CLEAR ETHER

personalzine of SEK3

for APA $\nu = \int \Psi \nabla (ego) \overline{\Psi} \partial \tau = SEK^3 \pm 2\pi \hbar$

A ASTRUM USQUE AD ASTER

Volume I, Number 5 August 31, 1974 $\Omega = 0$

DisCon?!

OK, Richard, we're here, so now what? Everyone already heard the one about Wigner's sister....

So $\alpha p \alpha - v$ is going to be read by all sorts of strangers (*eeee* -- there's a stranger reading my innermost thoughts! What's that? You'll be gentle the first time? What makes you think you're the first? *snee**) Ah, there goes the "in" clubbiness, the little private feuds, the petty rivalries and snide personal putdowns -- in short, all the things that make a club apazine worthwhile. Now we'll have to put on best bib and tucker [*stand still when I straighten your tie* *are my columns perfectly straight?*] and curb our vile tempers and peccadilloes while the mob looks in [*gosh, those aristocratic NYU fen got such fine manners 'n' all, I wanna grow up to be jes! like them! Why, why, seeing their example, I am gonna make sumpin' outta myself so's I can appear in a fancy-type zine and talk clever just like them!], and maybe preen.

Ah, no way. Come on, superstar, let's throw a non-Kosher pie in Richard's Useless and Didactic Free Verse...yeah, man, like that one...wait a minute, Mike, not to your own roomate... remember the money you owe me... *no place left to run, I'm cornered*FIAWOL! What dy'ya mean, that is justification for a pie in the face? TANSTAAFL! Whaddya mean I don't have to lick it off! How about "I'll get you!" Well, that worked. Now, updating my last two issues praise for Jim Baen's good-as-the-golden-age

Worlds of If, let me review...*splat!*
!!! *lick* *chase furiously*
catch! *pummel......[inch of life]*
"Uncle!" *pant* ...

BERSERKER'S PLANET BY FRED SABERHAGEN [serialized in World's Of If, Vol. 22, number 5 & 6]

In *Clear Ether 3* I alluded to one of the series which made the sixties' *If* so great, namely Saberhagen's Berserker series. Why?

Now you have a chance to answer that for yourself first hand, and if you are neo, you may yet find yourself back in the Huckster's room digging up the aforementioned prozine from the aforementioned decade. Nothing like an empirical definition. But, naturally, this wouldn't be a review if I just told you to go out and read it. I have to have a chance to cut down...or rave.

Stylistically and mechanically, I probably wouldn't put Saberhagen up for competition against the best the enemy had to offer, even if the enemy was the cream of the New Wave. His plot is fairly exciting, and the elements of mystery as well as sf gets you on the edge of your seat occasionally, but not continuously. The tournament chapters began to drag, near the latter parts, although still interesting enough to hold your attention. And the non-death of Giles the Treacherous was so telegraphed that I tried to convince myself that Saberhagen was going to pull a real fast one and have him killed after all! such luck!) But isn't this what counts? Shouldn't the storytelling, style, and swash leave this somewhere above mediocre?

Hey there, trufan, haven't you forgot ideas!? You know, the thing that made sf different in the first place from those other, inferior-type genres. Well, you may well reply, isn't it the same idea reworked over and over? The bit about these sentient machines programmed by

an extinct race to run about the galaxy treating life as a disease to be exterminated. Isn't this just another re-working, maybe extracting the last bit of salability of a shopworn idea?

Hah! What an idea! Literally, life versus death. Death is embodied and anthromorphised--not through fantasy or myth, but honest-to-Gernsback hard science. A series with all the possibilities of all combinations of people forced to re-evaluate their existence when forced to face Death personified and unevadable. Ayn Rand, eat your heart out for a device like this!

And that is what the Berserker stories are. I'll never forget that sweeping battle of Johann Karlsen leading the Terran armada against the Berserker killer fleet, being the space opera fan that I am, but all the other stories were far more on the level of a shipload of characters with contrasting valuesystems forced to come to grips with meaning and stop blanking out when they run up against...the Berserker! In Berserker's Planet, those of us who were raised on Saberhagen can quickly agree with the evil high priest of death who serves -- not Thorum, for whom he publically works--a real machine god, whose mere mention of the true name will wipe the confident smile off the lips of the self-sufficient business executive.

Schoenberg, unimpressed, sat down.
"How do you mean to terrify me, then?"
he answered.

"By saying a few words."

"Andreas, my respect for you is fading. If the threats you have already made have not had their desired effect, neither will any mutterings about some great unnameable terror. You are not going to scare me that way. In fact you are not going to scare me at all, not in the way you seem to want."

"I think I can. I think I know what a man like you is truly afraid of."
"What?"

"Perhaps I can do it by saying to you only one word." Andreas clapped his hands together playfully. Schoenberg waited.

"The one word is his name."
"Thorun. I know that."
"No. Thorun is a toy. My god is real."
"Well, then. Utter his terrible name."
Schoenberg lifted his eyebrows in almost

jaunty inquiry.
Andreas whispered the three syllables.

It took Schoenberg a little while to grasp it. At first he was merely puzzled. [You have got to have read this far to understand the suspense breaking at this point. Saberhagen underplays it right to the end!] "Berserker," he repeated, leaning back in his chair, his face a blank. Andreas waited, confidently, for his god had never failed him yet. [Come on, Fred, drop the other shoe!]

Schoenberg said: "You mean...ahhh. I think I begin to see. You mean one has really been here for five hundred years, and you--serve it?," I am going to offer the god of Death a special sacrifice, consisting of some people we no longer need. I can show you. You will be convinced."

"Yes, I believe you can show me. I believe you. Well. This puts a different face on things, all right. If I wouldn't help you in a local war, I'm not going to help you in a mass extermination."

One by one the other characters must choose: a pacifist must kill to stop Death incarnate, aworthless playgirl and a sadomasochistic bodyguard are sacrificed on an altar facing their own value, and...

And the ending is literally slam-bang. The way Saberhagen sets it up to have the Berserker go by its own nature...when's the next, Fred, when's the next!...?