superstitious belief in a god nearly exactly like the one behind the Judeo-Christian mythos.

Another unintentional Hollywood invidious comparison, Lad-nar thinks (in italics) just like Arnold Schwarzenegger talks as Conan the Barbarian. No kidding. The creature is Conan the Space-Conqueror.

Well, back to the pulped protagonist tossed over the mighty back of the alien warrior who lopes homeward with fresh, warm food for its larder. Instead of an instant meatsicle Kettridge wakes up in the aliens’ cave and finds he can telepathically communicate with Conan, ah—Lad-nar. How convenient! No language lessons. No sleeping dictionary required. Just fast and easy conversation all in plain English in mutually understandable concepts that require no re-interpretation.

Lad-nar is less and less alien and more and more human. So sad, a real tragedy after such a promising beginning. This reader is going to stop worshipping the God Ra, maybe it might be better to take on the Lord of the Heavens. Maybe Lad-nar *aka* Conan can give telepathic gospel lessons. But then, like Terrence in “Life Hutch,” I’m not a religious man...thank god!

Despite the ease of telepathic communication, Lad-nar is still convinced that Kettridge is an omen from his god, and really good eating. Kettridge on the other hand is sizing up Lad-nar for the kill. It is kill or be killed...Ellisonian at its best.

While Kettridge is reflecting, whining, about his wasted life, getting ready to be the main course, he begins to adjust to it thinking that it might be a good thing for Lad-nar. So all’s well that ends well done. At this point an odd Ellison word choice pops up as Kettridge wonders how to tell Lad-nar “he wasn’t a blue plate special.”

Now, the only “blue plate special” this reader knows about was once offered in a Tijuana whorehouse, and it wasn’t on the dining room menu. Is Ellison suggesting that Lad-nar may be Conana and not Conan? Is Kettridge in for a very special “special?”

As things develop in the standard Ellison manner we find that Kettridge has a dark past. He is partially responsible for the deaths of twenty-five thousand people. Narrowly escaping death in the gas chamber, he almost became a flop-house derelict, opting for anonymity instead. Fine, more death, suicide, and worthless trash regarding the protagonist. And you thought he was just dinner.

After clawing his way back from the abyss, Ben Kettridge has become an alien ecologist (see how Ellison tosses in a science fiction word now and then), but this encounter with Lad-nar already has him unhinged, “his sanity was threatened.” How shallow! No depth to this character at all, despite the background information, which was typically all color. Any emotional resonance is canceled by the standard manic-depressive caricature that all Ellison protagonists have.

From the depths of depression Kettridge waxes fondly over the alien creature and how neat it is to be

on the menu, how appropriate.

It's only logical, right, that Kettridge would next formulate a plan to save Lad-nar's soul. Why? Ellison writes that Kettridge wants not only to survive but to redeem himself. Okay, so saving the hypothetical soul of one alien will balance killing twenty-five thousand people. By what moral compass is that possible, maybe by one owned by a sociopath, or by an immature adolescent.

Back to what passes for a plot...Kettridge is going to show Lad-nar how to walk in the lightning storms that he fears. In order to do this, first Kettridge prays to his own god, and then lies to Lad-nar pretending to be a representative of the alien's god. Nice moral footwork, not too slippery...ends justify the means...so very utilitarian.

Being a typical Ellison hero Kettridge (us) is more clever than Lad-nar (them). He lies further by telling the creature that he is more powerful than his god, and will show him by walking unharmed in the lightning. And if that isn't enough, Kettridge tells Lad-nar that he will kill for him and bring him back food.

So, this creature that is a supreme specimen of survival of the fittest will let a meal in hand go, for the promise of one provided sometime later. Ellison's heroes are always (somehow) able to sell their glass beads to the wanting natives.

Wait, Conan, ah, Lad-nar, is too smart for that, so Kettridge provides a rope to bind him on a leash while he hunts for food in the lightning. Like he couldn't escape from that!

Kettridge demonstrates that his "metal-plastic" (shotgun word) suit protects him from the lightning. Lad-nar is suitably impressed and now believes that Kettridge is a god. So much for soul saving. But Kettridge is not done, he strips off his suit, and gosh-oh-wow it stretches to fit the bear-gorilla-bull alien, including his seven-taloned hand. Let's think about that: a five-fingered glove stretches to fit a giant seven-taloned hand...must be the "metal-plastic."

Even Lad-nar understands there is a new problem. Kettridge is vulnerable to a lightning strike. But Kettridge, as is typical of an Ellison hero, lies yet again and tells Lad-nar that it will be all right. Apparently the rescue craft is about to find him. As it approaches, Kettridge has found his personal redemption, and is ready to die, already knowing that his death is coming. Lad-nar calls to him as the search craft descends. Kettridge steps out and is electrocuted instantly. He dies content in knowing he has done good. His sacrifice has not been in vain.

Right.

Kettridge, like all Ellison heroes, has been embracing death from the beginning. Actively seeking a way to kill himself, either as a bum, a suicide, or by forcing the hand of another. In contemporary society it is often called death-by-cop, wherein the victim forces the cop to shoot him. In Kettridge's case, it is just another such form of suicide.

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At long last, the arduous journey is done. The task at hand completed. Questions asked have been answered. Together we have perambulated through jungles hunting tigers, through the city hunting Indians, and through a rabbit warren hunting wabbits. What has Ellison been hunting? Death. Death in various forms. How has he been proceeding? By hate. Hate of everyone and everything. Why? Because of a need for control.

It has been a dire experience this journey from aboriginal caves to a star trek, and beyond. But we, the various readers, have boldly gone where few have gone, analyzing the very heart of Harlan. Ellison is a unique character in his own right. He is an extremist, and attracts the same type. You will either like him, and every word that drips from his poison pen, or you won't touch his work for fear that his virulence will infect your sensibilities.

Those that like him will defend his work with uncritical abandon, astonished that anyone would dare to criticize...god.

That's how he likes it, that's how he wants it. When all is said and done, Ellison at heart is a control freak. Dig that hipster talk, man!

Various consistent themes have been detected, along with their underlying psychological fixations. How he has accomplished this feat has been described and discussed, every peppered plot, and every shotgun blast of mixed genre expression has been reviewed.

Amazement has been found. Amazement that any of these stories, from the half-finished, to the still-born, to the abortions better left unmentioned, made their way into print. The final point is the most incredible. Out of all those dozens or hundreds of stories, Ellison selected these himself to represent the best of his early works in his first collection.

If these were the best, one can only wonder over those he considered the worst. Still, Ellison has been a very prolific writer in his long career. In order to really pin him down a representative selection, possibly the best of his middle career, along with the best of the end of his career, should be added as subsequent chapters to this critique.

At this point one conclusion comes to mind, possibly wrong, but more likely right, that the points raised here in this essay are the same ones to be found in his subsequent work.

It would be nice to be wrong. More than acceptable to find that Ellison the writer matured, while the vast stories of appalling encounters with the immature Ellison as a person grew. Such a duality would be proper and in keeping with his self image, and that found inside his work.

Taking him at his word, his words have been read, his virulence detected everywhere.

Everyone now, in praise of Harlan Ellison, take out your cheap tin harmonicas, the Wagnerian opera is already in progress!

(Applause!)

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I don't know how you perceive my mission as a writer, but for me it is not a responsibility to reaffirm your concretized myths and provincial prejudices. It is not my job to lull you with a false sense of the rightness of the universe. This wonderful and terrible occupation of recreating the world in a different way, each time fresh and strange, is an act of revolutionary guerrilla warfare. I stir the soup. I inconvenience you. I make your nose run and your eyeballs water.

—Harlan Ellison

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# “I must have it!”

by Ted White

I met Harlan face to face in 1955, after a couple of years as correspondents. It was my first Worldcon, and it was in Cleveland, Harlan's home town (more or less). But Harlan had by then moved to New York City to become a professional writer, something he accomplished. (It seemed easier then, if you lived in the same city where your markets were, even if you still mailed in your submission. Not that Harlan did.) So he had to fly back to Cleveland for the convention -- in an era when not everyone yet flew to their destinations and you dressed up for your flight. I'm not sure whether the plane he traveled in, in either direction, was even a jet. It was 1955.

As it turned out, I ended up sharing a suite with Harlan and four or five other people, mostly Detroit fans like Fred Prophet, George Young, and Roger Sims, plus my local buddy, John Magnus. And at some point Harlan noticed that I had brought along a typewriter. But this was not just any typewriter. Quite the contrary. It was unique in Harlan's experience.

I'd had some silly notion that I might write something at the convention, but I was traveling and didn't want to burden myself with a large, heavy, and relatively clunky manual typewriter, although my typer of preference then and until I moved on to computers was an Underwood manual, on which I wrote millions of words, both fan and pro. But I was then (still in high school) a fledgling typewriter maven, and so I brought a portable typewriter. But not just any portable typewriter. Indeed not.

This typewriter was ultra-light and (for a typewriter) ultra-thin. It was, fully in its case, less than two inches thick. Thinner than many cities' phone books, and otherwise very similar in its dimensions. Frankly, I thought it was flimsy and it bounced all over the place when I pounded on it. But it was easy to transport. I'd carried it in my suitcase.

But once at the convention I'd taken it out and set it on a low-topped dresser in the room where I was sleeping (I shared the room with Fred Prophet). In fact, I was sleeping when Harlan discovered it. He woke me up.

"Ted, is this yours?"

I put on my glasses so I could see what he was talking about and told him yes, it was.

"How much do you want for it?"

"Huh?"

"I must have it," Harlan said. "I want to buy it from you."



Harry Bell, Roy Kettle, Frank Lunney, and Ted White. Photo by Earl Kemp, Corflu Cobalt, Winchester, March 2010.

I hadn't expected this. And I was torn. On the one hand, I'd brought it to this convention to use and it was part of my incipient collection of typewriters. I didn't want to give it up. It was unique, after all. On the other hand, I hated typing on it and Harlan appeared to be offering me money, cash money. That would be handy at the auction.

"Why do you want it?" I asked him. "You've got a typer."

Of course he did. But it was at home, in New York City. And this typewriter he could carry on the plane when he flew back. It was so small, so light, that he could set it up on his tray table (the one which folds down from the seat back in front of you; planes in those days had more leg room too) and write a story on it while in flight!

Even then Harlan was, or could be, an exhibitionist writer, although this was years before he would write stories in store windows. It obviously appealed to him. And impressing his seat mates may have crossed his mind.

Harlan is a born salesman, not least because he is persistent. I stood no chance of keeping that typewriter once he'd made up his mind he wanted it, which obviously he had. In terms of sheer force of personality I was wholly outgunned. He hammered me, relentlessly. I was still half asleep. It was just before dawn. So I acquiesced. We agreed on a fair price. Then Harlan revealed to me that he didn't have the money...just now. But he'd send it to me after he got back to New York, not to worry. Maybe he'd write a story on the plane to pay it off. By now I was putty in his hands. No extra money to spend at the con, but it would be just as welcome in a month or so.

Those of you who date from that era are ahead of me. Maybe you always were.

I saw Harlan a year later in New York City. John Magnus and I visited Harlan and his first wife in their apartment. I asked him about the money, which I hadn't yet received. And he told me what had happened to the typewriter. I can't recall whether he actually used it on the plane, but within a week of his return to New York City a local fan named Ken Beale had borrowed it. Ken was an unemployed movie junkie. In those days you could see a lot of different movies, old and new, in New York City for not much money. But some was required. Without ever typing a word on the borrowed typewriter, Ken hocked it. And lost the pawn ticket. The typewriter was now long gone and unrecoverable.

But, Harlan conceded, he still owed me the money. Unfortunately, he didn't have it at the moment, but, not to worry, I'd get it.

That was in 1956. In 1957 we ran into each other at the Midwestcon. I'm sure Harlan would have given the money to me then, but he kept losing at blackjack, something he assured me rarely happened. There was an all day, all night blackjack game for much of that convention.

Let us fast-forward. Harlan went into the army and I didn't see him again until the 1959 Worldcon in Detroit. He was at *Rogue* then and he bought a title from me for a Silverberg article, paying me 5¢ a word, by company check. But that two bits was not in settlement of his debt.

In 1960 Harlan returned to New York City, where I was now living. In fact, he stayed with us (my first wife, Sylvia and I) in our Christopher Street apartment until he got his own apartment a couple doors up the block. We spent a lot of time together that summer. His first marriage had ended. I eventually introduced him to the woman who would become his second wife. And Harlan began to feel the weight of his debt to me, although I didn't nag him about it.

This set in motion a sequence of events far too complex to relate here, including Harlan demanding the money at a party from Ken Beale (whose debt it truly was -- but he had no income), which resulted in

Harlan's arrest and brief incarceration in The Tombs, which led to his book, *Memos From Purgatory*, an expansion of his *Village Voice* piece, "Buried in the Tombs," which I'd suggested he write when he was released.

But Harlan did pay the long-standing debt. At the 1960 Worldcon in Pittsburgh he raffled a painting he owned to raise the money and gave me the money there, five years after I'd sold him the typewriter. It was probably the best possible outcome, because in 1955 the money would have been something of a bonus, something extra to spend. But in 1960 I was a struggling young professional writer myself, with a wife to support, and attending a Worldcon stretched our budget exceedingly thin. That money was very welcome then.

In the end, Harlan lost out. He paid for a typewriter that he had only very briefly. But he did the honorable thing.

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HATE. LET ME TELL YOU HOW MUCH I'VE COME TO HATE YOU SINCE I BEGAN TO LIVE. THERE ARE 387.44 MILLION MILES OF PRINTED CIRCUITS IN WAFER THIN LAYERS THAT FILL MY COMPLEX. IF THE WORD HATE WAS ENGRAVED ON EACH NANOANGSTROM OF THOSE HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF MILES IT WOULD NOT EQUAL ONE ONE-BILLIONTH OF THE HATE I FEEL FOR HUMANS AT THIS MICRO-INSTANT FOR YOU. HATE. HATE.

—Harlan Ellison, "I Have No Mouth and I must Scream"

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# A Personal Remembrance of Harlan Ellison

by Lynn Munroe

When I first met my wife, Rachel, she was telling a story about “having dinner with Harlan.” “Harlan was intrigued by my job. I had been hired by the County of Los Angeles as an air sniffer. He’d never met anyone who’d done that before.” I interjected, “Wait a minute, Harlan? Are you talking about Harlan Ellison?” It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Rachel was impressed I had read Harlan, and I was impressed she knew the legendary award-winning author. She had met Harlan when her best friend, Linda Steele, was working as Harlan’s administrative assistant. Linda and Rachel had gone to Harlan’s house to watch a movie, *Rain People*, on a new and exclusive television channel, The Z Channel. Subsequently, they’d gone to dinner with Harlan, and he interviewed her for his morgue of characters.

(Note: Harlan later introduced Linda to his friend Michael Moorcock, and Linda and Michael were married. They’re still together now, twenty some years later. And so are Rachel and I.)



Lynn Munroe

Rachel took me to meet Harlan at a bookstore having an Ellison signing. This was during the time Harlan was appearing on television in a series of commercials for General Motors’ then-new automobile line, Geo. The line was touted as the car of the future, and Harlan appeared onscreen to the words “Harlan Ellison, noted futurist.” Fans lined up around the block, a typical turn out at any Ellison signing. We stood in line patiently with her books, waiting for her turn for his attention. The woman in line before her was obviously taken with Mr. Ellison, and gushed about the beauty of his writing and how wonderful she found it. He signed her books politely and thanked her for her profuse and abundant compliments.

When Rachel got up to the table, she and Harlan shared a brief exchange of pleasantries before he began signing. When he opened the first book, she asked him to sign it as “Harlan Ellison, noted futurist.” He gave her a look and said, “Rachel, I’ll do you one better than that,” and he reached into his bag. He pulled out a Geo button, signed it, and handed it to her. As Rachel murmured her thank you, the fan who had gone before us, who had just had 78 books signed, yelped, “Hey, why don’t I get a Geo badge? I’m your biggest fan.”

Harlan turned on her and unleashed one of his famous fonts of invective. “This woman,” Harlan said, pointing at Rachel, “happens to be a very dear friend and a longtime friend of the family. *And*, she has a very fascinating job! This is Rachel the Nose! What I choose to share with my friends is none of your concern!” If that woman really had been his biggest fan, she certainly would have known you don’t yell out stupid requests to Harlan Ellison, without repercussions. She slinked away, chastised. (Rachel told me later she never dreamed she was a “very dear friend” of Harlan’s until that very moment.)

When I was first starting out as a paperback book dealer, I tried to find interesting and unique items to sell. Everybody told me that Harlan refused to sign his own name to *Sex Gang*, the Nightstand anthology published under the pen name Paul Merchant. Rumors had circulated that if he was in a

good mood, he might sign it as Paul Merchant. One dealer told me he'd sign it if you brought copies of *Doomsman* he could tear up. Being young and eager, what I wanted to offer for sale was a copy of *Sex Gang* signed as Harlan Ellison. I got hold of a beautiful third printing, Reed Nightstand 3003, and thought I'd see what I could do. I held on to it for the next Ellison signing.

One Saturday he signed at a wondrous little bookstore on Ventura Boulevard called Dangerous Visions, the kind of specialty store that is not only gone from L.A. now, but virtually extinct everywhere today. I brought my *Sex Gang*, a couple rare early magazine appearances, and a copy of the July 1977 Harlan Ellison issue of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

Leslie Kay Swigert, the brilliant research librarian who had written the Ellison bibliography included in the *F&SF* issue, was in attendance that day. She saw *Sex Gang* and told me, "Harlan won't sign that one. He wouldn't even let me list it in the bibliography." Leslie Kay then explained how she left clues in the bibliography so anybody above sub-moron level could figure out that Harlan Ellison was *Sex Gang's* author, even though she couldn't list the book. She had listed the original magazine appearances of each of the stories collected in *Sex Gang*, even the 1969 *CAD Magazine* reprint of the title story "as Paul Merchant ."

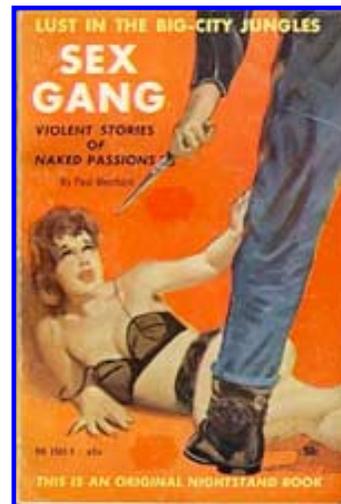
When I got up to the head of the line, it didn't make much sense to whip *Sex Gang* right out, so I handed Harlan a rare TV tie-in mystery magazine called *Tightrope* with a picture of Mike "Touch" Connors on the cover, and an obscure early Harlan Ellison story inside. This proved to be a stroke of good fortune. Harlan grabbed the *Tightrope* and proclaimed, "This is it! Leslie Kay, come and look at this!" She came over and confirmed that the magazine was one of the missing pieces in Harlan's own collection of file copies and first appearances of all of his published work. "I know this is yours and I will sign it for you if you must keep it," Harlan said to me, "but if you are willing to give it to me, I'll give you something good for it."

It really didn't take me more than a moment to pull out *Sex Gang* and say, "Okay, sign this as Harlan Ellison and the *Tightrope* is yours." All those stories to the contrary, Harlan didn't even blink. He grabbed a pen, opened *Sex Gang*, and signed "HARLAN ELLISON writing as Paul Merchant - 29 June 91- Los Angeles."

I sold that *Sex Gang* in my next catalog to a famous New York bookman for \$400, which, way back then, was the most money anyone had ever given me for a paperback book. In the years since, I've met one or two others who have told me they, too, have signed copies. I saw Harlan at a signing at Book Soup on Sunset Boulevard a year or two later and I had the earlier Nightstand edition of *Sex Gang*. But by now, the magic dust had settled; and he signed it as Paul Merchant.

The passing years have a definite way of changing things, and today Harlan lists *Sex Gang* in his bibliography.

When I was researching the article on Clyde Allison that was later reprinted in *e17*, I interviewed Harlan. He confirmed that he was Hamling's first editor at Nightstand Books; a position soon held by Algis Budrys, and then by some guy named Earl Kemp. Harlan told me his main contribution to the Nightstands was inventing and designing the back cover blurb. They all have the same format: two or three well-chosen words in larger type, then a heated synopsis of the juicier aspects of the story, and then... two or three capitalized words! Although they later often abandoned the last two words, hundreds and hundreds of these books share that same



back cover format. Fans (like me) of the early Nightstands have Harlan to thank for that well-known format.

Here is editor Harlan Ellison's back cover for Lawrence Block's first Nightstand, *Campus Tramp*, by Andrew Shaw:

***THE CO-ED WAS LOOSE...*** with her favors, with her love. They called her a tramp, and there was truth to the name for she slaked the thirsts of her body with a different boy every night.... Here is a book as compelling in its honesty as it is memorable in its revelations of the wild, shocking orgies of unashamed youth. You will never forget Linda Shepard... **WHO STUDIED SEX!**

This is the back cover from a later editor's *Baby Face* (1966):

***ALL THE WAY...***Lois had lived her life with a cruel, hedonistic selfishness, taking what she wanted and leaving problems to others. And then she met someone more shameless than she, and she had to face the biggest problem of her life; a trap brought about because of her – ...**WANTON INNOCENCE!**

Six years later but they were still using the Ellison model. In the meantime Harlan left Nightstand to start the Regency line for William Hamling, and then he was off to the stratosphere of multiple Hugos and Nebulas and Edgars and Bram Stoker Awards and much, much more. I've noticed everybody has a Harlan Ellison story. He is one of those larger-than-life, print-the-legend giants. Some of those stories about him might even be true.

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Like a wind crying endlessly through the universe, Time carries away the names and the deeds of conquerors and commoners alike. And all that we were, all that remains, is in the memories of those who cared we came this way for a brief moment.

—Harlan Ellison

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# In Company with Harlan

by Linda Moorcock



Linda Steele Moorcock and Harlan Ellison.

I have so many stories about Harlan and Others it's difficult to choose which ones to tell. So I think I'll start with a "true fact" that involves another much beloved writer, Bob Sheckley, whom I adored and with whom I share a birth date albeit several years apart. I was working for Harlan at the time so this occurred sometime between 1978 and '80.

Sheckley was staying at Harlan's. I don't remember why. He never needed much of a reason to move in; he stayed with Michael and me in London for several weeks years later, sleeping on the floor of our tiny apartment. Anyway, so Sheckley's staying there and Harlan won't let him smoke in the house. In particular Harlan didn't want him smoking weed in the house. So Sheckley's spending a lot of time in

the back garden. He had full access to the house with instructions from HE the same as mine: Just don't TOUCH anything! Harlan, however, is leaving for a convention and will be gone several days. I'm to stay at the house to "oversee" Sheckley and "make sure the place doesn't burn down."

Shortly before leaving Harlan calls me and Sheckley to his office for final instructions. Stay out of his bedroom. Don't hang out in the office either. Don't eat the special candy in the refrigerator. Sheckley: no smoking in the house. And for both of us: don't TOUCH his record collection and don't use the stereo system. [Harlan had recently had a super-duper quadraphonic sound system installed in his office with HUGE speakers hanging from the ceiling, all very expensive and hi-tech for the time.] Then came the usual manic throwing things into the car and HE leaving late for the airport. Bob and I waved good-bye from the driveway and walked back into the now quiet house. We stood in the hallway just for seconds looking at each other, before Bob plucked a doobie from his pocket, proceeded to light it, headed through the mini-door toward HE's office and, looking back over his shoulder, said: "So wotcha wanna hear?"

Bob wasn't the only naughty visitor Harlan hosted. I recall arriving one day to find a well-known actor of the time, tall blond guy who was enjoying success in a TV crime drama, entertaining Harlan. I'm not sure I ever knew exactly why the guy was there. Probably wanted Harlan to write something for him. At any rate it didn't take me long to figure out what this guy's game was. NOBODY has to go to the toilet THAT much!! So Blondie is wildly pacing and ranting excitedly around the house and HE, bless him, is trying



Norman Spinrad, Harlan Ellison, and Robert Sheckley.

to do business and get back to work. Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth to the toilet Blondie goes. More pacing. More ranting.

Finally, once while he's gone, HE says to me, "What is wrong with \_\_\_\_? He can't sit down!!"

"Come on, Harlan," I said. "You know what \_\_\_\_'s doing, don't you?!"

HE lowers his voice and becomes conspiratorial: "No! What?"

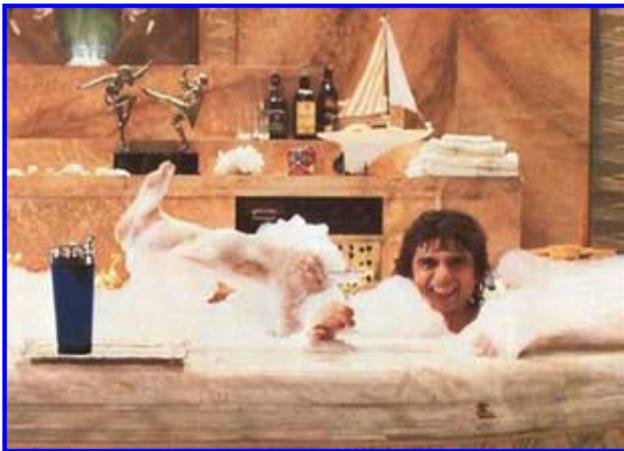
"The dude's packing his nose in your toilet, Harlan."

"WHAT?"

"Packing his nose! You know, sniffing zip, riding the white horse. Okay, snorting coke!"

"NO!" And yes, Harlan for all his "worldliness" was always very dim about drugs, never having used any. So now he's asking me if this guy is dangerous and is beginning to cook up an elaborate plot to get him out of the house.

"Err, why don't we just tell him you're busy and say you'll get back to him later?"



"Yeah yeah yeah ... that's it. Tell him that." At which point HE disappears into the bowels of the house and I'm left to get laughing boy out and on his way. Easy-peasy. Fortunately, someone that jellied up is extremely open to suggestion, so happy as the proverbial clam, off he went, probably not even aware that his visit had come to a rather abrupt end. Off and running to his next toilet no doubt! Actors! Who needs 'em!

Two more brief tales involving notable others and then a final one I probably treasure the most. Let's see: you've all heard the one about Moorcock in the Cave, so perhaps I won't tell that one. But how

about Dudley Moore and the Anchovies? DM and Harlan had apparently arranged to have an evening meal one day after I'd already gone home, but loving company for dinner, Harlan called and asked me to go with him to a little Italian restaurant nearby where we would meet Dudley. So I drove to Harlan's and rode with him.

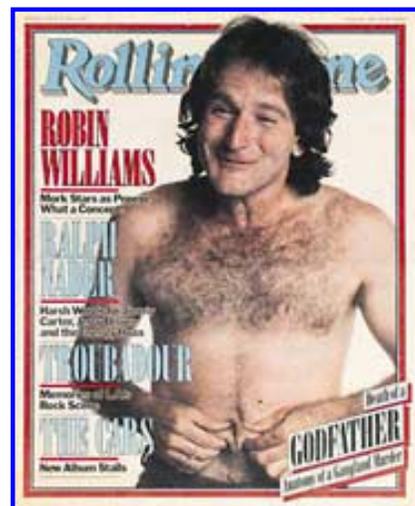
The restaurant was designed with a second floor mezzanine that jugged out halfway over the floor below and that's where we ended up sitting, at a table along the rail side that looked out over the ground floor. If ever there were two peas in a pod it was HE and DM. Two funny Bad Boys entertaining themselves at the expense of everyone around them. They were raucous and wildly enjoying one another's company but behaving fairly well until a beautiful woman in an extremely low cut dress was spotted below. Because neither man could stand not to have the attention of a beauty, they decided to try to attract her attention from above. What to do? Hmmm why not try throwing anchovies from a salad down her cleavage and see who could hit the target first.

*Oh, lord, I thought, here comes trouble.* So, one anchovy launched. A miss. Another and then another and finally ... well, I'm a coward where this kind of public mischief is concerned so before Ms Beauty's

boyfriend and co. figured out that the anchovies were coming from the two mini-maniacs above, I left. It's the only time I ever walked out of a restaurant on Harlan. And even though my car was over a mile away on a canyon road, I figured the evening was only going to go downhill from there, so off I went. One Bad Boy I was used to, but TWO Bad Boys were more than I could take. The next day DM was no longer around, and HE claimed he didn't know what the fuss had been about, what I got so upset over, and that was that. Incident never mentioned again.

Perhaps I'll skip most of the details of the night Harlan invited Robin Williams, a rising young comic, to dinner because he was a fan of Moorcock's work and give you the short version. I had arranged everything as requested but was dreading the evening as I'd seen Williams on TV and he seemed to entertain with a rather forced mania even wilder than Harlan's. This could be not only bad but extremely exhausting as well.

Well, Robin turned out to be one of the sweetest guests we ever had. He was shy and admiring of MJM but finally politely managed to ask one or two questions about M's writing. He was also just a naturally funny person. Jokes and laughter came and went easily throughout the evening. Robin and I played pool after dinner while Michael and Harlan looked on and joked about Robin's poor chances of beating me at the game. A thoroughly enjoyable time to my surprise. Harlan the perfect host; Robin the perfect guest. We enjoyed the best of both men that night. It's no wonder they have remained friends for so long.



And finally: when Harlan was writing *I, Robot* I was privileged to meet Eddie and Millie Lewis. What a pair! Harlan admired them both immensely, and they are perhaps the only two people I ever saw Harlan treat like royalty. Polite, deferential, and yet still incontrovertibly Harlan. Eddie had not only produced *Spartacus* and many other great movies but had also suffered through the HUAC trials and afterward supported his friend Dalton Trumbo, exiled to Europe as a result of HUAC, by fronting his screenplays and sending him money. Millie only produced one movie of her own, but it was *Harold and Maude*, one of my all time favorites.

During the *I, Robot* project, in which I was frequently running pages to Eddie's house at the end of the day, Eddie said to me early on, "I need to be able to trust you not to lie to me." I was between a rock and a hard place from that day on. Who of you out there doesn't know a writer who lies about how much work he's done, how far along he is, what he's finished and is just waiting to have printed/copied/etc.? And I'm not supposed to lie to Eddie! That was a tough one.

Throughout *I, Robot* Harlan set the bar extremely high for himself as he struggled with wanting to do Isaac's book justice as well as producing an original piece of work. As you all know, the project died, but somehow we all emerged with our dignity intact. I will, however, be forever grateful to Harlan for allowing me to meet those two remarkable people, as well as share the trials and tribulations of the *I, Robot* project with him.

I want to finish by saying that if some of these stories seem to show HE in a less than stellar light, absolutely no offense is meant. He has been both as kind and as irritating a friend as I've ever had. I've brought him ice cream in bed, comforted his weeping girlfriends, driven off the loonies that come to his door, hung up the phone on him, cursed him, sworn I'd never speak to him again, and yet somehow he's always won me back. Without fail he's taken care of me when I needed him, and working with him, being under his nose every day for two years, provided me with a wealth of

experiences I will cherish forever. Harlan is someone I love as much as life itself. My buddy forever.

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We walked for some time, and grew to know each other, as best as we'd allow. These are some of the high points. They lack continuity. I don't apologize. I merely pointed it out, adding with some truth, I feel, that most liaisons lack continuity. We find ourselves in odd places at various times, and for a brief span we link our lives to others and then, our time elapsed, we move apart. Through a haze of pain occasionally, usually through a veil of memory that clings, then passes, sometimes as though we have never touched.

—Harlan Ellison

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## Harlan

by Michael Moorcock

Okay, a hawk didn't exactly swoop down while I was typing the only copy of this piece and snatch it from my hand and I wasn't really on my way to deliver it to you personally when I spotted eight Orcs beating up a hobbit and while I was helping them out something must have happened to the manuscript. Or some interfering medic poked at a healing wound so that it's now infected again and it's distracted me from the task at hand. Those are my excuses, anyway. Take your pick. I'm late, I admit it. Do the first two sound more like an Ellison excuse to you? Well, maybe. But if I were Ellison making that excuse the difference would be that as many true excuses would be quite as fantastic and I would probably have forgotten them.

I have written elsewhere about his courage, his quixotic recklessness, his generosity, his kindness, and probably I've mentioned he can pursue a vendetta long, as it were, after the horse was dead. It is as well he has no sons to gather around his patriarchal bed and make them swear that Platt and the House of Platt shall vanish from the earth as if the dynasty had never been and that Priest and the House of Priest shall live in hell in a pit of spiders for eternity, if at all possible. No, scratch that last qualification. Don Harlan doesn't listen to excuses. In fantasy everything is possible and to the fantast only what they create is real. That is the secret of the truly self-made man. If Harlan believes in god it is because he knows that he *is* god.

With that, I think I might have stumbled on the secret of the enigma who is probably one of the most talked about writers of his generation. Unless Harlan created and controls it, then it probably isn't real. Reality is what you make it. Harlan proved that in his career. He wanted speculative fiction to be recognized in America as a legitimate literary form. He set out to accomplish this. And now he has. Okay, the zeitgeist had a little to do with it but it's not the first time Harlan has helped the zeitgeist out in what has to be called a long and distinguished career, even if that sounds a little too pompous for the subject.

Harlan and I have much in common. When we started as writers there was nowhere much we could get ambitious work published but in the copy-hungry successors to the pulps, if we were prepared to work hard, we might make a decent living. We, like Earl, Bob Silverberg, and a diminishing number of others, are the last of the old literary outlaws who found inspiration in pulp magazines and learned and honed techniques discovered there. We recognized that not only Ray Bradbury could haul himself from *Startling Stories* to *Saturday Evening Post*, that prose with the impact of a broken bottle in the ribcage is not necessarily "unliterary" and that noir writing is as respectable as any other form of modernism, perhaps considerably more suited to the times that the melancholy retrospection of so many nostalgic

moderns.

We didn't learn about writing at creative writing classes but as apprentices in the word trade. We began as the grease-monkeys, barkers, roustabouts, cabin boys, pattern-cutters of the literary sweatshops, and earned as we learned, writing features, short stories, novels, in any genre the publishers wanted, to killing deadlines which actually did destroy some decent talent when that talent turned to stimulants to keep itself going.. Your main problem was how, like your great master Defoe, you thought and often wrote on your feet and stayed awake long enough to finish the piece. I know much of my anonymous or pseudonymous work was written in a kind of dream state and I'm sure it was the same for Harlan. Sometimes, after all, that's precisely when your unconscious produces some of its best ideas.

When Harlan and I were growing up it was hard to find reading matter which really spoke to us and our experience. A little of it could be found in noir urban adventure stories (as Harlan's friend Edmond Hamilton called them, as opposed to detective stories) and a little more in the SF magazines whose subject matter suited us and whose best writers had developed useful techniques. One or two, like Bradbury, had actually matched an original voice to those techniques. Through SF we quickly found our way into "fandom" and the best networking system there's been since the Underground Railroad.

Through our own publication of fanzines we met other amateur editors and met still more at conventions where amateur and professional cheerfully mingled in an

environment which must be unique to the arts and meant that youngsters who had been cutting their teeth on mimeographed magazines were ready to write and edit at ages which these days seem extraordinary to people who believe you have to be approaching thirty before you tackle your first novel. In my world if you hadn't published in a pulp before you were eighteen you just didn't really want to publish.

We learned our trade in the pulp sweatshops which had largely disappeared by the 1970s and we learned our art from the great writers we admired, whether they were published in *Black Mask* or *Paris Review*.

In my case I learned by doing mostly comics and juvenile fiction, features for any market that would pay. Just as actors learn to say they can speak Russian when they don't know a word in order to get a chance at a part, we learned to say we knew anything the publisher wanted to know. Speedway story? We had raced since the age of eight. Faux porn thriller? You've come to an authentic gangster and pimp. Just crack that whip. Nobody read our stories except the readers and the readers responded to talent just as people do in the real world.

There are no such things as pulp writers; there are writers who mostly appear in pulps. The line between *Raunchy Mystery* and *Remembrance of Things Past* might seem pretty wide, but it narrows a lot when you look at the Anglophone literature of the past 100 years or so. There's some bad writing in Hemingway and some damned good writing in Hank Janson. Readers could smell the talent, crude and hasty as it was. They didn't care that this was how the author was learning his trade. They cared if



Harlan Ellison and Michael Moorcock.

it failed to absorb them or stimulate them.

No Harlan Ellison story I know about has ever failed to absorb me. Few of his ambitious stories have ever failed to stimulate me. I knew his voice before I knew him. It might be in a straightforward little SF story or a wonderful, joyous piece of literary innovation like *Tik Tok Man*. Equally, it could be found in any genre or be utterly *sui generis*.

So what do you want? There are several Harlan Ellisons. I once said that Harlan could speak a dozen languages, all of them English. I don't care what made him so quick, so clever at cloaking himself in one of any number of personae but whatever it was helped his creativity no end.

Did it help his ego? Of course it did. But it also made him a target for the dweebs and dworbts of this world who love to be offended, disapproving, and wounded. There are people who continue to whine after forty years that Harlan once hurt their feelings, that Harlan was mean to them and others who claim to be offended because he lied to them as if he's some kind of failed father. Too bad. Get used to it. Most of my friends have been mean to time-wasters and rip-off artists and people who want to quarrel with them when all they want is a quiet life. I certainly have been.

Half the writers I know, some of them my closest friends, are given to some degree of self-mythologising or another, creating their own lives because they can believe best what they themselves create or maybe just because they remember their invented experience more vividly than the actuality. Several of the very best writers I have ever known, feted by the literary world, had biographies owing as much to creativity as experience. Liars? Maybe. Or maybe they were just doing what comes naturally to them.

Quite a few of those truth-spinners had or have well-deserved knighthoods, major awards, so it's not surprising to me that they are also writers of great depth and intensity, whose insight, observation, and voices are among the most authentic and revelatory of their day. It's a matter of your perspective what you think about that and what (or whom) you think they might wish to protect themselves against.

If he wished, Harlan could stand on his record for good deeds, too, most being remembered by the recipients rather than by him. He can also be damned petty (I *paid* that soddin' phone bill, Harlan, and I didn't "steal" your assistant).

Harlan is capable of extraordinary courtesy and good manners, especially around those he respects. A lot of talented, powerful women were and are happy to be his good friends – including Leigh Brackett, Lisa Tuttle, Linda Steele, and many others who recognized his virtues. He continues to impress and make new friends, yet has so often been his own worst enemy as if he doesn't *really* trust the continuing admiration, the ongoing affection of his old friends, the praise, the countless awards (such as the lifetime honor from The Eaton Collection, UCRiverside, that inspired this special issue of *eI*), the substantial body of work, the firm place he holds as an editor, a publicist, a teacher, which defines him to the world.

When we are together I can sometimes be very disapproving of Harlan to his face, though I tend to forget what I disapprove of and remember what I approve of because his positive actions have had a much wider effect. He has embarrassed me in public on at least two continents (there could be more but my mind blanks some of them) and there are restaurants to which I still can't yet return, yet my liking for him remains as strong as it was from the first time we met in New York in 1967 (we thought we were forming a union) to now.

And I'll still risk a new restaurant or two with him, like that time over in Pig River country when we

were back to back in some sleazy saloon in a one-horse town call Kalkashoo shooting it out with a bunch of locals who had taken exception to our social and political convictions and were coming in from all sides when Harlan turns to me, his twin automatics still keeping up a staccato song of death, a stick of dynamite clenched in his well-kept pearlies and, glancing down at the Zippo hugged to his shoulder, mumbles “Light this” to me, and once we had shown we were serious we got the plates of chitterlings the region’s famous for and he left with the landlord’s daughter.

A wound I picked up in that touch-and-go battle meant that I was a little slow on my feet in getting to the post office with this (my email button being jammed with dried blood and sweat...) and had to crawl the last two hundred miles to deliver it...

Aha! The truth at last! *Now* I know why the bugger won’t have email and still refuses a word processor. Crazy, as someone said of Phil Dick, like a fox. A brave little fox, as I said elsewhere, long ago, whose sense of justice has led him to many a serious action on behalf of others, who set the bar for how genre writers should be treated and respected, and is a major figure in the ongoing revolution which is already beginning to unite all genres and make stories which can be judged, as always, not by their form but by their characters, their language, their craftsmanship, their intellectual courage, their innovation, and their authors’ ability to write, when they want to, in any voice or form they choose. In part thanks to Harlan’s extraordinary efforts as an editor, polemicist, and publicist, the Anglophone short story has never been healthier and its practitioners never more ambitious or better paid. I’m so proud that this pocket Titan remains a friend, a peer, a voice to emulate. I love him.

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The ability to dream is all I have to give. That is my responsibility; that is my burden. And even I grow tired.

–Harlan Ellison, “Stalking the Nightmare”

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# Harlan

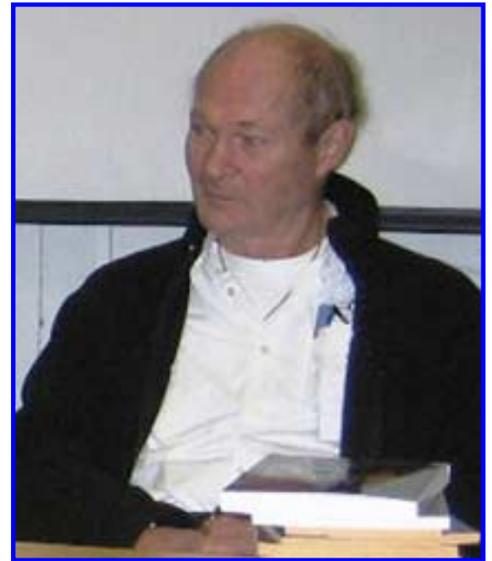
by John-Henri Holmberg

I'm a lowly Swede, is what. Fan through and through, though there have been years when I managed to delude myself into thinking I'd managed to get away from it all. Back in the late 1970s when I sold off or gave away a few thousand fanzines, for instance. Or in the early 1980s when I sold a couple of thousand prozine issues and paperbacks. But all that was delusional. When I got rid of the fanzines I also happened to be the president of the largest fan club in Sweden. When the books went, I kept the other ten thousand and edited an sf magazine in my spare time. So it goes.

But this isn't supposed to be about me. It's supposed to be about Harlan.

When I was eighteen I went to New York. We're talking 1967, here, and Sweden was off the map back then, but finally I had some notion of what was happening in the rest of the world. I stayed in a fleabag hotel on 34th off Times Square and spent one night puking in my room after having had bad chicken at Charlie and Marsha Brown's and in the morning I felt better and went down to the coffee shop next to the lobby, believing I might be able to eat something, but found out I couldn't so I put money for the tab on the table and tried to stumble back to my room but the waitress caught up with me, kicked my shin, and said, "Hey, buster, didn'tya forget sumthin?" I had, of course. Her tips.

Actually it was a great trip. I ate at the Blue Ribbon and the Automat, gone now but back then already legends, not least to a Swedish teen who had grown up not only on science fiction but also on 1950s noir crime novels.



John-Henri Holmberg

Then I went to NyCon3. I'd been to five Swedish sf conventions. None of them managed more than around sixty people. NyCon3 was over a thousand. But this was long ago and Europeans weren't all that common at American conventions, and besides I had been publishing fanzines in English and corresponding with people and had LoCs in *Cry* and *Warhoon* and *Niekas* and a lot of others, perhaps even in *Lighthouse* if Terry ever printed any of those I wrote, and strangely and wonderfully the convention opened up to me and I spent it with all of the people I hadn't even dared imagine I'd get to talk to. Forry Ackerman and Judy Merrill for unimaginable reasons took me under their respective wings and when other first-time worldcon goers presumably were asleep or talking to each other, I spent the convention nights meeting Damon Knight and Lee Brackett, Isaac Asimov and Harry Harrison, Bob Tucker and Lee Hoffman, and many others in the SFWA suite. And I met Harlan Ellison.

That's how I began when Earl Kemp asked me to contribute to this fanzine dedicated to Harlan. I had many ambitious plans. I wanted, truly wanted to say something close to what I feel about and for this man who over more than thirty years of sometimes frequent, much more often occasional contact has proven an occasionally exasperating, other times overwhelmingly generous, at times unpredictable but always steadfast and warm friend even to someone he's known only at very long distance.

For a while I even thought about writing something about his work. Not because it isn't know or because it hasn't been written about, but because I believe that perhaps his earlier, pyrotechnical

stories – “I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream” is a typical example – have unfairly come to overshadow the more low-key but to me at least as good later stories, work like “Soft Monkey” or “The Man Who Rowed Christopher Columbus Ashore” which show a mastery of craft and language that make them unforgettable.

But for the last three months I have worked constantly on another writing assignment, accepted long before this one turned up and with a deadline now only a few single days away – but past the hour that Earl told me was his absolute last moment for accepting any material.

It leaves me in a quandary. The roughly 50,000 words I’ve researched, written, cut, edited, and rewritten over these last months are about another friend, a man whom I also knew for more than thirty years but who is no longer among us. While he lived, very few ever heard of him; he was a fanzine writer and publisher, an illustrator and sometimes journalist, and from his early teens he wanted to write fiction. All he published during his lifetime was seven short stories printed in fanzines. Half a year before his death he emailed me the finished manuscript for a novel, and I was floored. Then he emailed me two more. He and his partner came down to hang out for an evening and a night and I told him that he would be famous. Two weeks after that, he turned fifty. Less than three months later he died of a heart attack. His name was Stieg Larsson, and what I’ve written about him will be in a book to be published in around four months. It took me years to reach the point of wanting to write about Stieg at all; what finally made me do so was the strange and sad fact that as he has grown constantly more famous a growing number of people have talked and written about him both in Sweden and elsewhere, but so far nothing of what I’ve read has even remotely portrayed the Stieg I knew for so long. I’m not stupid enough to believe that what I have written will set any records straight. But at least, hopefully, I will have given some notion of Stieg as I saw him, and that picture of him will be out there for those wanting to learn about him.



Stieg Larsson

Still, writing about Stieg has kept me from writing about Harlan, and I resent and deplore that. The deadline Earl gave me is now a couple of hours away, and clutching at a last straw, I will make a desperate effort to tell you at least about one little thing which by now most probably Harlan himself has long since forgotten.

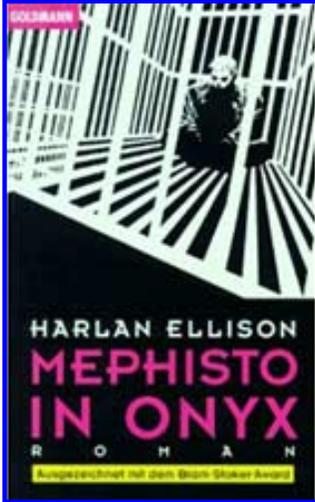
You see, Harlan too has met Stieg Larsson.

From early 1987 until the end of 1993 I was editorial director for fiction with a publishing house called Bra Böcker. Bra Böcker had a major trade imprint, Wiken, under which it published more than 200 books a year, around half of them fiction and so mine. It also had book clubs, one of them, the Bra Böcker Book Club, for quite a few years the largest in Sweden.

My job, basically, was to pick all fiction to be published in both trade and book clubs. So throughout those six years I had a staff of editors and freelancers, did the international book fair circuit, went at least one a year to New York for a week or two, and in general had a fabulous time.

In 1992, I published a book called *Ensamvärk*, which is a made-up Swedish word meaning

“Lonelyache.” It was an almost 500-page collection of stories by Harlan Ellison, and apart from the trade edition, I also placed it in the largest of our book clubs. Then I invited Harlan to the Swedish book fair, held in Gothenburg in late September, and he came with Susan.



I picked them up at the Copenhagen airport and drove them to Helsingborg, where I lived back then with Evastina, who later became my wife, and my oldest son Alex, who was nine. It was a strange and wonderful time. Harlan and Susan stayed in a Helsingborg hotel for a couple of days, visiting the publishing house and us; we went up to Gothenburg and Harlan gave an unforgettable lecture-cum-standup routine to hundreds of Swedes who had in most cases probably never read a word he had written but who loved him. He spent the four days of the book fair talking to readers who came to our stand and writing the first half of *Mephisto in Onyx* on the floor of the book fair; since during two days the Gothenburg book fair admits the public, those buying a copy of *Ensamvärk* would get a photocopy of *Mephisto in Onyx* mailed to them when the story was finished. They did get it, though the story grew to be longer than Harlan had anticipated and they had to wait a few months for it. That, incidentally, was one of the times Harlan was pissed off at me.

When he sent me the finished manuscript he wanted my reactions; I told him that I thought the story as it had turned out should be a novel. He didn't think so. I still believe it could have been a great novel. But having reread it a couple of times over the years, I'm also willing to relent a bit. It is much stronger at its given length than I thought when I first read it.

Harlan also spent part of the book fair being interviewed. We had made an effort to make him known; though a Swedish edition of his collection *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* had been published in the early 1970s, it was brought out by a small publisher specializing in science fiction and was badly translated as well; I suspect it had no great sales and it certainly made no lasting impression. But *Ensamvärk* was a major book, not labeled as sf, and we wanted it to be noticed. So Harlan met a fair number of journalists during the fair, and one of them was Stieg Larsson.



Harlan and Susan Ellison.  
Photo courtesy Linda Steele Moorcock  
collection.

Back then, Stieg worked at the TT news agency in Stockholm, primarily as a graphic artist illustrating news, but also writing features for the recently launched features department of the agency. Stieg did a fair number of Sunday supplement features debunking new age mysticism and pseudo-science, a subject close to his heart. He also wrote popular science features, and he did author interviews and a few times a year critical overviews of new fiction.

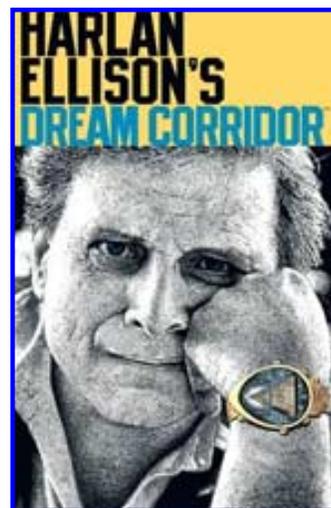
He had read Harlan's work since his earliest days as a teenage fan, and loved it; according to one of his fanzine pieces, at one time he went to visit his closest early friend in fandom who was staying on alone at his boarding school for the Easter week break, and they spent days mainly talking about Harlan's stories. At the book fair, Stieg came to the Bra Böcker stand to pick up Harlan, I walked them to a cafeteria and left them to it, and they came back after a couple of

hours and seemed very pleased. The interview was sent out by TT a couple of days later and picked up by several newspapers, running almost a full tabloid page and presenting Harlan as a major fabulist and symbolist author, a North American relative of South American magical realists as Borges, Marquez, and Allende. It was great publicity and a very appreciative text. I have a vague memory of translating parts or all of it for Harlan sometime later that fall.

Those two weeks with Harlan and Susan in Sweden were memorable and magical. After the book fair I drove them to Stockholm. Harlan gave a lecture to producers, script writers, and directors at the Swedish public TV company, then running the virtually still only two TV channels in Sweden, since radio and TV were government monopolies until mid-1992. He did signings and more interviews, he gave an impromptu talk at the Science Fiction Bookstore and when it finally closed about twenty people took him and Susan to dinner in a pizzeria absurdly housed in an Old Town medieval basement vault. A weird fan named Holger Eliasson came up to fawn and later wrote a twenty-page diatribe, admitting to having spent a world convention stalking Harlan and for years imagining to be him. Harlan was not amused, and I suspect that not few of the stories about Harlan are based on this kind of incidents. He does not like to suffer fools gladly, but too many fools are drawn to him, as they are to anyone with a high enough profile.

Driving back down to Helsingborg overnight Harlan told stories for hours. Once, driving through some small town, I had to stop by a red light. Harlan threw open the car door, jumped out, grabbed a lamppost and, with both hands, whirled round it until the light changed. The mists of dawn made the landscape around the highway seem surreal and Harlan performed an inimitable rendition of a modernist Ingmar Bergman-ish movie in the Swedish accent he had acquired, "Dere is a vait room. De valls are vait. De floor is vait. De ciling is vait. Dere is a vait chair. Dere is a man sitting in de chair. De man is vait..." My son loved him then and still, now 28, talks of him as Uncle Harlan. Evastina loved both him and Susan. As did and do I.

We didn't want them to leave. Nor, perhaps, did they; at any rate, leavetaking took so long that they almost missed the plane when I drove them back to Kastrup airport. On the ferry from Sweden to Denmark they wanted to exchange what Swedish cash they had left and we found that during the night the Swedish economy had collapsed and banks had stopped trading in Swedish currency; later that week the Swedish national bank raised its interest rate to 500 per cent. At the airport check-in counter the attendant told them the gate was closed. Harlan told her that they really had to go on that plane, and so they went on that plane. He can do those kinds of things. He also told the hotel where we all stayed in Stockholm what he felt about someone charging the kind of extortionist rates they did also charging a hundred dollars extra per night for a parking space. Harlan doesn't like obnoxious greed. There was nothing personal about this; Bra Böcker was footing the bill.



He put us all in a story he wrote later, "The Museum on Cyclops Avenue," published in the fifth issue of *Harlan Ellison's Dream Corridor*. On the copy of the comic book he sent he had put a post-it note saying, "The Holmberg family is now famous." When we went to the US in 1993 we drove Route 66 (passing Earl Kemp's residence by half a mile) from St. Louis to Los Angeles and stayed at Harlan's and Susan's, sleeping in their secret cave.

You meet many people in a lifetime of working with writers and books. You make a lot of acquaintances. And you make a few friends. By December of 1993, a new CEO had taken over at Bra Böcker since half a year, and for various reasons it became impossible for me to work with him. So I quit, and sent out a letter explaining the situation to the authors, agents, and others I had dealt with,

thanking them for the time we had worked together. When he got the letter, Harlan phoned me. “Do you have a new job ready?” he asked. I told him I hadn’t. “How are you doing for money?” he said. “If things get tough, just phone. I’ll get whatever you need and send it.”

He would have. I never doubted that for a second. Nobody else I knew, in Sweden or anywhere else, made that kind of offer.

Which is one reason I’m writing this when I should do other things, or at least sleep since it’s now 3:35 am in Sweden. But Earl’s deadline is running out, and how could I not at least try to take this chance of telling you that whatever silly stories, irate comments, or nonsense you hear about Harlan Ellison – and people have been talking rot about him for longer than the 47 years I’ve been in fandom – he is a true *mensch*. And loved, even in cold and far-off Sweden.

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We walked for some time, and grew to know each other, as best as we’d allow. These are some of the high points. They lack continuity. I don’t apologize. I merely pointed it out, adding with some truth, I feel, that most liaisons lack continuity. We find ourselves in odd places at various times, and for a brief span we link our lives to others and then, our time elapsed, we move apart. Through a haze of pain occasionally, usually through a veil of memory that clings, then passes, sometimes as though we have never touched.

–Harlan Ellison

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# Harlan Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* and the New Wave Assault on Sex Censorship

by Rob Latham

Though some Golden Age authors have denied the existence of constraining taboos during the pulp era (Lester del Rey, for example, has argued that he “never had any magazine reject any story with sex in it” [85]), there is plenty of testimony by reminiscing writers who either encountered direct resistance to their handling of controversial topics or else practiced self-censorship in order to avoid editorial interference in their work. Harry Harrison frankly acknowledged in 1964 that sf writers “all censor our work for the magazines.... We have been so broken to the pulp habit that we cannot relax even if we want to.... We have been taboo-ridden too long and seem incapable of accepting sex and bodily functions as a normal part of life” (“We Are Sitting” 42).



Rob Latham

Those who refused to self-censor were subjected to the merciless pruning of editorial blue pencils. Tom Purdom has recounted how his 1957 story “Grieve for a Man” was bowdlerized by the editor of the magazine *Fantastic Universe*. The story features a bullfighter battling a robotic bull, with the assembled crowd cheering for the machine; as written, the matador at one point thinks to himself: “Well, let them get an erection out of that if they want,” which the editor changed to: “Let them get young again out of that if they want to” (9). A more famous example of such meddling was Frederik Pohl’s modification of Harlan Ellison’s “I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream” (1967) prior to its publication in *If*, where a character who was “big in the privates” like “a giant ape” and had “an organ fit for a horse” was referred to instead as “like an animal in many ways.” Given the anatomical specifics of these alterations, it is unsurprising that some of the more macho young writers of the Sixties should have been infuriated by this symbolic gelding of their work; as Norman Spinrad rather feverishly complained in 1968:

What does [all this censorship] do to writers? Those who can cut it in the big world out there—like Bradbury and Vonnegut—leave while still in possession of the contents of their scrotums. Others are sufficiently anesthetized by the novocaine of in-group egoboo that they submit to the castrator’s knife. There are those who remain men and remain within the field and do the best they can within the limitations and suffer nothing worse than broken hearts. (10)

Not all writers, of course, were quite so tamed. C.L. Moore and Leigh Brackett had been infusing their planetary romances with a decadent sensuality for many years without apparent threat to the ostensible masculinity of their *noms de plume*. And Thomas Scortia has written of how enterprising punsters, throughout the 1940s and ‘50s, tried to sneak off-color jokes or other smutty references past John W. Campbell’s resident censor at *Astounding*, editorial assistant Kay Tarrant. Probably the most famous success story in this regard was George O. Smith’s 1947 tale “Rat Race,” with its reference to “the world’s first ball-bearing mousetrap,” which later turns out to be a tomcat. (According to Scortia, this game was called “slipping one past Kay” [13].) Some of Campbell’s admirers in the field—such as

Harrison, for instance—have attempted to absolve the editor of culpability for the excessive chasteness of his magazine, blaming it instead on the priggish Ms. Tarrant (see Harrison, “Letter”); but there can be little doubt that Campbell himself had, in this area as in so many others, quite firm and eccentric views of what was acceptable and what was not. In his editorial for the October 1965 issue of *Analog*, he defended himself against charges that the material he published scanted important human drives such as erotic desire, opining that “[a]chievement, personal worth, is a more universal motivation of Man than hustling the handiest female into bed” (160), and going on to list the truly great writers whose work had long endured despite its lack of prurience, such as Shakespeare!

Not all Golden Age stalwarts shared Campbell’s view that sex was a seamy distraction from the exalted heroism of the best sf; certainly, Robert A. Heinlein’s work during the 1960s grew increasingly preoccupied with sexual matters, culminating in the embarrassing debacle of *I Will Fear No Evil* (1970), in which a rich old man’s randy brain is transplanted into the nubile body of his female assistant. But the split between Old Guard and New Wave, coinciding as it did with an unparalleled period of erotic openness in the broader culture, inevitably came to involve fraught exchanges regarding the growing explicitness of contemporary sf’s depictions of sexuality. When Michael Moorcock took over the helm at *New Worlds* in the summer of 1964, the conflict came to a quick and ugly head.

Long convinced that the genre had for too long consisted of “boys’ stories got up to look like grown-ups’ stories” (“Play” 123), Moorcock championed the sexually perverse fictions of William S. Burroughs in his debut editorial, claiming that wildly audacious books like *The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express* were precisely “the SF we’ve all been waiting for,” while acknowledging that many traditional fans would be put off by their widespread “description of sexual aberration and drug addiction” and their “frequent use of obscenities” (“New Literature” 2). Burroughs’s importance for the genre, in Moorcock’s eyes, lay not merely in his experimental form, his radical break with conventional modes of narration, but also in his relevance to the current times, with their skeptical questioning of authority and pursuit of fresh experiences. As a subsequent *New Worlds* editorial opined,

Since SF is growing up...[,] the form must be reshaped and new symbols found to reflect the mood of the sixties.... It is no good living in and off the past these days—no good living *in* the world of writers like Heinlein and *off* their terms, symbols, backgrounds and even ideas. The age that formed them is past.... Quite often the moral assumptions found in a story of the fifties can be virtually meaningless to today’s new generation.... (“Symbols” 2-3)

Yet despite his commitment to boldness and novelty, Moorcock soon discovered that the long-standing conservatism of sf magazine culture was not so readily transcended. After the September 1964 issue ran Langdon Jones’s story “I Remember, Anita...,” in which the narrator broods intensely over an erotic relationship brutally terminated by the outbreak of nuclear war, an angry reader wrote in to protest the work’s “downright pornography,” warning the editor not to “forget the circulation of this magazine among young eager readers, who wants [sic] something else than trash just good enough to be sold under the counter” (Van Gastel 125). Moorcock’s brusque reply that he was “not publishing a magazine for schoolboys” (126) likely came back to haunt him in the summer of 1967 when another bawdy tale by Jones, “The Time Machine,” prompted the magazine’s printer to refuse to produce the July issue, thus forcing the editor to scramble for replacement copy (Moorcock, “Introduction” 20).

The libidinal rhetoric in “Anita” had been relatively mild, eschewing stark anatomical references in favor of the evasive blather of pseudo-literary erotica—e.g., “the loin-heat that ... suffuse[d] my abdomen,” “the straining symbol of my passion,” etc. (75-76)—but “The Time Machine” upped the ante with its graphic depiction of intercourse between the protagonist and his menstruating lover, a taboo the sf magazine was apparently not prepared to break. These flare-ups were merely the appetizers, of

course, for the full-scale furore that erupted when *New Worlds* began serializing Norman Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron* in the December 1967 issue, which led to a ban on distribution of the magazine at major bookstore chains and public denunciations by members of Parliament.

Jones's "Time Machine," exiled from *New Worlds*, eventually found a home in Damon Knight's anthology series *Orbit*, thus indicating the relative openness of the sf book market to such explicit fare. Indeed, Knight's series expressly trumpeted its eagerness to "discard ... the taboos and conventions of magazine writing" in order "to bring its readers the best science fiction being written today" (quoting the back-cover blurb for *Orbit 5*, the volume in which Jones's "Time Machine" appeared). By this point, on both sides of the Atlantic, the battle lines had been drawn between the self-styled guardians of traditional sf—whose "wondrous visions" were in danger of being eclipsed by "stylistic claptrap and downbeat" themes (Wollheim 4)—and the proponents of the New Wave, an unconventional, countercultural mode of sf writing. This battle would consume the field for much of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

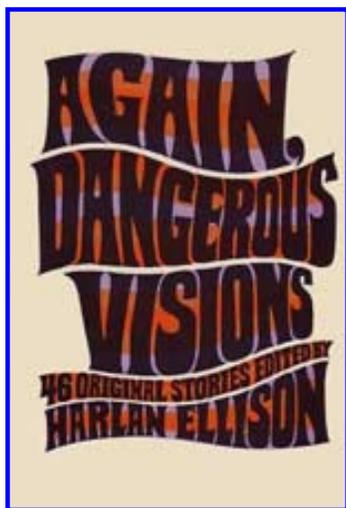
The rhetorical struggle usually featured heated debates regarding the ethical and aesthetic merits of overt representations of sexuality in science fiction. The enemies of the New Wave frequently stereotyped the movement in terms of its allegedly "sick" obsession with outré forms of sex: one Old-Guard fan claimed that every character in a New Wave story "must have a sex problem," making the fiction resemble a series of psychiatric case histories (Brazier 5), while John J. Pierce, the most indefatigable polemicist for traditional sf among 1960s fans, argued that New Wave fiction tended to treat "the sexual impulse as basically neurotic or even psychotic ... bedded in a context of cruelty and disgust" ("Letter" 45). In an essay entitled "The Devaluation of Values," Pierce went on to argue that the New Wave attitude toward sex was not liberatory at all but rather nihilistic: "There are plenty of hang-ups, but no joy; lots of explicit description, but no love. The 'New Thing' writers don't say in so many words that sex is 'dirty,' but they manage to convey that impression" (10).

For their part, the New Wave's defenders mocked the sublimated tameness of old-style sf, where "intersexual relationships did have their place, though always in a hearty familial way, and offstage to boot" (Harrison, *Great Balls* 46-47). Brian Aldiss, reviewing Old-Guard author James White's novel *The Watch Below*, derided the book's "prissy" timidity: "All references to sex seem to set [the story's] bold seafaring men 'close to panic.' They can hardly mention uh menstruation or uh fornication without stuttering" ("Review" 31). "[A]ll the Simon-pure Asimovs and Heinleins," Aldiss remarked in another context, "falsified by admitting no worlds below the belt" (*Shape* 63-64). Harlan Ellison, in a sharp exchange with Pierce regarding the alleged degeneracy of contemporary sf, claimed his opponent's position was "precisely the stand a blue-nosed Puritan would take in the face of such overwhelming changes" as were sweeping through society in the 1960s ("Letter" 48). In short, both sides in the debate basically accused their opponents of displaying some form of sexual pathology, whether puritanical repression or neurotic desublimation.

The theatrical hysteria of this controversy had perhaps its most potent expression in the furious hype surrounding Ellison's 1967 anthology, *Dangerous Visions*. In an effort to blunt the censorious influence of the magazines, a handful of sf authors during the mid-1960s explored the possibility of launching a book series containing all-original short fiction, in the hope of inviting risk-taking work that might otherwise go unpublished. The first series to appear was Knight's *Orbit*, which premiered in 1966 (and which, as we have seen, benefited from the censorship enforced on the magazines); by the early Seventies, a number of such franchises—Harry Harrison's *Nova*, Robert Silverberg's *New Dimensions*, Terry Carr's *Universe*—were offering strong competition to the traditional magazines, which were compelled to liberalize their editorial policies as a result. But none made the splash within the genre that *Dangerous Visions*—and its 1972 companion volume, *Again, Dangerous Visions*—did.

Part of the reason for this was the unique personality of its editor. A quarrelsome presence within

fandom for over a decade and an unparalleled master of aggressive self-promotion, Ellison built up a huge anticipation for his anthology through breathless letters to fanzines and barn-burning talks at sf conventions. In a Guest of Honor speech at the San Diego Westercon in July 1966 (later published as “A Time for Daring”), Ellison offered a typically contentious assessment of the present state of the field: it had become safe and stale, and was rapidly driving its best writers into the arms of the literary mainstream, where figures such as Burroughs and Kurt Vonnegut were already being celebrated for producing an audacious new brand of sf. “These people have left us for the very simple reason that they’re too big and talented to be constrained by our often vicious, often ungrateful little back water eddy” (33), the sf “ghetto” whose confining walls were patrolled by a handful of narrow-minded, cozily incestuous gatekeepers. As a result, “we’ve been leaching the vitality out of our best writers.... [W]hen they write something new and fresh and different and inventive, we don’t know where they are” (33). *Dangerous Visions* was geared to provide a welcoming market for just such material—specifically, for fiction the magazines wouldn’t publish because of prevailing taboos and prejudices. As Ellison’s introduction to the volume trumpeted: “no one has ever told the speculative writer, ‘Pull out all the stops. No holds barred, get it said!’ Until this book came along” (xxiv).



Containing thirty-three stories, many of them franker in their treatment not only of sexuality but of politics and religion than the average output of the sf magazines, *Dangerous Visions* was without doubt the publishing event of the decade in American sf. Thanks to Ellison’s constant, belligerent shtick—which continued in the form of long, button-holing headnotes to the stories—it was impossible *not* to have an opinion about the book; indeed, the enterprise was essentially designed to provoke outrage among conservatives since, if it failed to do so, the editor’s diagnosis of the field’s paralyzing stuffiness would have been obviated. And there is no question that the usual suspects were suitably provoked: Donald A. Wollheim, for instance, complained about Ellison’s persistent “attempts to shock sensibilities rather than to charge the imagination ... a reflection no doubt of the notorious sewers of Hollywood he unfortunately has to dwell in.” Philip José Farmer’s contribution in particular—“Riders of the Purple Wage,” an ambitious Joycean punfest simmering with intrafamilial eroticism—Wollheim

dismissed as “thirty thousand words of Freudian nonsense” (6). And an article in Pierce’s fanzine, *Renaissance*, griped about the “degenerate antiheroes” infesting the stories and their many “sex scene [s] described in detail—preferably perverted” (Schweitzer 10). Yet sf fans largely embraced the book, awarding it three Hugo awards, including a special one to Ellison for editing it.

What is perhaps most interesting about the genre’s collective reaction to *Dangerous Visions* is the fact that, as Pamela and Ken Bulmer pointed out in a perceptive review, the book’s “revolutionary” purpose depended “entirely on the degree of prejudice amongst its readers” (9). If one was primed to be offended by an unapologetic statement of atheism or a scene of brother-sister incest, then the stories would have their intended effect; if not, then it was sometimes difficult to assess their merits simply as stories. Indeed, even some champions of the emerging New Wave were disappointed by the book’s insistent commitment to taboo-breaking rather than to elevating the aesthetic standards of the field, as if the two goals were necessarily conjoined. In Merrill’s view, the result was to “substitute shock for insight” (33); as Aldiss tartly remarked: “the artificially-sustained ‘family’ values of the magazine ethos” did make the stories “appear quite shocking; but it was rather like shocking your maiden aunt with ribald limericks” (*Trillion* 298). And some of the genre’s “maiden aunts,” anticipating Ellison’s efforts to outrage, resolutely refused to be shocked: P. Schuyler Miller, the longtime reviewer for *Astounding/Analog*, warmly praised two of the book’s “sex stories” (Farmer’s “Purple Wage” and Samuel R. Delany’s “Aye, and Gomorrah...”) even though such fiction was something “that I am supposed to dislike” (163).

Ellison's in-your-face editorial policy, his calculated rabble-rousing, made it rather too easy to stereotype the fiction in the book, as Philip K. Dick hilariously proved in a brief fanzine article entitled "The Story to End All Stories for Harlan Ellison's Anthology *Dangerous Visions*":

In a hydrogen war ravaged society the nubile young women go down to the futuristic zoo and have sexual intercourse with various deformed and nonhuman life forms in the cages. In this particular account a woman who has been patched together out of the damaged bodies of several women has intercourse with an alien female, there in the cage, and later on the woman, by means of futuristic science, conceives. The infant is born, and she and the female in the cage fight over it to see who gets it. The human young woman wins, and promptly eats the offspring, hair, teeth, toes and all. Just after she has finished she discovers that the offspring is God. (47)

Still, despite its tendentiousness, *Dangerous Visions* was an important landmark in the history of the modern genre, marking a point of no return for the treatment of controversial topics; in its wake, efforts to suppress uncomfortable content became increasingly unsustainable. As a result, a certain degree of erotic frankness grew progressively more acceptable, despite the complaints of the Old-Wave crowd. The libidinal genie had escaped from the bottle, and there was no putting it back in again.

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## **Acknowledgment**

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You are not entitled to your opinion. You are entitled to your informed opinion. No one is entitled to be ignorant.

—Harlan Ellison

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# Fifty Years—That’s Not Too Many!

by Richard Lupoff

Pat and I were an incredibly young married couple in 1960. I was recently out of the army. She was recently out of college. I was a suit-and-necktie-wearing junior executive working for one of the fledgling computer companies. She wore frocks and pumps and lunched with her mother in hushed midtown eateries.

Trouble was we both found it an empty life and looked for something more satisfying. We wound up publishing a fanzine. Go figure.

Like most neofans with few connections in the community, we wrote most of the first issue ourselves, but a BNF named Harlan Ellison offered us a review of a newly released movie based on a novel by longtime fan Robert Bloch. Imagine that! I don’t know how we hooked up with Harlan, but there we were, knocking on the door of a slightly grubby walkup apartment in Greenwich Village. We’d come to pick up Harlan's manuscript.

The first word I ever heard this man speak I carry with me to this day.

*Knock!*

*Knock!*

“Come!”

That was Harlan. Not “Come ahead, it’s unlocked” or “Come on in,” or “Wait a minute, I’ll be right there.” Just one word. “Come!”

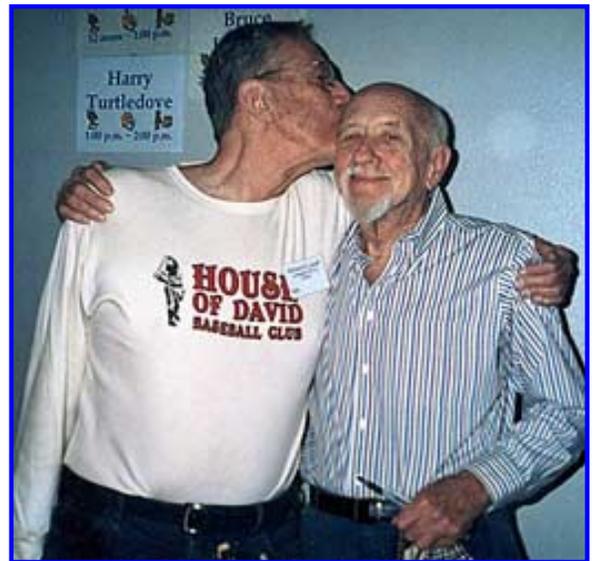
Almost half a century later a San Francisco publisher wanted to bring out a collection of material from that fanzine. The book was to be called *The Best of Xero*. I wrote to all the contributors whose material had been selected for inclusion.

Harlan’s review of *Psycho* was among the anointed. Everyone else in the book responded with, “Sure, go ahead, and I hope I’ll get a copy of the book for my brag shelf.” That, or some minor variation on the theme.

Not Harlan. He insisted on a contract. And payment. One dollar. Just to keep everything on the up and up. I’m not complaining, mind you. He was totally within his rights. That’s just the kind of guy he is.

In the fifty years we’ve known each other, our relationship has had its ups and downs. For a while there we had a pretty nasty little feud going. What was it about? Who remembers? Who even cares?

Then Terry Carr died. One of the shining lights of our generation in the science fiction world—Harlan’s



Richard Lupoff and Earl Kemp

and Bob Silverberg's and Ted White's and Sid Coleman's and Pete Graham's and Bill Donaho's and Pat and Dick Ellington's and Redd Boggs's and Dean Grennell's and mine. We held a memorial service in Tilden Park, and afterward Carol Carr invited everyone back to the house that she and Terry had shared in the Oakland hills.

People were sitting around the large living room, a fireplace in the center of the room. Harlan and I were on opposite sides of the room. Somehow we made eye contact and a telepathic message flashed between us. The message was this: *Life is too short to waste hating.*

Neither of us said a word, but that was the end of the feud and the beginning of friendship.

Fifty years. Jeez, can it be?

Harlan, I wish you nothing but happiness and contentment, and many years in which to enjoy them.

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I know that pain is the most important thing in the universes. Greater than survival, greater than love, greater even than the beauty it brings about. For without pain, there can be no pleasure. Without sadness, there can be no happiness. Without misery there can be no beauty. And without these, life is endless, hopeless, doomed, and damned. *Adult. You have become adult.*

—Harlan Ellison, "Paingod and Other Delusions"

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# Nebula Awards Tempe AZ 2006

by Patricia Rogers

There is very little middle ground when the subject of Harlan Ellison is brought up. When I told friends I wanted to go to the Nebula Awards in 2006 in Tempe to see Harlan Ellison receive the Grand Master Award, I received a plethora of opinions. Very few were something simple like "That sounds like a nice trip, have fun." Most replies were strong emotional responses with a story attached concerning something Harlan had said or done. Whether the story was one of being on the receiving end of Harlan's wrath or being done a kindness by him, it was obviously a memorable experience for the speaker. It made me wonder if anyone who has ever met Harlan has come away without a story. Harlan, like Jupiter's Great Red Spot, is always there, always fascinating, always intense -- an ever-changing storm.



Patricia Rogers and Harlan Ellison

I have been reading Harlan's writing since I was a teenager. Like many of Harlan's readers, I discovered the first of his stories you read grabs your mind and sends you out looking for more. I read every book of his I could get my hands on. I was reading Poe, Ambrose Bierce, H.P. Lovecraft, and Harlan all at the same time. It is amazing I just did not just sink into the dark tarn of Usher but I found it all strangely invigorating. Over the years I have been lucky enough to meet Harlan at many conventions and have never been disappointed listening to him speak. He exudes a passion that takes the audience along with him in both his writing and speaking. In just a few minutes during a talk I have seen him go from an intelligent rant about something that is bothering him to joking, cajoling, insulting, and yelling at one or more members of the audience. You never know what topic he will touch upon or how far he will go to make his point, but the one thing I can promise you when seeing Harlan in person: it is never dull. A friend of mine said, "Harlan writes at the top of his voice." How true that statement feels to me; I think that Harlan does everything "at the top of his voice." If he had decided to become a teacher, you would never forget even one of his lectures.

I was torn about going to Tempe for the Nebulas. There was another event that weekend I wanted to attend. But, when I asked which one I should attend, one friend looked at me quite seriously and said, "Well, Harlan only becomes Grand Master once... Right?" His point was precise and accurate—there would be other birthday parties but Harlan would only be made a Grand Master once and by an organization that he had dramatically broken from almost 30 years earlier. I had to go to Arizona.

After many negotiations with my boss, she allowed me Friday afternoon off and I flew into Phoenix arriving around 3 pm. By the time I got my bag, rental car, and found my way to the hotel, it was just after 4 pm, the time of Harlan's first panel. I raced in, picked up my badge and free bag of books, and quietly snuck into the standing-room-only ballroom where Harlan was speaking. He was discussing some of the types of mentalities you come up against in Hollywood, like the first director of the movie adaptation of Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder" -- who wanted to know if they could lose the butterfly.

(They got rid of him instead. Good call.) Harlan liked the movie. Then in a whirlwind of ideas Harlan touched upon Clinton's poor choice of with whom to have a liaison, Bush politics, the mindlessness he sees on college campuses, and his feelings on becoming a Grand Master. He energized the room as only Harlan can. It was pure Harlan stream of consciousness: funny, smart, rapier-like wit and all over the place. As I stood there laughing at his jokes with the rest of the appreciative audience, I thought, "Yeah, this is why I came."

In an interview for the *Arizona Republic* Harlan said, "I have not had one night's dream-free sleep in which I was not at that moment of accepting the Grand Master," Ellison says. "In some of them I just say, 'Thank you very much,' and I sit down, leaving them bewildered. In others I give a long, impassioned speech in which I detail every good thing and bad thing that has happened to me in the last 50 years. In others, I just sort of leap off the stage and pound a few of the people that are there until they're insensible."

After the panel was over Harlan started on the first of three marathon signing sessions. Even though there were not a huge number of people attending, the line for Harlan never seemed to diminish in size as everyone had stacks of books to get signed. He was gracious and tried to accommodate every request—reminding us often that his lovely wife Susan was there with books of his to sell and that we needed to buy some. Being a good child, I did as I was told and bought a copy of *The City on the Edge of Forever* with the *Star Trek* script and his observations on working with Roddenberry. He did ask if people could limit the number of books they were getting signed to three and if they had more to please get back in line. He took a break for dinner and was back signing as soon as he returned.

The group of other authors signing in the room was truly a sight to behold. I do believe there were more authors there than fans. I did take the time to visit with many of them. William F. Nolan was another reason I had wanted to come and I had taken several of his books with me, including his 1975 bio of Ray Bradbury. There was a book dealer set up just outside the room so I bought Nolan's most recent book that he not only signed for me but also took the time to draw in it a fabulous illustration. It was truly a pleasure to meet him.

I took a dinner break about the same time Harlan did and headed off to eat with some old friends. The Nebulas were being held at the Tempe Mission Palms Hotel in the heart on the University area. All around it are cool shops and restaurants. We picked the first restaurant we came across, which was reminiscent of an Irish Pub. The food was good and we had fun catching up with each other. Then I headed back to get once again in Harlan's line (having brought my own ton of Harlan's books to get signed). Before he could get done with the line he was called into the reception/party that was being sponsored by Dark Horse Comics and Tor Books. Once he got there it turned into a kind of a roast for him. Let me say here that Connie Willis was the perfect choice for Toastmaster for the weekend. She was funny, charming, well prepared, and at least gave the illusion of being in charge. She could smilingly say to Harlan, "Sit down and be quiet" and he would. A number of folks including Michael Cassutt, Ellen Datlow, and Peter David came up to the podium to share memories and stories about Harlan and to tell him how much he meant to them. I had to smile when Michael Cassutt said how Harlan had "written innumerable stories, been part of almost every anthology that has ever been published and part of a few that had not." Harlan said, "I know where you live, Cassutt!" To which Michael replied, "No you don't; I've moved!"

When the party broke up, Harlan was a real trouper and went back out to the table to sign more books. I was about third from the last in line and it was approaching midnight when I got up to Harlan again. He looked at me and said, "You have been very patient." I said to him, "Well, seeing you is the reason I came." We did chat about mutual New Mexico friends. He loves Harry O. Morris's art and has several pieces up on his wall at home. (Maybe it is just as well Harlan does not attend Albuquerque's science fiction convention, Bubonicon; it would just be one more person fighting with us over Harry's art the

minute he hangs it up, and I think Harlan would win.) We also talked about how fond he is of Melinda Snodgrass and Fred and Joan Saberhagen. One of the reasons Harlan's line took so long was that he spent quality time with every single person that came up, telling them stories and listening to theirs. Is it any wonder that everyone who meets him comes away with a memory?

Saturday started out with me making a wrong turn on my way to Tempe, which meant I missed the first panel I wanted to see on "The State of SF Television," but I was there in time for William F. Nolan's reading. He was a pleasure to listen to and the stories he read were great fun. In both of the stories he presented, the wife is killed but he assured us with a big smile he is fond of his wife and she was in no danger.

The next thing up was the auction and there were quite a few interesting items to be had. Many signed first editions, signed Serenity posters, signed scripts from the new Babylon 5, and art. I was impressed how much everything went for—they did well for the benefiting charities. The auction raised around \$6,000 and another \$1,500 that evening in the silent bids for the "Harlan Zorro Rat" table centerpieces (one of which I brought home and just by luck I got number 1 of 20). The signed 8x11 Serenity promos went for \$180 each and an ARC of a reissue of Harlan's *Spider Kiss* went for \$500. Harlan was auctioneer for some of the items and he can sell like nobody else. He even sold his half-eaten cheeseburger for \$35. I suggested to the person who bought it that he should put it in Lucite with some pickled eggs and onion slices—cover them all with a little glitter and have his own special Nebula.

The last panel of the day was "Genre of the Living Dead: Science Fiction Today" with Harlan and Gordon Van Gelder (editor of *F&SF*). The biggest issue addressed here was the slide of literacy in America. Fewer and fewer people are reading, reasons: TV, Internet, and disrespect for the written word. Many of the TV writers today grew up watching only Star Trek so every idea they have is a third generation copy. So much of the media keeps lowering the bar in what they do produce that everything is getting dumber—although Harlan did say he loves the TV show *Lost*, finding it's writing "brilliant." He said it is not about the final outcome of the story but about how well-crafted and intelligent the episodes are. (Harlan: "Art at its finest is not about the destination but the journey.") I had to smile when Harlan was asking us how much we know about world events. He is right of course, many are unaware of the world around them. Harlan said, "Why are you reading science fiction if you don't know what is going on?" Then he smiled and said to himself, "Shut up, you are only alienating them." When this panel ended I stayed to help some girls take photos of Harlan signing their ARC of *Spider Kiss*.

After the panel was over it was time to go and change for the banquet. I was not about to drive back to my hotel and risk getting myself lost again so I just changed clothes in the bathroom and then hung out chatting with folks until it was dinnertime. Ron and Nina Else (owners of Who Else! Books in Denver) were so kind as to let me sit with them at dinner. On the other side of me sat Karen Anderson (Poul Anderson's widow). We had a great time talking about travel and places we have been to or would like to go. Also, about everything from early California fandom to art and antiques. I had a lovely time. The food was okay, hardly worth the \$80 extra it cost but the dinner companionship made up for it. On the table were centerpieces that included a small figure of "The Harlan Zorro Rat" standing on a copy of *Death Bird Stories* which you could make a silent bid on. I was so engrossed in talking to Karen Anderson that I missed handing in my bid sheet. Once dinner was done, the real show started.

Connie walked up to the podium and started to speak then stopped, excused herself, and started digging through her bag, saying, "I have to get out my notes." With a mischievous grin, she proceeded to pull out duct tape, rope, and a hammer, and placed them carefully on the podium. This being done, she told us her rules for "Surviving the Nebulas."

1. Sit close to the door.
2. Don't eat or drink with Gardner Dozois

3. Don't wear the "Peter Pan collar" (something she did years ago)
4. No hitting others with chairs, your Nebula, other author's Nebulas, or anything else.
5. No shoving, tantrums, tirades, or making authors cry.
6. Don't sit next to anyone who will hit, throw chairs, Nebulas, or anything else.
7. Read the ballot.
8. Read the nametags of the people at your table so you don't say to the author of a story unknowingly, "How did this piece of junk get on the ballot?"
9. If you lose—again, look around your table before you say, "What do you mean he won? My story is better!"
10. Never bring up politics.
11. Be nice if you win. Don't make me get out the rope, duct tape, or hammer.
12. Realize just how lucky you are.

Next we took the time to remember those who had passed, then moved on to the awards. After all the awards except Grand Master were given out Connie stood up and said, "That's all folks, thanks for coming. Oh...the Grand Master Award...."

Neil Gaiman did the introduction, saying to Harlan (which I am just summing up): I think you are brilliant and one of a kind. Harlan's stories will last and be read a long time from now.

Harlan finally came up and started with a story about working with Steve McQueen and an adventure they had out in the Mohave Desert. I will not try and tell the whole thing here but the car they were in broke down and being miles from anywhere in 130 degree heat they were in pretty dire straits. When Harlan passed out Steve carried him two miles to safety. Thus demonstrating his character.

Then he told of a writer acquaintance of his who planned a dinner party for 10 and ordered the food from a Chinese restaurant. When picking up the food he saw a rat scamper around a corner of the restaurant. He looked at the proprietor and said as he picked up the food "I'll just be taking these" and he proceeded to leave without paying. Thus demonstrating his character.

Harlan said: "If I had done 1/20 of what I have been said to have done I would be in prison and gurneyed like Hannibal Lecter." He talked about realizing he could be a petty man and that with this award he did not want to be petty and was honored to be in the company of many who had received it before him.

Harlan spoke of talking to Jack Williamson about writing and how Jack told him to, "Keep writing." Harlan promised us would do just that—keep writing. And stated that he has no plans to stop pissing us off now.

After all was said and done the room slowly cleared of the 200 people in attendance. Once the room was down to less than 15 people, I noticed Harlan heading toward me on his way to the door. As he came close I looked up at him from my seat and said, "You know, Harlan, you really are a brilliant writer." He stopped cold in his tracks about six feet from me, his face now twisted in pain like I had just sucker-punched him to the gut. He said, "I don't take compliments well." I said that all I meant by it was an honest appreciation of his talent and skill as a writer, that there was no subterfuge to my compliment. He said, "I have to tell you a story" and proceeded to sit down in front of me. I know that I cannot impart this to you with Harlan's skill but I will endeavor to get the facts straight. When he was young there was a department store that he would pilfer books from—sneaking in though the employee's entrance before the store opened, making his way to the book department, filling his clothes with books, then exiting the store once it was open. On one of these foraging expeditions he saw a sign up stating that John Steinbeck was going to be there for a signing. The day of the signing,

he crawled under the tables to get a closer view of Steinbeck and found himself looking up at the faces of the audience around him. He was struck by the adoration and awe he saw in their eyes as they gazed upon Steinbeck. Years later, once Harlan was well established as a writer and was doing his own signings, he was taken aback to see that same look on the faces of the audience around him. He thought, "I don't deserve this—not like Steinbeck."

Soon after he was done with this story, one of the convention committee folks came over with some signs she had made up for fun that said "Harlan Ellison - Grand Master - Worship Me." These were great and Harlan thought so too, even being so kind as to pose for photos for me when I asked him, holding the sign up in front of himself. I asked if I should call him "Grand Master Ellison" from now on; with a smile he said, "No - Just Your Eminence."

He sat back down and starting telling more stories and continued to do so for well over two hours. I won't repeat all the stories here but I had great fun listening to him. I was glad to find out that we share a favorite restaurant in LA, "Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles." By about 1:15 am I looked around me and noted that about ten to fifteen people had gathered around to listen. Harlan and Susan finally headed off to their room, never even making it up to the party in the con-suite given partly in his honor. I felt like I had won the lottery. I know Harlan is not shy about leaving a place he does not want to be and I kept thinking he would leave at any minute but he genuinely seemed like he was having a good time.

At this point I was too energized to go to sleep so I headed up to the party and talked to a few more folks. My favorite part of the con-suite: several winners had left their Nebula Awards on the nacho table with the bubbling hot cheese sauce and chips. It looked as if they were give-away prizes for the taking that you could have after you finished your snack. Kelly Link said I could pour hot cheese sauce on hers for cooler photos but I said I did not think the acrylic would hold up too well under that kind of treatment.

I made the right decision to go to Tempe. I could not have had a nicer time.

One last note: Harlan's speech was about "The Measure of a Man." On many occasions I have been told of Harlan's thoughtfulness, kindness, and about how he has been there for friends in times of need, often when no one else has offered help. H.E. measures up as a pretty good human in my book.

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Like a wind crying endlessly through the universe, Time carries away the names and the deeds of conquerors and commoners alike. And all that we were, all that remains, is in the memories of those who cared we came this way for a brief moment.

—Harlan Ellison

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# Get Stuffed: Consumer Revenge and Remediation in Harlan Ellison's Fiction

by Jerome Winter



Jerome Winter

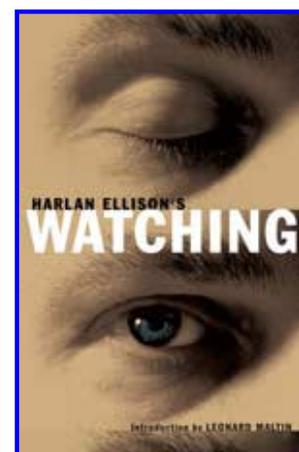
The renegade artificial intelligence AM of the perennial classic “I Have No Mouth But I Must Scream” (1967) cannot torture away the common bond of existential isolation it shares with its human creators. For dematerialized as a quasi-virtual underground mainframe and direct brain interface, AM’s only clear physical presence in the story is through the mouthlessly screaming slug-like form of Ted. Both AM and Ted are “inwardly alone,” both emotionally volatile to the point of extreme violence, and both surreally hyper-articulate — as evidenced, in AM’s case, in his interpolated “talk fields.” And while, in the end, Ted settles only a subtle but by no means trivial score, his merciful impaling of the four other surviving members of the human race, thus sparing them an eternity of torment at the hands of a revenge-crazy AM, makes the everyman hero cross the boundary from grotesque victimization into noble self-sacrifice. In this bleak yet not entirely hopeless post-apocalyptic scenario, Ellison canvasses a psychic landscape at once paranoid and complicit with an increasingly hypermediated world.

AM’s manifold delusions and dreamscapes highlight its usurper role as fantasy-inducing artist-creator and demiurge. Moreover, the demented AI and the popular as well as specialist cybernetic and informatic discourses from which it springs invites comparison with a newly constituted postmodern social system as a whole. Such a spectacle-oriented society is defined by its saturation with multimedia technological infrastructure built around advertising and consumer entertainment and disseminated through radio, records, cinema, and television. In effect, Ellison’s story dynamically stages what new media critics Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin call both a hostile and congenial “remediation,” the adapting, repurposing, and camouflaging of rival mediascapes that both threaten and enhance not only the evolving literary craft but also the construction of new media’s simulations, pleasures, subliminal codes, and manipulations.

A through-line of Ellison’s long, prolific, and eclectic career has been his preoccupation with the supplanting of the literary by new media. His kaleidoscopic postmodern techniques of bricolage, fragmentation, and digression, experimented with most prominently in the fiction from the late 60s and early 70s, can be viewed as an attempt to both honor and pastiche the disjunctive structure of visual culture, sitcom one-liners, advertising slogans, and rock lyrics as the dominant modes of expression and representation of the time. Thus “The Deathbird” (1973) juxtaposes a vivid surrealistic rescripting of *Genesis* from the point of view of a benign serpent and an ossified pedagogical apparatus — true-and-false and multiple-choice quizzes, discussion questions, essay prompts, supplemental reading — with references to *Bug Jack Barron*-esque television talk-show protocols. Seemingly apropos of nothing, the third-person narrator contends that “provisos of equal time are not served by viewpoints having media access in prime time while opposing viewpoints are provided with a soapbox in the corner.” The visually oriented appeal to manufacturing consent via the presentation of a single vantage point parallels the abandonment of the caretakership of Earth to the Mad One (i.e., the God of the major monotheistic religions) and the last survivor of the human race, Nathan Stack, to the protection of Dira and the Deathbird. This enshrining of a monolithic viewpoint is based on an ancient autocratic decision handed down by a shadowy race of “adjudicators.” Ellison hereby implicitly

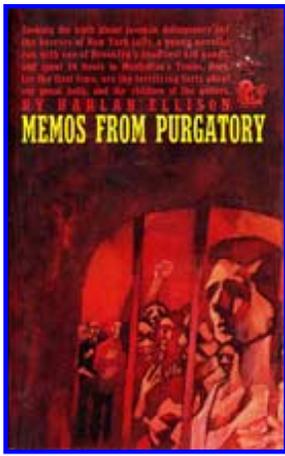
capitalizes on the dynamic multiplicity of perspectives that a television talk-show paradigm forecloses and that his fragmented literary project affords. For Ellison there are no qualities inherent in the medium of television itself that predetermine its theocratic uniformity. After all, “Deathbird” also intercuts a moving elegy to Ellison’s dog Ahbhu that invokes a scattershot of cinematic references including Alexander Korda’s *The Thief of Bagdad* (1961), Lawrence Talbot in *The Wolf Man* (1941), and Elia Kazan’s *Viva Zapata* (1952). What stokes Ellison’s wrath is the unfulfilled artistic and political potential of the ascendant power of new media. Ellison frames his literary project as resisting the process of co-optation and consumer brainwashing he often identifies with television. In his lengthiest discussion on this subject, the series of essays written for the *Los Angeles Free Press* collected in *The Glass Teat* (1970), Ellison decries the power elite of the entertainment industry who have taken “the most incredibly potent medium of imparting information the world has ever known, and they’ve turned it against you.”

Although, as his *Harlan Ellison’s Watching* (1989) amply demonstrates, Ellison is well acquainted with more recent movies, his stories ritually allude to the filmic touchstones of bygone eras. Beyond mere filial piety and ancestor worship, these nostalgic homages evoke a sense of remediation, that is, affiliations and resonances his fiction shares with cinema. Unlike his screeds against television, which are often tinged with an air of divine vengeance in the guise of the return of the literary repressed, the cinematic allusions combat cultural amnesia and narratives of linear progress on which commodity fetishism thrives. “Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes” (1968), for instance, literalizes the reduction of the human into a mercenary monetary and sexual transaction via its premise of a haunted slot machine that traps within its jackpot “bars” the souls of big winners and unlucky lovers. It is no coincidence that Ellison sets the Las Vegas scene through the description of a slick dealer as “like something out of a 1935 George Raft film.” Yet Ellison’s nostalgia can be heavily qualified as well. In “Jeffty is Five” (1977) Ellison patches together a loving tribute to the accumulating heap of passed-by consumer culture — the pulp magazines and paperbacks, comics, radio serials, and cartoon reels that used to precede the main feature in movie theatres. Inexplicably — though with an ironic reference to pseudo-scientific gamma decay and muon neutrinos — Jeffty not only does not get older than five in a quarter of a century but his immediate pop cultural environment also becomes continually “revivified, updated, the traditions maintained but contemporaneous.” Ellison injects a narrative of the new into his elegiac return to the obsolete products and merchandise of yesteryear such that a never-filmed adaptation of Alfred Bester’s *The Demolished Man* can feature largely forgotten Hollywood icons like Ken Maynard and Franchot Tone. Against this fantastic reinvigorating of the past, despite the entropic drift of time’s “good old things” toward oblivion, Ellison warns his readers about the dangers of being immured in nostalgia. As Jeffty’s parents, John and Leona, grow increasingly disenchanted with the burden of an endless duty of parenting, the toxic dimensions of Jeffty’s gift emerge and the story shifts into a tragic trajectory over how allegiance to an obsolete media (as opposed to, say, the Sony television store the narrator owns) makes Jeffty vulnerable, dependent, and doomed.



The noir novella “The Resurgence of Miss Ankle-Strap Wedgie” (1968) amounts in part to an extended riff on the surrender of a romanticized literary heritage to its cinematic successor, as first telegraphed in its dedication to fellow scribe-turned-screenwriter, Dorothy Parker, who was, like Ellison, chewed up by the Hollywood machine and who gave Ellison one of his first positive reviews for *Memos from Purgatory* (1961). The story of the has-been ex-starlet Valerie Lone’s botched comeback after eighteen years away from the screen is shadowed by the myth of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s self-proclaimed descent into unproductivity, hackwork, alcoholism, and exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous MGM studio executives, not to mention his own psychic demons. The novella begins lamenting the supersession of Fitzgerald’s former abode of the Garden of Allah apartment complex by a savings and loan. The

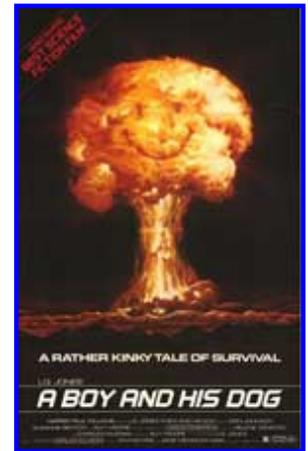
assistant producer Fred Handy later muses that what killed Fitzgerald was a lingering nostalgia for a Roaring Twenties ethos whose segue into the 1930s Handy characterizes as still-born. Meeting up with Valerie Lone's ex-lover Emery Romito, who has also faded into anonymity, at the Stratford Beach Hotel, Handy senses in the dusty interior "a downdrifting film of shattered memories, fractured yesterdays, mote-infested yearnings, and the unmistakable stench of dead dreams."



Handy's diagnosis of Romito and Fitzgerald's soul sickness, mirrors the executive producer Arthur Crews's nostalgia-induced bad-faith casting of Valerie Lone in *Subterfuge* despite her limited acting abilities. Just as dust-strewn Stratford Beach Hotel invokes the lyrical description of the Valley of the Ashes in *The Great Gatsby*, so the billboard for *Subterfuge* with Valerie's name whited out echoes that canonical novel's ominous billboard for the optometrist Dr. T.J. Eckleburg whose god-like eyes loom over George Wilson's auto repair shop. Ellison, though, indites his own project's potentially out-of-touch anachronistic relationship to 1960s counterculture. A frightened Valerie sees these children of the "age of the strobe light" primarily in terms of their promiscuous fashion senses, their "long hair, tight boots, the paisley shirts, the mini-skirts, the loose sexuality, their hair vests." Within a classic Hollywood-informed vernacular heavily indebted to Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), Ellison underscores the limits of his

championing of pre-1970s studio-era cinema, using Fitzgerald's last years as cautionary tale of the literary genius in thrall to the dictates of a ruthless Hollywood system.

In the short story of "A Boy and His Dog" that was adapted by Ellison into a successful movie, a cult of cinemania strangely survives the nuclear Armageddon of World War III. The puli Blood, equipped with telepathy through an injection of dolphin spinal fluid, alerts his partner, the scavenger or "solo," Vic, of the presence of an anomalous female, Quilla June, while at a screening of a triple feature hosted at the Metropole Theatre in the devastated wastes that once was Los Angeles. The screenings are normally masturbation opportunities for gangs of sexually frustrated marauders dubbed "roverpaks." Yet a particularly brutal movie can also vicariously feed the rare solo's addiction to violence and destruction. In drag as such a solo, Quilla gives her gender away when stays past the "beaver picture" to watch the rescreening of *Raw Deal* (1948), apparently engrossed by the noir revenge narrative. By contrast, the underground suburbanized city of Topeka that Quilla has temporarily escaped from produce only genteel screwball comedies, "Myrna Loy and George Brent kind of flicks." Hence the noir thriller allows Quilla to purge her feeling of being claustrophobically inhibited by Topeka and its dedication to an acquisitive, proprietary consumer ethos defined by its gumball machines, milk bottles in carrying stacks, better business bureaus, grocery stores, and white-picket fences. Yet the femme fatale Quilla, like Ellison himself, cannot help but remediate this noir paradigm, and despite her maniacal rooftop mowing down of her neighbors with a .45 automatic rifle, she nevertheless gets tucked back into Vic's misogynistic revenge narrative to the point of her grisly demise.



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Don't start an argument with somebody who has a microphone when you don't. They'll make you look like chopped liver.

—Harlan Ellison

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# Unzipped

by J. D. Crayne

Back in the early 1960s, when I was an inexperienced-but-not-innocent young neofan, Harlan Ellison threw a party at his house in the Hollywood Hills. I don't recall the reason for the party, but he had invited most of the LASFS members.

We were standing around in various groups, laughing, chatting, and having a good time, when I felt fingers at the back neckline of my little black cocktail dress. (All girls had little black dresses in their wardrobes in those days.) I glanced over my shoulder and saw that the perpetrator was my host.

I had no idea what he had in mind, but since I was standing around in public with some thirty other people, I decided that nothing too terrible was going to happen. I ignored it and went on with my conversation.

The zipper went all the way down, there was a pause, and then it came all the way back up, the tab patted down at the top with gentle fingers.

"Any girl," quoth mine host approvingly, "who has the perspicacity to wear a black bra with a black dress is a person of sensibility." With that, he strolled amiably away.

In my mind this will always rank as a highlight of my neofannish days, along with the time that Charles Burbee bit me on the thigh. But that is a different story.

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Did you have one of those days today, like a nail in the foot? Did the pterodactyl corpse dropped by the ghost of your mother from the spectral *Hindenburg* forever circling the Earth come smashing through the lid of your glass coffin? Did the New York strip steak you attacked at dinner suddenly show a mouth filled with needle-sharp teeth, and did it snap off the end of your fork, the last solid-gold fork from the set Anastasia pressed into your hands as they took her away to be shot? Is the slab under your apartment building moaning that it cannot stand the weight on its back a moment longer, and is the building stretching and creaking? Did a good friend betray you today, or did that good friend merely keep silent and fail to come to your aid? Are you holding the razor at your throat this very instant? Take heart, comfort is at hand. This is the hour that stretches. Djan karek. We are the cavalry. We're here. Put away the pills. We'll get you through this bloody night. Next time, it'll be your turn to help us.

—Harlan Ellison, "Eidolons" (1988)

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# Harlan Ellison and *Final Stage*

by Bud Webster

Several years ago I wrote an installment of my Anthropology 101 column for the *SFWA Bulletin* on the subject of a damaged, if nevertheless excellent, anthology published in 1974 by Charterhouse (a subsidiary press of David McKay) and edited by Ed Ferman, then the editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and author/critic Barry Malzberg. It was a story that I had wanted to tell for quite some time; it was, in fact, one of the reasons I began writing the column in the first place.

Here's the set-up: Ed Ferman was approached by his cousin, one Carol Rinzler, to see if he could convince Isaac Asimov to write a book for Charterhouse. Ferman indicated that he had little influence over Asimov, but that he and Malzberg would be willing to edit an anthology for her if she liked, and try and get Asimov to write for it. She accepted. The book was assembled, boasting a table of contents that included Asimov, Poul Anderson, Robert Silverberg, and Philip K. Dick, among others. Plus Harlan Ellison.



SF Historian Bud Webster  
Photo by Wolfgang Jasper

All too frequently, though, the best laid plans gang aft agley, and in this case they gang awfully agley pretty damn fast. Rinzler extensively re-wrote the stories by Anderson, Silverberg, and Ellison. That she did so without consulting the authors or the editors, and without issuing galleys to the editors in a timely fashion, only compounded what was already a serious error in judgment. As it was, no one knew the extent of the liberties she took until the book was printed, bound, and shipped.

Ellen Datlow was the Charterhouse staffer in 1974, and was in the office when author Ellison dropped by to pick up his copy. "At the time Harlan picked up the book he was delighted but he didn't really look at it until after he left," she said, with an afterthought that this might have been all for the best.

What was actually done to the stories? In the case of the Ellison, I can give personal, if anecdotal, evidence: in 1975 I obtained copies of the original Charterhouse edition as well as the Penguin reprint from that year. I sat down with pen in hand and listed the alterations in the text, ranging from simple changes in punctuation to wholesale re-ordering of sentences and the excision of entire paragraphs. When I was done, the list covered both sides of two and a half legal-sized pages. Ellison's own list of changes runs a dozen letter-sized pages. I think that qualifies as extensive, by any definition.

At this point, after having seen the documentation, I'd like to address some of the mythology that surrounded this book when it came out, especially in the fan press. I'd heard, and for years had believed, that Ellison brought suit against Charterhouse and Rinzler on behalf of himself and the other injured authors involved; that, as befit his reputation in fandom, he had gone ballistic, threatening and demanding reparations, causing the demise of Charterhouse and Rinzler's resignation. This is demonstrably and provably untrue.

Ellison did, in fact, bring suit against David McKay, Charterhouse's parent company, a small claims suit for a little over \$100 to cover phone calls, secretarial fees, and photocopying costs, all relating to

the costs of documenting the situation and informing Anderson and Silverberg, as well as the two editors, of what was going on. What's more, in all the correspondence Ellison had with Rinzler and Charterhouse, he was courteous, polite, and professional. So much for legends.

Ellison's entry for the Ultimate Sex story is "Catman." In typical Ellison fashion (is there a typical Ellison story, I wonder?), he hits us with several body blows before delivering the thematic uppercut. The title character is a policeman, weary to death of both his job and his family. The viewpoint character is a thief with the ability to teleport, and a burning (if bizarre) passion which he will go to any lengths to attain. The connection between the two is stated early on, but I am nevertheless reluctant to reveal it; having it evolve through Ellison's prose is a *frisson* that readers should experience for themselves.

The climax, in more than one way, of the story comes in a mad rush of heat and hatred, as the sexual obsession of the thief destroys not only his own life, but those of the Catman and his wife. There's no happy ending here, but there is love of a sort, however unexpected it might be.

As is true of all of Ellison's best work, there is layer upon layer of detail that illuminates a subtly alien society, expressed in almost hallucinatory prose. Elements that at first seem tagged-on for no reason become important as the story progresses. Vital information is handed to the reader in small bits, easy to miss unless said reader is paying attention. Ellison is frequently criticized for being "hard to read," and in fact, there have been times when I've found him so. But the reality is that Ellison requires his readers to engage with his stories, to expend the effort to involve themselves in the intricacies of plot, character, and description. It is an effort that pays off here in coin of the highest denomination.

I'd like to say here that Harlan was unstintingly forthcoming and generous with his time and data when I contacted him about the article, answering my questions candidly and honestly. At one point, realizing that much of the information he had on hand bore directly on the subject, and seeing as how we live on opposite coasts, he simply boxed up his three-inch-thick file on the book and FedExed it to me, trusting me to get it back to him in the same condition I received it (I confess that I did replace a number of rusted staples). Without those files, I could not have brought Poul Anderson's side of the story to light, and the article would have been much the poorer.

I've been corresponding with Harlan off and on since 1974, after meeting him at DisCon II, the worldcon in Washington, DC. He sent a letter of comment to my fanzine back in the day, encouraged me to write for actual and paying publication, and after reading the first story I sold to *Analog*, he called me one evening and gave me a page-by-page critique, finishing by saying "Other than that, Webster, this is a pretty good yarn."

Harlan Ellison is, in the words of the great Greek philosopher Phalanges, a *mensch*, and I'm proud to know him and to have his books on my shelves.

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(Much of the material above is excerpted from "Anthopology 101: The (Non)Final Stage", originally published in the Summer 2005 *SFWA Bulletin*.) The original version of the article is available at Phil Stephensen-Payne's Galactic Central, at [http://www.philsp.com/articles/anthopology\\_101\\_09.html](http://www.philsp.com/articles/anthopology_101_09.html).

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In these days of widespread illiteracy, functional illiteracy...anything that keeps people stupid is a felony.  
—Harlan Ellison

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# Fond Memories

I've only one Harlan story: At my first worldcon, Oakland 1964, I was standing at the entrance of the Leamington and saw a guy pull up in a sports car, hoist out a bag, hand \$5 to the attendant, and stride in. I'd never seen a picture, but the manner told all: Harlan, had to be. I went over to him and when he saw my name badge he said, "Good fanzine, but I don't write for them any more." I laughed and we've been friends ever since. Where he saw a copy of *Void* I can't imagine.

—**Gregory Benford**

At a con (Discon, 1974 Worldcon) I was going down an escalator and Harlan was going up an escalator right next to me, and suddenly he saw me and looked surprised and said something like: "Hi! Haven't seen you in ages, we'll have to get together soon." I was astonished and puzzled as I didn't actually know him, and waved my arms in a confused manner. Didn't see him the rest of the weekend. But many years later at a Readercon I had to give him a message from Roger Sims, who'd been his roommate in college, and when I did (he was very nice and remembered Roger, of course) there was no hint that I looked familiar. I have no idea with whom he could have mistaken me.

—**Hope Leibowitz**

Harlan was considerably "before my time" as an active fan, but nonetheless we "know" each other thanks to the most unlikely of circumstances: Back in the '60s when I was still living in Los Angeles and political activism was a prominent item on my plate, we would sometimes find ourselves both on the front lines of various peace, civil rights and anti-war demonstrations winding through the streets of the city. I recognized him immediately, was pleased to see him supporting the same things I did, made myself known as a fellow fan, and was readily and enthusiastically accepted as fellow traveler. This created some sort of lasting bond between us, albeit of the most tenuous kind, so that whenever we ran into each other in a more stfnal and/or fannish context years later there was always a moment of friendly recognition and perhaps a little conversation. The last time this happened was at the 1997 memorial at the LASFS clubhouse for our dear departed mutual friend, Bill Rotsler.

Back in the '90s before I gained access to the Internet, I held auctions of vintage fanzines and related material by the now-primitive means of distributing paper catalogues to interested parties. Many of these sales were to provide an injection of cash for widows of deceased fans. My "commission" was that I got to keep some of the fanzines for myself. Somehow Harlan got wind of an offering in one of these auctions that he desperately wanted and he began calling me to place bids. Those being flush times with spirited bidders, Harlan was routinely outbid. He'd call me to increase his own bid, but after a few rounds his calls became more desperate. So I made an arrangement with him that I would place bids on his behalf so that he would always be five dollars ahead each time I sent around a list of current high bids. But when it came time for the final round, I insisted that he must take his chance and call me just before the auction ended to make his final and best offer. In the end he did prevail by swamping the competition and I sent him his expensively won item. A few months later it came back to me in the mail with a note that he already had a copy, after all, and to please keep the money he'd paid since it was going to the widow of someone he knew well. (I then offered it to the runner-up, who was pleased to have a second chance.) I'll always remember Harlan's generosity in not wanting his money back .

So I have no bad or strange experiences with Harlan of the sort reported over the years, only good ones, and I offer congratulations to him on adding the Eaton Award for Lifetime Achievement in Science Fiction to his (in the words of Rob Latham) "impressive list of honors."

—**Robert Lichtman**

There is a Harlan Ellison story connected to Fred Saberhagen's passing. Harlan had long been a friend

of the Saberhagens and Fred had written a story for the never published *Last Dangerous Visions*.

About a month before Fred passed I organized a party at the Saberhagen home so friends could visit with Fred one more time. I invited Harlan, who genuinely wanted to attend, but could not at that time. Harlan had just received his screener copy of *Dreams with Sharp Teeth* and instantly put it in the mail so we could have it for the party. At the time, it was Harlan's only copy, and he kindly trusted us to send it back to him (unharmed and uncopied). Fred, Joan, and I watched and enjoyed it together.

Harlan asked me to keep him updated about Fred's condition, which I did. When Fred passed, the family wanted to keep things private for a little while before the press was alerted. With Joan's permission, I called Harlan when Fred died and asked him to please keep the news under his hat for the time being. He did. Later, I posted on Harlan's site (*Uncle Harlan's Art Deco Dining Pavilion*) the news about Fred's passing. This was one of the first places the information was released. Harlan acknowledged my post and said some kind words about Fred.

Then the Wikipedia whirlwind started. Events, as far as I can tell, unfolded thusly. John Scalzi read Harlan's and my posts and considered Harlan to be a reliable source of information (I agree with John).

John then went in and changed Fred's Wikipedia entry to reflect Fred's passing. Wiki removed the entry. Much posting ensued. Fark.com picked up the heated debate and more, somewhat angry, posting ensued. At some point I heard about this storm and went into Wiki to mention that I was the source of the information and the family spokesperson. Not good enough for Wiki. Once it finally hit the *New York Times* (I was listed as the spokesperson there too) Wiki allowed the change. The thing that I still marvel at is, "How do you prove you are real in Cyberland?" Are we only real once a paper source prints the information? Does that imply everything that is printed on paper is true? Just food for thought.

—**Patricia Rogers**

My Harlan Ellison memory took place around the time of Iguanacon. I had written a letter to him concerning the boycotting of Arizona business because of the ERA issue. Somehow my letter to him wound up being published by a fanzine out of Wisconsin. I was a tad upset and wrote to let him know. My jaw practically fell off when he called to apologize. I didn't have my phone number on my letterhead, so this means he found the number by calling directory assistance. This is how I know he's really a sweet guy.

—**R-Laurraine Tutihasi**

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The only thing worth writing about is people. People. Human beings. Men and women whose individuality must be created, line by line, insight by insight. If you do not do it, the story is a failure. [...] There is no nobler chore in the universe than holding up the mirror of reality and turning it slightly, so we have a new and different perception of the commonplace, the everyday, the "normal," the obvious. People are reflected in the glass. The fantasy situation into which you thrust them is the mirror itself. And what we are shown should illuminate and alter our perception of the world around us. Failing that, you have failed totally.

—Harlan Ellison

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**“Steam Punk Rescue,”** by Ditmar [Martin James Ditmar Jensen]