

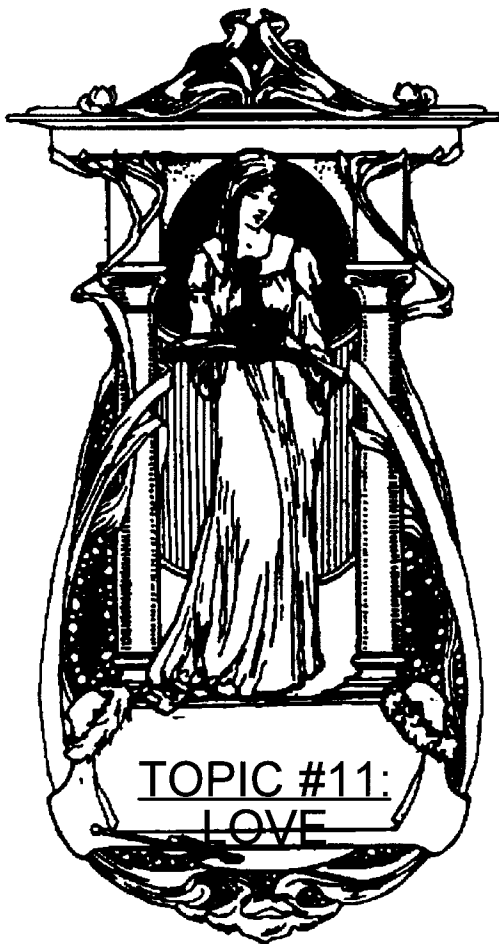
THE LOG THAT FEELS

#11

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for me the day isn't complete without a quote from Charlie Brown. "I know nobody likes me—why do we have to have a Valentine's Day to emphasize it?" ☺

Even though it *was* poor timing, I still must maintain that Love is part of a good roleplaying game. No, let me put that differently: Love *as a subject of game play* can be an important part of a good roleplaying experience. Not an indispensable element, but an enriching one. Envy, fear, anger, and avarice all have their place in even the most simplistic hack n' slash game; it takes a skilled GM to make love work in a game, but the effect should be proportionally greater and more meaningful.

On the other hand, I've never made much use of love *qua* love in a game. It has never been a major focus; I've used it tangentially (mother love as an NPC motivation, for example), but have never attempted to explore all the possibilities. Will I change that in the future? Perhaps, but I'm not particularly planning on it. It's just too tricky a subject.

Truth to tell, I chose Love as the topic because I was thinking about how much I *loved* my new laser printer. ☺

Love: What is it? We all love gaming, I guess, or else we wouldn't do it. We all love writing, or at least we love the feeling of *having written*.

All right, I'll admit that "Love" might not have been the wisest choice for a topic. "Dumb" might be a better word for it; I'd forgotten that many people are a bit sore on that subject, particularly in February. Retailers may love Valentine's Day, but

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☺ REVIEW: ☹ SPACE ACE

A CD-ROM multimedia video game for the IBM PC and compatibles

Publisher: ReadySoft

Cost: \$49

Requires: CD-ROM drive (300K/s or better) 4MB RAM, 386 or faster processor, VGA display.

Review machine: 486 DX/2 50 MHz, 8 MB RAM, double-speed CD-ROM drive (300K/s), 16-bit Diamond Speedstar Pro sound card (SoundBlaster compatible), 15-inch .28 pitch CTX SVGA screen

It probably wouldn't have been much longer before a hastily-formed group of software retailers would have stormed 81 Washington Street #2 *en masse* and pulled me shrieking from my bed. If I were lucky, they'd only pull my tongue out.

Let me explain: readers may remember my review of the Dragon's Lair CD-ROM in IR #4. At the end of the game, a promo for Space Ace played; it was described as "Coming Soon". That was in the summer of 1994; I assumed that "Soon" meant that year, maybe within a month or two, and so phoned store after store week after week.

The game has finally become available. Was it worth the wait?

Yes...yes, it was. And yet it's not perfect. For the most part, I could simply have recycled my review of *Dragon's Lair*; naturally enough, the games are very similar. There are some differences, though, which I'll detail.

For those not familiar with this style of game, here's how it works: an animated scene is played onscreen, with fully cinematic music and voices. As the scene progresses, the hero must make certain moves; these are defined as left, right, up (or forward), down (or back), and blaster (or sword, in DL). If the proper button is not pressed at approximately the right time, the scene stops abruptly and is replaced by a quick view of the

hero's amusing death. If every button is pressed correctly for all the scenes, the hero eventually triumphs and reaches a happy ending. Effectively the whole thing is a long animated cartoon, with limited alternative (death) tracks. I haven't had a chance to time the whole thing when played flawlessly, but I don't suppose it lasts longer than half an hour.

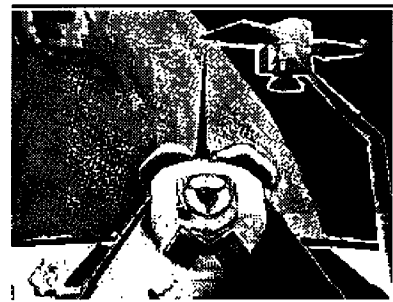
The source material (a laser-disk video game created by movie animator and producer Don Bluth, formerly with Disney), is outstanding—of course. As Dragon's Lair skillfully drew on the archetypes of cinematic fantasy, so Space Ace evokes the great moments of science fiction from the movies. It's an extremely effective technique, though I have to wonder how they got away with it. One scene was so closely based on Star Wars that I'm sure that George Lucas' lawyers must have stirred restlessly in their coffins...

The strong leavening of humor helps the game, too. I died quite a few times, simply because I was laughing too hard to press the buttons. In one case I died several times on purpose to just to watch the death scene (it was the scene on the motorcycle). Even after I'd mastered the game entirely, I still played it several times just to enjoy the cartoon.

What else?

Compared to Dragon's Lair, Space Ace is somewhat less...would "exploitative" be the right word? *Can* you exploit a cartoon? I don't know. But it's safe to say that while the red-haired heroine Kimberly certainly has some cheesecake-like qualities, she's nowhere near as hyperdeveloped as the Princess from Dragon's Lair (who probably would have had difficulty standing up in normal gravity), and her clothing is comparatively modest. She's also considerably more active and intelligent, though at times a bit of a nag.

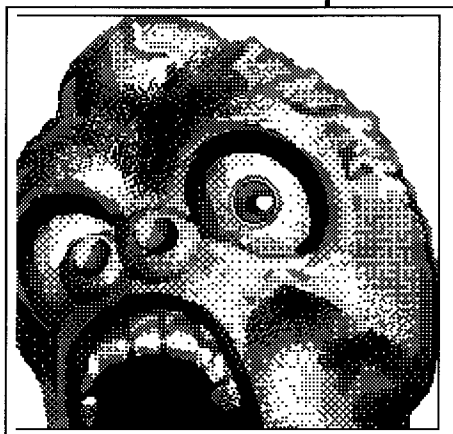
Timing is handled a little strangely; often the correct button can be pressed well before the choice comes up



on the screen. In several cases it's almost required to jump the gun this way; if you wait until the choice flashes on the screen, you're dead. In the roller-skating maze a whole series of buttons must be pressed with their own staccato rhythm, without reference to the screen. Tricky.

Some choices of action are extremely confusing. Of course the decisions couldn't all be obvious (got to suck in those quarters somehow), but there are times when two virtually identical actions can require different keystrokes—"up", and "left", for example. At one or two points the correct choice is the opposite of what you'd expect from the action onscreen. Programming error? Maybe.

On the other hand, this game makes good use of mirroring; some scenes are completely reversed sometimes, which makes it necessary to figure out the pattern and invert it, rather than simply memorize keystrokes. In this regard Space Ace has an edge over DL, which had little mirroring.



Where Space Ace really stands above Dragon's Lair is in its multi-tracking. It actually allows you to make a choice at several points, and that choice changes the game. The hero, Ace, has been hit with the Infanto Ray; the effect is to turn him into a whining, gawky kid, strangely reminiscent of Jerry Lewis (particularly his voice—and yet somehow it's actually funny. Go figure.). Every so often Ace gets the option to Energize, pressing a button on his wristband to recover his previous strength and size (a very dramatic and effective scene). When he does so, the action changes. In general it becomes longer, more drawn-out and difficult but also more interesting. The Energized and non-Energized scenes are different enough to make it worthwhile playing them both ways. Of course, Ace always gets hit again or reverts to kid-form by the end of the scene. It's important to note that in some cases Ace must energize, or he'll die. That's definitely true in the final scene.

There does seem to be one bug. In the Space Station, after getting through the corridors (and if energize, dodging the guards), Ace dodges and runs by a laser projector. He then gets the option to energize. If he doesn't, he jumps from one flying platform to another, finally jumping off just before the last one smashes to pieces. However, the scene freezes a second or so before he jumps; a left jump at the right time is necessary, or he'll die. It's difficult without the screen cues, but by no means impossible.

Synchronization is a bit of a problem. The voices and pictures are sometimes noticeably off. It's not bad enough to ruin the game, but it *is* a definite flaw.

One of my biggest complaints is with the ending. Throughout the game, Kimberly has been called Ace "Dexter"; he always responds with "Call me Ace, huh?" The ending gives the punchline, as well as providing a nice feeling of closure (something I consider important for a game). Unfortunately in the CD-ROM version the scene ends so quickly that the last moments are almost impossible to understand—and in any case, by this point the voices and picture are too disconnected to make the joke obvious. Of course I realize that there are serious limitations on how much

information can be stored on a single CD-ROM; scenes through the game were truncated, which was mildly disturbing but not unacceptable.

However, that the ending—the point of the whole thing—is ruined by the data-cheapness of the programmers is a serious flaw. It's particularly annoying because there are *two* animated promos for other games on the disk. If they could have spared just one second from one of the other promos they could have improved the game enormously. For that the game gets a one-third grade reduction.

One final note: the game does include the full promo for Space Ace as well, which is worth watching for itself. It would make a good talking screen saver, too.

Rating: A-

ALONE TO BOSKONE

After the smashing success of Arisia in January, I had a deep hunger to go to more science fiction conventions. Boskone seemed the obvious first choice; after all, it had been described as the second half of Arisia in a zine in *The Wild Hunt* some time ago. Most of my friends weren't going to attend, but I decided to go anyway. I might have some fun, and could distribute copies of the *IR* Sampler.

Late Saturday morning I lugged the large box of Samplers and flyers into the car and started out. I had directions of a sort from an enthusiastic blurb by the editor in "The World's Best Editorial Humor" comic newspaper (a stupid name—I preferred "The Boston Comic News"). Unfortunately they weren't the most detailed, and so I ended up on a considerable detour before reaching the hotel: the Framingham Tara.

The hotel was something of a disappointment. The doorman was dressed in a Beefeater costume; he looked silly and out of place. The layout was confusing and dull. Where Arisia's Boston Park Plaza had had a soaring lobby with the convention clearly visible along the upper perimeter, this low-ceilinged place felt like a businessmen's motel.

A large bearded science-fiction fan lead me to the con. Something about the way he spoke, and about the way the people around me looked, made me think that this would be quite a different experience from Arisia.

It was. I managed to check in without difficulty (not surprising, given that it was now Saturday afternoon), and wandering around soon realized that Boskone had an oddly *older* feeling than Arisia. There were no costumes, and the average age of attendees was definitely higher—it seemed

that I was one of the younger people there. The whole affair was more restrained, quieter and somehow less fun than Arisia had been. In fact, it was pretty boring. Perhaps that's because I didn't have anyone to hang around with. I did see George Phillies, and Bill Ricker of TWH, but both were otherwise occupied.

I'd hoped to distribute some of the Samplers at the roleplaying area. However, at check in I was told that there was no roleplaying area—an ominous sign. After unloading the Samplers on the only "free" table, I set out to have some fun.



The layout of the hotel was extremely poor. Long bare corridors separated the huckster's room, art show, and various function rooms; I wandered about aimlessly, at one point approaching the pool closely enough to get a strong whiff of chlorine. The con was spread through the hotel, difficult to keep track of.

The huckster's room was interesting, though. It concentrated much more heavily on books than Arisia (or I-con) had; though it was smaller than both those cons, it easily had more book dealers.

I have to be in the right mood to comb through thousands of unalphabetized old books, and I didn't feel up to it then. However, one stand interested me very much: that of NESFA Press. Not only did they have their new complete collection of **Cordwainer Smith's** short science fiction, *The Rediscovery of Man* (**Virgil** had given me a copy for Xmas), but they also had a new hardcover version of *Norstrilia*, his only novel—and a concordance of Smith's work, as well! I grabbed them, along with a collection of **Mack Reynold's** work (I always liked his stuff). They weren't cheap, but I managed to save a little money by joining NESFA; they give a large discount to members.

I continued to wander about. After buying another copy of the issue of *Shadis* with the *IR* review, I

picked up a copy of **Jack Finney**'s sequel to his classic Time After Time: From Time to Time.

I may as well wrap the rest of the con up; there wasn't much more to it. I did lose my copy of *Norstrilia* almost immediately, and was unable to find it; I ended up buying another copy from NESFA. I also picked up a collection of postcards featuring the work of **Roger Dean**, the artist who painted most of the covers of *Yes*'s albums. I've liked his stuff for years. That done, I headed out.

All in all, it was a pretty boring experience. I'm not sorry I went, but it was definitely no Arisia. The whole affair had a strong atmosphere of *old fandom*, if you know what I mean; it was like a bit of science fiction history, something out of the thirties or forties. The language and attitudes all seemed to represent a strong subculture—I can't put it any better than that. As a result, it was somehow less friendly and open.

It's strange that I'm now a member of NESFA; if anything of interest should come from that, I'll write about it here.

CORDWAINER SMITH

There's probably little point in reviewing the new NESFA editions of the works of Cordwainer



Smith. After all, these are part of the enduring canon of science fiction; though Paul Linebarger (Smith) never received the attention he should have from mainstream critics, his works have a place on any science fiction fan's bookshelf. If you haven't read Smith, you should—he was one of the best. And NESFA Press deserves great credit for bringing all of his science fiction back into print.

Some random bits and pieces: the NESFA edition of *Norstrilia* is the most complete yet, as it includes not only the text of the complete novel, but also the "bridge" chapters that Smith wrote when he was forced to break it into two separate books.

The collection of short fiction is also extremely complete. There were two stories that I hadn't read before, both of which were completed by his widow from his notes: "Himself In Anachron" and "Down to A Sunless Sea". Neither possesses the magic quality of Smith's own works, however, and so they were rather disappointing.

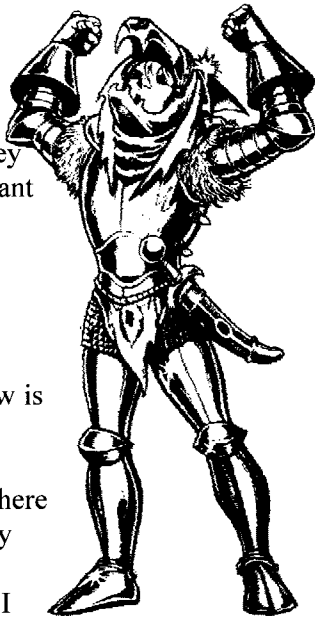
The Concordance is a GBC (plastic coiled comb) bound book which lists terms from Smith's works and give ten-to-forty word definitions. It's interesting, and dedicated Smith fans will find it worth buying; however, it too falls short. Smith's work is supposed to be filled with obscure references and odd tricks: for example, there's one section in "Quest of the

Three Worlds" in which the first letters of a paragraph spell out the words "Kennedy shot". I'd liked to hear more about that sort of thing, but there was little of that in this edition. Most of the entries are descriptions from the books, along with a listing of the source language when appropriate (for example, the names of many characters are actually numbers in a wide variety of foreign tongues). I was also much amused to discover that the "ancient" city of Meeya Meefla was in fact Miami, Fla. Still, this work reveals only a small portion of the quirks that I'm sure permeate Smith's work. It's interesting, but mildly disappointing.

Ratings: *Norstrilia* A+, *The Rediscovery of Man* A+, *The Cordwainer Smith Concordance* B.

F5 FOLLIES

To my amazement, the clowns at [Factsheet 5](#) actually *published* the “asshole” review they mailed to me. It seems they find revenge more important than the appearance of impartiality. I suppose I shouldn’t have been surprised...



Interestingly, the review is published in the “Quirky” section, rather than the Science Fiction section where it was reviewed previously (and where other RPG magazines are reviewed). I can only guess that they wanted to make sure that no science fiction reader might see it, and subscribe. I guess I’m lucky; with that sort of deep-seated hostility, they’d probably hunt me down and kill me if I lived in their area. ☺

...WITH LOVE?

I have an odd ability—actually, I have several odd abilities. The one in question, however, is the strange ability to *recognize* people. Particularly actors. I’m always the first to recognize a known actor in an unfamiliar role. It usually takes me a while to convince others, but the credits almost always bear me out. For example, recently I picked out Ted Danson in an unusual supporting role in *Body Heat*. And years ago I was amazed to spot *Dr. Who*’s **Tom Baker** behind the evil vizier’s beard in *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*.

So what? Well, not long ago TBS had one of their regular James Bond marathons, showing two movies per night for a week or more. I’ve been a Bond fan for a long time; I read the books as a teenager, and still own a few of them (as well as a copy of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, also by Bond author Ian Fleming). The character of Ernst Stavro Bleufeld, evil mastermind of SPECTRE, was always one of the most interesting to me. That part has been played by

several different actors; the two that I recall are Donald Pleasance and Charles Grey, who also played “No-neck”, the narrator from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

In one movie, however, the actor who plays Bleufeld is not seen. In *From Russia With Love* (starring Sean Connery as Bond, in my opinion the only legitimate actor to play the part apart from David Niven in *Casino Royale*) Bleufeld is filmed from behind only. His hands may be seen around the back of his evil-looking chair as he pets his cat and speaks to his terrified subordinates, but his face remains a mystery.

I’ve solved that mystery. Watching *FRWL* late at night, I suddenly realized who that voice must be—it was disguised, but there was no way to completely erase the vocal characteristics of that well-known actor, even if the producers had wanted to. And I don’t think they did. The identity of the actor made it clear that this was an in-joke, and the listing in the credits made it clear. “Bleufeld.....?” Indeed.

Perhaps others have already recognized that voice—I’m sure I’m not the only one to figure it out. Still, if you hadn’t guessed before listen carefully the next time you watch *From Russia With Love*. Behind that carefully repressed accent you’ll hear none other than...Sean Connery! It seems that James Bond was his own worst enemy. 8^>}

COMMENTS #10



Doug Jorenby: How ironic that your warning against Top Ten lists should appear on the opposite page of my own Top Ten list! Will anyone believe that we didn’t arrange that in advance?

* The Python CD-ROM sounds very appealing. Does it still waste much of your time? Do you have it on your machine at work? Are you in trouble yet? ☺

* I’m surprised that Cinemania ‘95 doesn’t have a “Back” feature, since the ‘94 version does. Maybe Microsoft had to squeeze out more space for all the movies that were made in the meantime?

* As for Wonder, play has actually begun—and yet the game proper *hasn’t* (I’ll explain that nextish). Fortunately there seems to be no great danger of munchkinism so far. I’ve had some experience at trying to depict dreams in a game; I’ll leave it for

the players to decide how successful I've been (perhaps some of them will write about it here).

George Phillies: It was good to see you at Boskone, George. I hope you had more fun than I did.

* I was glad to see another part of "The Warrior Unseen"—it really is a fascinating and well-done story. I can understand why the reviewer from *Shadis* singled out the fiction of *IR* for praise...

* The cyberstory was interesting too, though at first I was mildly confused—I didn't realize that it was a new story (I soon figured it out, though). That sort of story is becoming more and more common in the genre, it seems.

Curtis Taylor: Do you pay for your art, Curtis? What are the terms? I was always under the impression that commercial art was just too expensive for a non-profit publication.

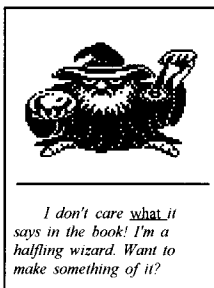
* You know, I really should go over my old zines; I have to find out why everyone thinks that I'm some sort of foaming-at-the-mouth maniac on the subject of AD&D. ☺ I've played it often myself, even as recently as four or five years ago. Heck, I even listed the game in the *IR* Glossary! And TSR just sent me a big pile of promotional material...on the other hand, *they* don't know me. ☺

Chris Aylott: It was good to see you at Arisia, too! And welcome to *Interregnum*, Chris. I'm glad to have you aboard, as often as you can make it.

* I can strongly recommend *The Babylon Project* to all readers with even a slight interest in *Babylon 5* or TV science fiction; and not only because I have a zine in issue #3. ☺ It's a fine production.

* It's ironic that you got into *IR* because of issues that you picked up at Pandemonium, since Tyler, the owner of Pandemonium, has decided not to carry *IR* any longer. When he made that decision he lost my patronage. Nor will I be recommending the store to anyone (I'm sure I've sent several thousands of dollars of business his way over the years). Not an intelligent business decision on his part.

* It's a pity that you're moving so far away, since you'd be welcome to play in Wonder—and I wouldn't mind playing in some of your games, too. The Lantern Kingdom campaign sounds like a lot of fun, and I'd have liked to have played in the re-start.



* Best of luck with **The Space-Crime Continuum!** It sounds like a great idea: a store that specializes in my two favorite genres. Of course you can have as many *IR* flyers and Samplers as you like, and if possible I'll try to get some promotional copies of the regular issues to you, too. Or will you

be coming to the Boston area on occasion? I don't really know how far away the Pioneer Valley is (someone told me it's about a two hour drive).

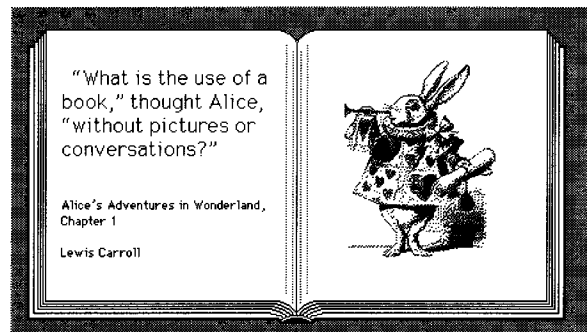
* Some suggestions:

➤ To play up the dual nature of the store, why not publish a list of writers who've worked in both genres? Fredric Brown leaps to mind, but I know of dozens more (Mack Reynolds, Lloyd Biggle, Ron Goulart, Anthony Boucher...), and I'm sure that a search of the various listings would turn up hundreds. You could post that list to the Boston-book email list, and the various books newsgroups, for one thing.

➤ Old books are vitally important, of course. They're 90% of the reason that I go to a store. The only bookstore I regularly visit that doesn't have used books is Wordsworth in Harvard Square, and that's because they always get new books in first and have a huge collection of Dover clipart books.

➤ Used games—particularly roleplaying games—would probably be a draw. There are a lot of them out there, and a lot of science fiction readers are RPG players; I know that I've picked up a number of cheap used games, not because I expected to play them but simply as reading material or out of nostalgia.

➤ A rare-book search service would also be a good idea. Wordsworth has an exceptional one with a high success rate; I think they actually advertise in rare-book journals. Alternatively you could have people file special requests with you. You could then screen your incoming used stock for matches to the requests. Heck, I'll put in a standing request for Lord Dunsany and Fredric Brown right now! ☺



You'll need to cultivate rare distributors, which will probably require some detective work. Books from publishers like NESFA Press or Black Lizard are almost never seen on the chain-store circuit, but it's the chance of finding a book that's off the beaten path that motivates me to search out a store.

➤ Personally I don't think a book store is complete without a cat. However, that's a difficult decision to make. For one thing, some people are allergic. For another, I really don't know how you train a cat to be a store-cat. How do you teach them not to scratch obnoxious customers, or keep them from sharpening their



claws on those tempting \$20 volumes? I don't know, but several used book stores around here have managed it.

Tara & Jenny Glover: Glad to see you again! I appreciate the difficulty of contributing from across the Atlantic, since you have a considerably smaller window of opportunity between receiving an issue and mailing your zine for the next one.

* Please accept my apologies for forgetting to correct the author listing in your zine last issue. It completely slipped my mind.

* It's interesting that Moria offers greater opportunity to male characters, as opposed to female ones; could this be some sort of secret propaganda attempt on the part of the programmers? An anti-feminist ploy? I hope you won't let that sort of thing influence you, Tara. ☺

Moria sounds much like Rogue or Hack—I suppose it's another variant, though it would seem that it offers much more flexibility. Do you descend through level after level, in search of some sort of ultimate talisman?

* I'm glad to hear that you like The Jungle Books, Tara; as I've noted here before, I'm a big fan too. If I ever get "The Jungle" LARP together and ready to run we'll have a special wolf character for you to play. Of course, by the time the game is ready to play you may be too busy on your Master's thesis to fly to the US... ☺

* Tara sleeps surrounded by books? I can go her one better: my bedroom is paved with books, sometimes nearly a foot deep. I have to levitate to get out of bed. ☺

Dale Meier: There are times when I wonder why it is that Interregnum has attracted so much high-quality fiction. Looking at it as dispassionately as I can, it still seems far better than most of the fan fiction I've read in other publications. Needless to say, I'm not complaining. ☺

* Is "Tales From the Angel's Brigade" going to be a serialized short story, or part of a novel? Is it already finished, or a work in progress? What are your plans for it?

It reminded me a little of **Jim Starlin's** groundbreaking *Dreadstar* comic book—not the crappy version that's

published now, but the original Epic stuff. It's the religious angle, I suppose. Of course Starlin was bitterly criticized at the time, and accused of being anti-Catholic.

* The *Star Wars* material sounds very interesting. Not too long ago I saw some of it at a local science-fiction specialty store; thanks to your reviews I was tempted, though I haven't done anything with the game.

* Robb Repp, TSR's (former?) Net representative, did indeed attach a copyright notice to every post he made in the TSR newsgroup—and yes, that's probably impossible. Silly, in fact, since the post by necessity must be copied to millions of machines. But who ever said that those corporate boneheads weren't silly? ☺

* I believe that my copy of the *Star Wars* RPG is the second edition. I'd double-check, but it was so dreadful that I buried it beneath 2,000 pounds of old papers. By the time I dig it up again, it will probably have undergone some sort of weird pressure-transformation.

Mark Sabalauskas: Glad to see you back again, Mark! I hope we'll see a zine from you a little more often, if you can.

* Thanks for the review of *Star Trek: Generations*. The bad word about that movie reached me quickly enough that I never bothered to go see it. From all reports Kirk's death was highly unsatisfactory. It seems that with the death of Gene Roddenberry there's no one with authority over *Star Trek* who actually cares about the show—which explains the execrable *Voyager*. That's why *Babylon 5* is doing as well as it is, I think; the people who run it are real science fiction fans, not corporate flacks out to make a buck off of what they see as pathetic nerds.

Gee, that sounds kind of negative, doesn't it? ☺

NEXTISH:

A review of *The Lathe of Heaven* video, the beginning (and a before-the-beginning scenario) of the Wonder campaign, another guest...should be lots of stuff. Take care!

—>Pete

COLOPHON

The Log That Flies #11 was gestated in a *P. Maranci 30,999 brain*. Much of the text was then written with *PC-Write 2.5*, an ancient but serviceable ~~villain~~ word processor.

The text was formatted for desktop publication using *Publish-It 4.0 for Windows*, a cranky but cheap DTP program.

The DTPed document was printed on an Okidata OL400e 300 dpi laser printer.

It's not easy coming up with these stupid little quotes, you know. ☺

—>Pete

