

CLEAR ETHER!

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I'M HERE, I'M HERE, LET THE BELLS RING OUT AND THE PEOPLE CHEER!...

I'm already burnt out of Introductions. Let's get to the new material already. For those of you who've been reading CE! for some time, this is a new format with new entertaining ways of expressing new variants and improvements on the timeless concepts I choose to embody and defend.

For those of you who are new to my zine, **CLEAR ETHER!** is my publication for personal gratification for those who are gratified similarly. It is not meant as an *ideological* publication—I already do those for money and fame—but my philosophy is inseparable from my way of thinking (a delightfully consistent arrangement) so it will show through. Ne'ertheless, CE! is my creative, aesthetic, artistic outlet—and unabashedly fannish, faanish...and sercon when I'm out to pick a good fight.

CE! is named after the expression of heroic friendship in Doc Smith's *Lensman* series; it sums up what Ayn Rand would call my "sense of life." (My companion commentzine to run through APAs with this, ...AND ON GREEN!, is the *Lensman's* way of saying "on course" or "on target" from "All clear and on green, Kimball!")

That's enough bookkeeping and stonemasonry. Let's see if I can now amuse as well.

LOSCONZO!

So I took another toke and then she finished it off. I lay back and decided, what the hell, this is how "Raoul Duke" got ready for his gonzo. So I *would* do another con report.

Y'see, Sheila and I had been hit with a couple of last minute problems involving everything from the State's nabbing her car while her stoned buddy had been driving it to satisfying her "rad-therapy" requirements. All of which blew the first day of LosCon 5 for me.

No, I don't believe in psychotherapy of any sort; it's the world's second oldest social profession (variously known as medicine, magic, witchery, politics, organized religion, psychology, establishment economics, or just plain fraud.) And while we finally rescued the car Saturday morning, Sheila's friend had yet to see sunshine. But that's counter-economics; back to fanac.

So I wasn't feeling too frisky Friday as I gave up on the Con, but to my surprise and returning delight, the Pasadena Huntington-Sheraton would give me a reservation for Saturday night only for two! Ghod, it never occurred to me there could be an underbooked Con hotel.

Friday night mellowed out and though Saturday morning came all too soon, I packed as Sheila rescued the car and then we caught a bus to Pasadena. (Why a bus if we had a car, you may ponder. Well, you see, Sheila doesn't really drive yet, and I prefer not to...oh, it'll take too long to explain.) We got off in Pasadena within a couple of blocks of where I thought the hotel was. 15 blocks later, three rest stops, and numerous hand-rubbings for the restoration of circulation in suitcase-bearing hands, we arrived at the registration desk an hour before they would give our room away.

Some of my more enjoyable moments were spent getting Sheila acquainted with a Con and Confandom, but if she wants that written about, she'll do a con report herself. Suffice it to say that though her feet were a-draggin' to the hotel, they were a-tappin' to the strains of "Roland, The Headless Thompson Gunner" as rendered by Frank Gasperik around one in the morning.

After we had registered, unpacked, refreshed, unwound, and restored ourselves, we arrived downstairs to find, only forty minutes after it was scheduled to begin, the masquerade was over. Only ten entries: probably best I didn't expose (good word, that) Sheila to her first costumed event with such meager fare. We then ran into the Zubers who had won prizes for best unicorns and hopped with them over to that Middle Eastern Answer to economical cuisine, Burger Continental.

Mike Gunderloy and his friend Ken had made a deal with the management to run con-goers over to this restaurant, and with over a hundred accounted for, raked in free meals for themselves. Entreprising lads.

The ebb and flow of conversation carried some flotsom and jetsam of information and some which stuck in my clouded mind follows. Bernie and Teny (of famed Zuber-Rule Enterprises, known for their superbly typeset stationary) gave me a review of the pre-screening of *Lord of the Rings* and a pass for Sheila and me to catch the one on November 10. Ah, *smof*

and impressiveness! Too bad we couldn't share in the celebratory banquet they partook of, but we amused ourselves discussing how we would construct our plates most appetizingly from the ample buffet they described. It detracted naught from the steaks and bebobs we were devouring. Mike and Ken regaled us with the student-lurid tales of Caltech activity going around in surrounding Pasadena. It seems Tech had *won* a game, and was celebrating with a downtown bonfire. The Pasadena Porkers were out to score a few arrests and things sounded lively. (Wonder what all the little old ladies were doing?)

Back at the hotel we hunted parties. Now let me bring this narrative flow to a sudden halt right here and lay this subjective evaluation on you: LosCon, after four false tries, has grown up.

You see, I go to cons for the parties, and sleep through the programming. Films, panels, and speeches are fine as long as they don't detract from the bheer flow, fems and filks. Hucksters rooms are nice to fool around while you're killing time and awards banquets are a duty—sometimes rewarding, often an ordeal. But when the programme ends, night falls, and the banquets and ceremonies end, oh, my fan friend, then the Con begins!

For the past four LosCons, it was *the* party—usually with a cash bar. Now not only was the con suite *giving* away the bheer (in good old fannish tradition—TANSTAAFL is a generous Old God) but there were at least *three* other parties I discovered and at least one I didn't. I mean, you got to have some other place to go when a lull hits where you are. You got to cruise. One party may have the bheer you prefer, another the munchies, still another a filk session and yet another pleasant company.

So it was at LosCon 5. The Con suite, *mirabile dictu*, had Coors and Frank Gasperik was providing a wealth of snacks in 519. Barry Gold was leading filks in another room, and in 507 . . . but that deserves a section unto itself.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FAN CULT!

A new pope to be elected? When the (**suck**) smoke would clear (**exhale**), the Herbangelists would proclaim a new spiritual leader. Elst (Elliot Weinstein) somehow managed to contrive his own re-election, after throwing out the "ballasts"—for being insufficiently amusing. But the event itself, perhaps lacking suspense—was hilarious—Fandom's theatre of the absurd.

Herbangelists, for the uninitiated, worship the comic book character, Herbie, who created miracles with a bop of his lollipop. The founder of this church reasoned that anyone with that much power must be a god. The founders set a catechism which blasphemed most Americans' creeds in a rib-tickling way, and thus reaped converts in jaded, sceptical fandom across the country. But their strength lies in, of course, Southern California.

Roman Catholicism, with Popes John Paul up and down, was the main target in this jam-packed room.

Pope George Ringo of Herbangelism was declared gone and his office vacant. The College of Coo-Coos, led my champion punster Jack Harness in a flowing green robe suspiciously resembling the Huntington-Sheraton bed coverlets, and a wearing a polo helmet painted like a duck's head, were assembled.

Elst mced, occasionally brandishing a lollipop with a face on it that, when exposed, promoted the (primed) assembly to avert their faces with howls of anguish. Craig Miller, who scripted what little had been prepared, then got up to ad lib a "defense" of a "saint" who was to be canonised—Saint No-Such-Thing-As-A-Free-Lunch (Jeff Siegel).

There were many good lines, but my besotted brain gropes in vain for their recall, and quite a few groaners. Fen came and went as room permitted, but when Mike Glycer came around with an honest-to-Herbie collection plate, the congregation evaporated. Sic Transit RTD or something.

DEBAUCHERY & DECADENCE & D&D

A melange of discussions followed, interrupted by the need to acquire or release bheer. I remember walking into the Gold's filksing as it ended, and promptly a discussion of D&D condensed around Lee Gold, who tried to avert it. Barry Gold held forth on computer talk, which I joined in with Tom Locke and Mike Gunderloy. The Barry and Mike traded Caltech legends when Mike brought latest word of the bonfire bust.

In Frank's room, midnight fell and I found myself with Sheila and Mike alone with Frank as it was revealed that not only was it now Guy Fawkes' Day (Frank had an effigy of the heroic anti-statist at the party) but also Frank's birthday. We lustily accorded him the traditional song, foregoing the fannish tradition of "God Save The Queen" this once.

Later we returned to 519 where Sheila got to play gosh-wow-it's-first-pro with Larry Niven. Frank had unlimbered his guitar and convinced Sheila that there were hip fans when he did "Roland, The Headless Thompson Gunner." He followed that with a rendition of Mark Czescu's song from *Lucifer's Hammer*, most appropriate, then a talking blues relating the procurement of popcorn at a previous Con.

Mike and I were keeping tabs on the Coors, and the supply was getting low. We got two of the last three.

Several Arizona fen had shown up, including Greg Brown, the once (and future) IguanaCon King and his pseudonymous wife, Jenny Montaire. Also from the land of Phoenicians was Don Markstein, still in his Beagle Boy costume from the masquerade. Don and I got in a little smoffing on the future of *Frefanzine* and I was pleased to find him willing to take the OEship off my hands as of next disty.

We went back down to 362 to find it closing but *one last bheer* (a Bud) was available—and guess who spoke up for it first? That was enough fuel for one last orbit of the fading parties, as they closed down to leave just the Con suite. Around 2:30 Sheila and I returned to our room. **fade out to waves crashing**

FEAR AND LOATHING IN PASADENA

Sleep was, as usual, a battered victim at the Con. Less than five hours after we succumbed to it, we were awake to wallow in genteel Pasadena decadence by ordering breakfast in bed, la-di-da. Nothing like having your room serviced.

The light of my anarcholife returned to Morpheus' embrace as I dragged my bod downstairs to attend *shudder* an item of programming. Ah, Doc Smith, what I would do for the memory of thee! So at low noon, I lowered my grateful bones upon a chair with a dozen scattered other morning-after bods, and gazed upon the heirs of E.E. Smith.

Steven Goldin, who carries on the Family D'Alembert series, spoke mainly of his work, vexations and rewards. William Ellern, author of *New Lensman*, ranged a bit further afield, into psychology, motivational analysis, alleged Smith sexism and racism, and even fan unionism! Both authors related problems with Smith's widow.

I wrestled with myself as whether to meekly listen to the official panelists, even when they took Doc's name in vain, or to righteously arise and set them straight. When Larry Niven sat down in front of me and began to smile at my irritated mutterings, I decided to let it pass until a less-hung-over moment. This is the moment.

First, Smith has been called ahead of his time by at least one feminist I know for considering civilization to require freedom of the sexes. He portrays both male-dominated and female-dominated societies, and both are bad guys. Whether or not his 1930's consciousness was raised to that of the triumphant liberation of the seventies who can spend time on the finer points of equality of attitude, seems incredibly churlish to me. How many suffragettes of the 1920s could stand up to a close scrutiny by the hard-core women's activists today?

Nor do I consider it any justification to excuse Smith for having been imprinted with an 1890s frontier American culture (as Ellern did). He was, if anything, a forward-looking individualist of the 1920s and 30s, not overly conservative until at least the 1950s and 60s, and only on anti-communism even then. Smith held one thing that was in fashion in the late 1800s that is out of fashion today—Romanticism. But the fashion of today is crumbling into the nothingness on which it is based. And Smith's unabashed heroes and heroines—allegedly lacking two dimensions when they actually had four or more—still inspire, entertain, amuse, revivify and sell.

Ellern's plea for fen to "organize" to force better products? ...working conditions for authors? ...more fannishly conscious publisher? ...whatever was in questionable taste given Smith's view on unionism (a skeptical, penetrating, muckraking view which is returning to intellectual fashion in North America and Western Europe today with renewed vigour). Much of what Bill Ellern talked about was interesting, and one must by all means grant allowances for the tendency

for one's mind to wander on the last morning of a Con, so I write this not to condemn a fellow Lensfan but to set the record straight.

It should be noted that this panel reversed the usual trend by increasing its attendance during its duration, doubling in size about every half hour, rather than the usual attrition by fans who get bored, distracted, or called away over an hour or more. Perhaps it just happened to be when everyone got back from breakfast; but maybe it was word spreading of a "hot" panel.

THIS TOO DID PASS

The rest of the day was spent looking for people to talk to—as opposed to exchanging yawns. Everyone was burnt out and the post-con blues were approaching. We checked out of the room, wandered around the hotel and over and back across the bridge with the paintings on it and the swimming pool below it.

Soon we trudged out to catch a Long Beach bus back home, burnt out and craving more. For half-a-LosCon, not bad.

REVIEWS

Lucifer's Hammer (Book) by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle. Is it Science Fiction? Is it a disaster-story exploitation? Is it commercial mainstream? Is it good in any of these categories?

I feel squeamish about answering yes to all of the above. I mean, the damn thing is even *faanish* with its in-references to LASFS personalities. I guess it can be all these things because it's so *long*. In a real sense, the latter part, post-holocaust, is stfnal, and the first two-thirds is a better-than-average disaster novel. I mean, what more of a disaster to end all disasters can you have and still have something to write about after than having the Earth walloped from space?

It never bored me, and I will always recall certain well-drawn, indelible scenes: the surfer riding the big one over the city of Santa Monica, the ride over the rails, the guards at the pass, the last gaseous battle. So it wasn't a cosmic space opera. ■■■■

The Lord Of The Rings I (Cinema) As Vic Koman said to me, let's all rave about this film to make it enough money so they'll do part two. But, O! If Walt Disney had followed through on his option.

I'd like to say that no one could have made a bad movie with the story J.R.R. Tolkien gave them, but that's not true. They could have ignored the plot. Thanks be to Ralph Bakshi, he was at least faithful.

There were excisions: Tom Bombadil, Goldberry, the barrow-wight, Legolas meeting them too early, but the main theme is there. There were annoyances, like Saruman becoming Aruman (far too close to the Zoroastrian Ahriman) halfway through the picture. But the Great Tale—the Myth—was there. Up until Helm's Deep, and leaving one faunching for Shelob, the Ents' march on Isengard, Frodo on Mount Doom, and above all, the Gondor-Mordor battle.

For here indeed did Ralph Bakshi show his mettle. The battles, orcs and Rohirrim especially, were a war-

gamers' wet dream. Rotoscoping or nay, that *felt* like an honest-to-Eru battle in Middle-Earth.

The villainous were sublimely rendered. The Nazgul were frightening and loathesome, the orcs convincing, the Balrog demonic and awful (original meaning). Sauron was, properly, not depicted. Saruman was shown to have gone from white to many colours not by changing his robes, but by affecting the light around him.

The good guys were depicted so as to cause grumbling among those who had their own images. None were *bad* or inappropriate; the elves were thankfully worthy of respect and admiration, if not awe and adulation. Personally, I thought Aragorn appropriate, though many femfen felt their pulses less than quicken. The hobbits were convincing, if a little more cartoony than the orcs. And Gollum was a delight to all; his lines (appropriately) getting some of the best laughs.

The inconsistency of rotoscoped types not fully "cartoonized" with the more cartoonish main characters was often jarring, probably the major artistic flaw of the movie. Perhaps it could be smoothed out for the sequel.

Galadriel came across fairly well, though again, this male at least did not swoon. On the other hand, her voice was superb. Alas, the other Tolkien females were badly short-shrifted. Arwen never appeared and Eowyn never uttered a word.

The splashes of blood when Gandalf, riding to the rescue of the besieged Theoden, smote the orcs, probably kicked the rating to PG. Eru knows what else would have. But that scene of Gandalf taking on the balrog on the bridge in Moria—I hope they re-run it in the opening synopsis of the sequel.

And, O by The One, let there be part II! ■■■
(Acknowledgements to Bernie & Teny Zuber for preview tickets for *CLEAR ETHER!*)

One Immortal Man (Novel) by Richard E. Geis (serialized in *Science Fiction Review* ending in November-December 1978). First and foremost, this is a gripping, action-packed, fast-pace, thrill-a-minute story. Geis has been preaching that literature should be this way, and he put up.

Nor does it lack a message. The one immortal man is a thoroughgoing Darwinist, biological and social, and knows survival is everything. If the peripheral aesthetics didn't turn Ayn Rand off (and if she can groove on Mickey Spillane, she shouldn't be turned off), she couldn't reject the message. Of course, this millenarian has lost his ability for Romantic Love, so Ayn Rand may yet be lost.

Vic Kunzar, for those of you who will not read the hard-to-get story, is transformed by aliens around our time into a biological immortal. Several centuries later, man failed to get into space and is going through Spengleroid cycles. An ice age is coming upon man, the whites have reverted to savagery, and the last gasps of civilisation are around the Congo River and in Southern India.

Kunzar had his skin and features turned negroid by

advanced surgery techniques by Egyptians—before that civilisation fell. Geis has a lot of fun for the readers with all the original technology developed in that period. It's very organic. Trees grow into dwellings, plants become furniture and clothing, and all still alive.

But with all the stfnal background and action plot, what happens? Well, Kunzar, posing as Masil, plutocratic advisor to aging King Ndola, is uncovered by the necrophobic monarch. "Kun-zar" is the legendary god of the white savages, who promises immortality to his faithful. And so Masil is spied upon and betrayed and finally busted.

He escapes and the rest of the plot is mostly chase. The ending—how can I put this without committing the reviewer's cardinal sin?—is the message, and that's where it belongs. It's a cynical story, but not downbeat. There's hope—but only in the chance to keep looking. There are elements of heroism, though the hero performs the classic disgusting acts and every forbidden act I can remember. Vik Kunzar survives because survival is its own reward. It's a far balder statement of pure egoism than Ayn Rand had the nerve to write—utterly unredeemed by Romanticism. Romance, yes; Romanticism, no.

Yet it's not New Wave, either. A lot is wrong, but a lot is right, too. I suppose I'd have to say it's the most fine-balanced, *neutral* thematic SF novel I have ever read. And because the message is so important (to this reviewer—this issue has already been argued to death in previous issues)—all important—I am left with serious ambiguity in evaluation. And it's not just because I like Dick Geis, the person.

Call me a cop-out, then, but I'll say he successfully wrote exactly what he set out to. Everything he has been advocating and living by was skillfully weaved in. It's successful, a great read, entertaining, non-preachy, thrilling, probably commercial, will attract egoboo and groupies for the author and even acceptably libertarian. What more can one say in lavish praise?

I guess I want Vic Kunzar to find, after a thousand years of looking and living... *something to die for.* ■■■■

SKYLOCS OF SPACE

Dear Sam:

I unfortunately saw "Damnation Alley" which you reviewed... I'm not a big fan of the book—Zelazny couldn't have taken it through more than two quick drafts, and for my money the best novel ever written in under two weeks is The Killer Inside Me by Jim Thompson—but the thing that saved the book for me was the thought, "The Would Make A Good Movie." It didn't. Of course, the title is just about the only thing the book and the film have in common. Let's put the blame where it belongs, though: on the shoulders of veteran hack director Jack Smight ("The Illustrated Man," "Secret War of Harry Prig," etc.). The man has no talent. He didn't even keep things moving.

Well, keep in touch,

*Jeff Grimshaw
New York, New York*