



THE LOG THAT FITS

#16

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TONIGHT'S EPISODE: WHEN GIANTS SNEEZE, DUCK & COVER!

October 1995



Oddly enough there have been no disasters since the last issue. My computer, car, and life are all okay. That leaves me with nothing to talk about...so on with the show! ☺



A Growing Addiction

I was never a Trekkie—still less a *Trekker* (though the distinction between the two is hardly clear to me). Don't get me wrong; I've always enjoyed the original *Star Trek*, since way back when I was watching *Trek* and *The Starlost* (a maligned show, in my book) at the age of six with my father. Still, I never got into the heavy fan activity of true believers. No cons, no costume hidden in the closet, no cast albums, hardly any books...

There's something about the rabid fan mentality that repulses me. It's a little pathetic; after all, what sort of person gets that involved with a *television program*, for goodness sake?

And that's why I'm disturbed to find myself becoming more and more of a fan of *Babylon 5*. I'm taping all the shows, read the newsgroups, subscribed to the mailing list, bought and enjoyed the books very much, and recently drove more than 200 miles in a car of dubious reliability to see the

final four episodes of the second season. What's happening to me?

For those who don't follow such things, I should explain that the final four episodes of season 2 of *Babylon 5* were not shown in the US at the actual end of the season; the executive pinheads (not the creators or producers) decided to delay the episodes until the beginning of the third season for some unknown reason. Thus viewers in the UK were able to see the end of the second season months before US fans.

Some people in the UK taped the shows, however (it has a large and rabid following over there), and copies of these tapes soon made it over to the US—where they were soon copied. **Chris Aylott** managed to get one of those tapes, and several weeks ago had a showing of all four episodes at The Space-Crime Continuum. Thirty or forty people showed up, and all were very up on the show.

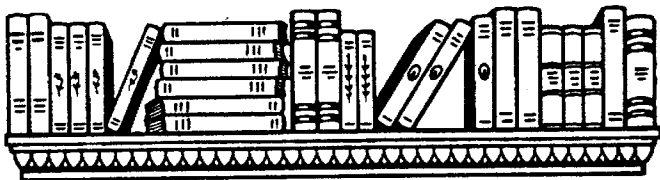


The trip was worth it, because the shows were great. The first episode involved major character development and some serious revelations; the second was, well, outstanding. As fine a piece of visual science fiction as I've seen. Very powerful. By the time this comes out it will have already been aired.

The third episode was a bit lame. Okay, possibly *very* lame; it was basically filler. Lois was even more critical of it than I was, particularly of the quality of the acting. I was barely able to suppress her cries of outrage. ☺

The final episode of the second season wasn't quite as effective as the second of the four shows—but it was definitely a high-point ending for the season, without being one of those lame cliff-hangers that seem to be *de rigueur* these days.

I won't spoil the shows by giving details, but I will say this: at this point *Babylon 5* is the number one TV show on the air in my book. The improvement since the original pilot is immeasurable. I have a strong suspicion that I'll be writing more about the show for **The Babylon Project** APA...



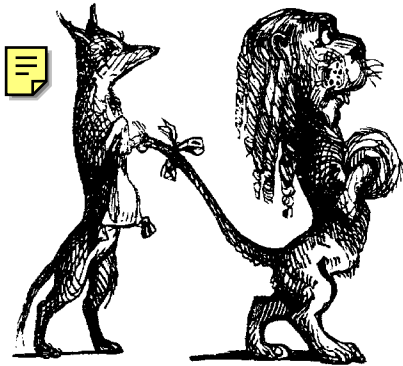
From the Closed Shelves

I love old bookstores. Logically enough, I also love old books. Of the thousands of books in my personal library, I'm sure 90% or more were purchased used.

That's not because I don't want to support authors (nor because I'm cheap, if you were wondering). The truth is, the books I like best aren't being *printed* any more. Most modern science fiction and fantasy strikes me as somehow flat and glib. There's a certain lightness to them, a strange similarity...

Don't get me wrong. There *are* a few modern writers I enjoy. I've liked everything **David Brin** ever wrote except for *The Postman*. I like the works of **Lawrence Watt-Evans** very much, at least up until

his latest three books. **Stephen Brust** has authored a few duds, but I'd rank most of his books at the top of the field any day.



But that's about it. Perhaps science fiction and fantasy

has become more sophisticated, more literary in the last twenty years; if so, I think the field in general is poorer for it. Good heavens, what a long introduction—without getting to the point, yet!

"From the Closed Shelves" was a feature in my old "Rack & Rune" zine from **The Wild Hunt**. In it, I wrote about certain rare old books and other media that I considered to be exceptionally good. Some of that material had been the object of years of search for me; some I *still* haven't found.

Be that as it may, I'm bringing the feature back and expanding it. In addition to writing about rare and wonderful books (and tapes and movies), I'll review any book that is out of print—stuff you might find in a used bookstore. After all, I've often found myself staring at thousands of old books and wondering which of them were good, and which were garbage. My personal collection, plus the fact that Boston has an exceptional selection of used bookstores, ensures that I'll have enough material to review for as long as I want.

Assignment In Eternity by Robert A.

Heinlein

Fiction; first published 1953

Okay, I'll admit it: Heinlein is hardly an obscure writer. And though *Assignment In Eternity* is not one of his best-known works, it *is* probably still in print. But I'd bet that most bookstores don't stock it. And that's a pity, because in many ways I think that AIE is Heinlein's finest book.

It's made up of three novelettes: "Gulf", "Elsewhen", and "Lost Legacy". There's also a short

story called “Jerry Was A Man”. All were written in the 1940’s, in what I’d call Heinlein’s “late early” period: after his rawest beginnings (though he was never very raw) and before the descent into self-indulgence, preachiness, and sleaze that first became obvious in *Stranger In A Strange Land*.

They’re all outstanding examples of storytelling. Although “Gulf” was later used as part of the history of the novel *Friday*, at the time all four stories were independent of the “Future History” series, standing alone. Not that there was anything wrong with that series (quite the contrary), but it may be that the lack of connection to the rest of his literary world allowed Heinlein a certain extra freedom of imagination. Since they also feature Heinlein’s writing style at its best, the result is simply classic.

Perhaps it’s silly to worry about giving away the plots. Most IR readers must have read *Assignment In Eternity* by now. Still, on the chance that a few haven’t (a safe bet, since I know several who fall into that category), I won’t spoil things by giving details. The one unavoidable spoiler is clearly marked. Briefly, then:

“Gulf” begins as a near-future spy story, and takes a very odd twist; its one serious drawback is a very unpleasant (though not terribly graphic) torture scene that upset me quite a bit when I read the book as a child (and come to think of it, I *still* don’t read that paragraph...make of that what you will).

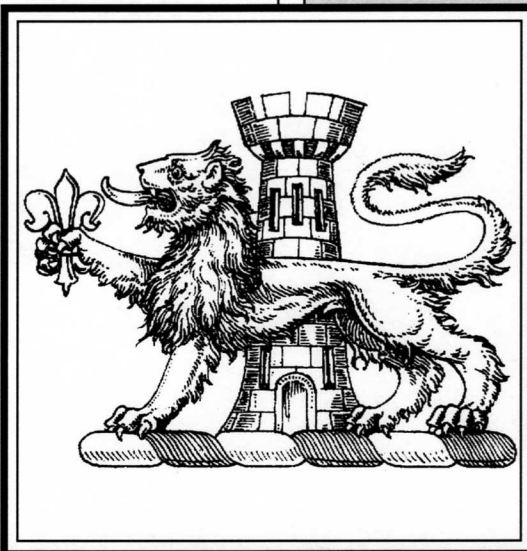
“Elsewhen” is the “nicest” story of the four; there’s really almost no tension at all. At no point is there any serious chance that the protagonists are in immediate danger. The most dangerous encounter is described after-the-fact, removing any fear of tragedy. Despite that low-keyed quality it’s an extremely involving story, developing the now-hackneyed theory of alternate universes beautifully. And I’ve always

found the end strangely moving, though I’m not sure why.

“Lost Legacy” is the longest piece in the book; had it been released today, it would probably have been “illustrated” and released as a novel by itself, *a la* Larry Niven’s *The Patchwork Girl*. As with all the stories in the book the core of “Lost Legacy” contains real philosophical issues and extremely intriguing theories. Unlike Heinlein’s later works, though, the result is not a sermon (I’m tempted to theorize that the reason that Heinlein was able to write philosophi-

SPOILER: There is one point that perplexes me. The adepts of Shasta Mountain refrained from acting directly against the powers of evil for thousands of years; when urged to teach the people directly by teleporting children to their fastness directly, they answered that doing so would mean adopting the enemy’s tactics, with the usual “end-justifies-the-means” result. That’s fine; I have no argument with the idea that evil acts corrupt.

At another point it was explained that the adepts couldn’t run a candidate for national office because the other side was free to fix the ballots and cheat in any way they liked, while the Shasta adepts had to play fair or betray their principles. Fine!



That being the case, though, I couldn’t help but be confused when the Shasta adepts proceeded to seek out and kill the ringleaders of the forces of darkness. There’s a gap in the logic that is well-disguised, but real; what happened to their high moral standards?

I might suspect that this discontinuity was itself a reflection of a discontinuity in Heinlein’s own mind. This suspicion is borne out by a revelation by Isaac Asimov in his final autobiography, *I, Asimov* (which I heartily recommend, BTW). In the book, Asimov notes

first wife, Leslyn. But when he divorced her and married Virginia Heinlein, a fervent conservative, his political compass swung to the same point. Asimov doesn't quite make a direct connection between the two events—in fact, he denies it—but he does note that he decided that he would never marry anyone whose beliefs differed greatly from his own.

cally without resorting to authorial fiat and preaching was that he was fairly young and less full of himself at the time).



“Jerry Was A Man” is quite short, and perhaps the least distinguished of the four stories in the book. It's also the most typical for Heinlein, and so of course is well-written and entertaining.

A final, minor point: at least one old paperback edition of Assignment In Eternity has an unusual cover featuring a somewhat impressionistic painting of a naked woman pointing upward. As a youngster I found this quite disturbing, and went so far as to fashion a brown paper cover for the book. The modern cover is, well, *weird* would be a good word for it. Now, I must admit, I find that I prefer the older cover. ☺

Anthology, by The Vapors

Music/CD

One-Way Records 1995

Okay, I admit it: I have weird musical tastes. Even I am embarrassed to admit some of the stuff I like. Nonetheless, I've been lucky to run across some really good artists in my time.

Several of my favorite groups share an unusual similarity: they made exactly two albums, and then were dropped by their labels and disappeared. I don't know why that happens, but the Cavedogs, Annabel Lamb (not the singer from Bow Wow Wow), and the Vapors all suffered that fate. And for years I've been looking for some of their albums on CD.

I'm still looking for Annabel Lamb (the Cavedogs were a modern band, with all their albums originally on CD), but recently my 14-year search for Vapors material finally bore fruit. A small record company has just released a CD anthology of their two albums, called (originally enough) Anthology.

Actually, you've almost certainly heard at least one song by the Vapors. “Turning Japanese” was their one big hit from the first album, and it's still played on the radio (and was even turned into an easy-listening parody version on SCTV).

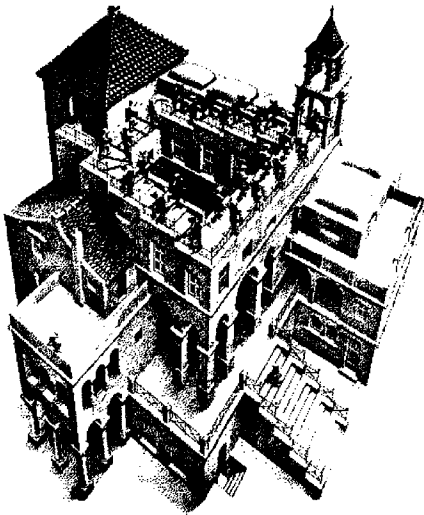
The song isn't really typical of their work, but they did include Japanese themes in at least one or two other songs—and they never recorded a bad song. It's hard to describe their style—perhaps I could call it a sort of Rock/New Wave/Punk synthesis—but as songwriters and performers, they have a definite, unique sound. For example, the band never used synthesizers or keyboards of any kind. Just guitars and drums.

Their style definitely developed between their first and second albums. The first, New Clear Days, featured infectious riffs and short, clear, catchy songs (though all their music had a quality of humor and intelligence that makes their songs interesting to listen to again and again). The second album was called Magnets, and while the music was just as good it was more complex and the lyrics were more thoughtful.

Anthology includes most of the first album (including “Turning Japanese”), plus several of the best songs from the second; I miss a number of the songs that were cut, but it's nice to get even this much (nearly an hour of music) at CD quality.

The disk may be a bit hard to find. I had a hell of a time getting a copy; after looking through four or five large stores, I found a single copy hidden away out of sight. Perhaps a clerk had been saving it for himself. In the past when I asked for the Vapors at record stores the clerks would often comment on what a great band they were, and wonder why they weren't available any more.

What else can I say? It's a great album. If you're at all interested in that sort of music, it's worth any amount of searching. And if you find that you *really*



enjoy their music, let me know and I'll make a tape of the songs that weren't included on the CD for you.

The Game

At the end of this issue of The Log That Flies is the SoloQuest that I whipped up for the Interregnum World Wide Web home page. On the Web each number is a separate illustrated page, linked to the appropriate choices.

It's simplistic, of course; after all, it was created in about a day. However, there is no reason that it can't be expanded. In fact, it would be easy to insert additional links and subplots anywhere in the sequence—and there's no reason that different scenes can't be stored anywhere on the Web. One choice could lead to one Web site, another to a site across the country, or the world. And back again. In other words, if anyone *would* like to build an addition to the game, please do!

By the way, for those who were wondering just how crazy I am: in the graphic of the spell book, the words in the book are actually Tengwar Quenya runes spelling out the names of the spells, along with comic "notes to myself" by the drunken mage. After reduction and resampling there's no way that anyone can possibly read them, but nonetheless they're there. ☺

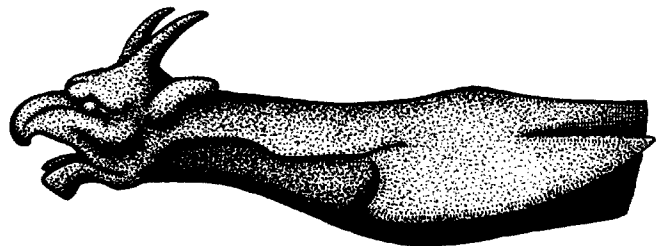
The Topic Is Tools

Tools? That's an easy one; I'm using my most valuable all-around tool right now. It hardly takes any imagination to realize that the personal computer is an invaluable resource for all sorts of projects.

Actually, though, the computer hasn't been that useful in roleplaying. I've used it to make advertisements, a printed prop now and again (rarely), and I've written out scenario ideas and character sheets...but when it comes to playing or running games, the computer stays in another room and I rarely visit it. When I do, it's to take a look at a table that could easily be printed out.

Oh yeah—I almost forget. Believe it or not I use the computer quite a bit when putting Interregnum together. ☺

Anyway, when it comes to roleplaying I'd have to say that my most useful tool is my notebook: the one that I always carry around in my pocket to record any ideas that I might have. I *have* picked up ideas from some published sources—the lists of random items from various RuneQuest modules have always been particularly useful and interesting to me—but for the most part I can't use scenarios because A) the worlds I usually GM are my own, and are unusual enough that the assumptions of another game world won't fit them, and B) there's a good chance that some of my players will have already purchased and read the scenarios.



There's one real-world tool that I've found incredibly useful: an air compressor. If you have a car, that's almost a necessity. Yet I'm often surprised at how many people don't have one.

The compressor is a smallish device with a tube that clips onto your tire valve. A cord plugs into your

cigarette lighter. Flick a switch and it starts inflating the tire. An air-pressure meter lets you track the amount of inflation.

This can be a lifesaver when you have a flat. Most flat tires (at least most of mine) aren't absolutely bust-open propositions; if you manage to pump the tire up again it's possible to drive the car for at least half an hour, which should get you home if you're driving locally or to the next exit if you're on the highway. I've been able to avoid changing to the spare six or seven times that way.

What's more, compressors are cheap—about \$25 last time I checked. And with more and more gas stations installing coin-operated air pumps, a compressor might actually save you money in the long run...one drawback, though. They're pretty loud. I wouldn't use one late at night unless I was desperate (and I have been).



REVIEW: The Book of IOD

The Eater of Souls and other tales

Author: Henry Kuttner

Publisher: Chaosium, 1995

Price: 10.95

Format: 5.5" x 8.5" paperback, 204 pages

Perhaps it's me, but a number of my favorite authors have dropped into near-obscure; some are entirely out of print, forcing me to haunt used-book stores on the off chance of making a find. Lord Dunsany is one such author. Another is Fredric Brown. And still another is Henry Kuttner.

All of which is to say up front that I'm not an impartial reviewer in this case. I had no idea that Kuttner had been one of the Lovecraft circle (how did that fact escape me?). When I saw that Chaosium had published an entire book of lost Kuttner stories I probably cheered aloud.

The stories are more limited than the usual Kuttner fare. That's not surprising, since he wrote them when he was quite young in conscious imitation of H.P. Lovecraft. However Kuttner did not limit himself within that narrow field: he wrote stories in the pattern of several of Lovecraft's periods, including (to my delight) that of Lovecraft's Dunsanian period.

The stories differ in several ways from Lovecraft's own work. The writing style is fresher, clearer, with less "purple prose"; there's almost a pulp-magazine quality to the writing, which is comparatively brisk and straightforward. There is less atmosphere than in HPL's material, but the overall effect is very readable and certainly not unlike the original works. I found the book easier to get through than many of the Lovecraft originals. It's not Kuttner's finest work, but it's still very good stuff.

There is a lengthy introduction by the series editor, Robert M. Price, who also provided useful and informative intros for each story. It gave me a twinge—maybe a little more than a twinge—when he wrote that "...just about all of Henry Kuttner's exceedingly clever fiction is the property of literary nostalgia-lovers and antiquarians." I guess you can call me a literary nostalgia-lover! ☺

One minor detail: the cover of the book is a bit thin. It looks good enough (though I'm always a little suspicious of gold-foil printing—it's been too often used by the worst comic books). The design and art aren't bad. But the cover stock itself is unusually thin, almost flimsy. And the book is already displaying an odd wrinkling along the spine that makes me wonder how long it will stay together. The binding *feels* solid

enough—the pages aren't falling out, and there certainly seems to be enough glue along the spine—but I can't help but wonder how it will hold up over years of use.

Rating: For Kuttner fans I'd give this book an A—minus because of the cover, and because it's not top-notch Kuttner. Still a must-have, though. For Cthulhu fans, call it a B+, definitely worth picking up. And who knows? Perhaps you'll catch the Kuttner bug, and find yourself turning into a literary nostalgia-lover! ☺



REVIEW: Secret Societies

"Sourcebook of Occult Organizations for the Nephilim Gamemaster"

Author: Kenneth Hite

Publisher: Chaosium, 1995

Price: 16.95

Format: 8.5" x 11" perfect-bound paperback, 93 pages, b&w interior art

First, let me admit a key point: I haven't played Nephilim. Don't have a copy of the main game, either. The concept sounds interesting, but unless someone in the area runs a pickup game I'm not likely to get to play the system. It's so hard to find gamers these days!

Scott Shafer is Interregnum's Nephilim man, and so he'll be reviewing any Nephilim material in the future (he already has a copy of *Secret Societies*).

Secret societies can fit into all sorts of games. A good sourcebook on secret societies could be useful to almost any GM. Does *Secret Societies* fill that bill? Let's see.

The first section of the book is "Deep Background": the principles and belief systems which underlie the world of secret societies. Masonry, Gnosticism, and Rosicrucianism are examples of these.

It's a bit reminiscent of an academic study. There isn't an overwhelming wealth of detail but it is a good introduction to the topic, certainly as much as a gamemaster would need. It's a bit dry, but readable and informative.

Section 2, "The Nature of the Beast" describes the working methods and structures of secret societies in general. I'd already heard about some of this information, but have never seen the information assembled in a single source. The amount of detail is just about right, as far as I can tell; there is enough information to be useful and spark ideas for the GM without becoming boring and excessive.

"Just Under the Surface" contains write-ups of secret societies expanded from main rule book; the following section, "From the Shadows", contains write-ups of new groups. Both sections follow the same pattern. This includes the history and current status of the group, major leaders and enemy organizations, and full write-ups for two NPC members of the group, including pictures of the NPCs. In some cases there are maps of important areas, and there are also some interesting boxed sections on magic and unusual items. Some of the magic write-ups are a bit gruesome, but it's nice to see so much detail.

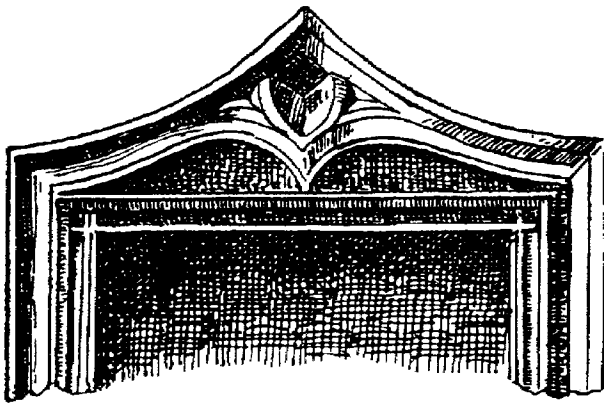
A few odd points crossed my mind while reading the book.

First, in a couple of places there is an odd typo effect: the letters look as if they've been monospaced and somehow printed over themselves. It's possible to figure out the meaning, and it doesn't seriously compromise the book, but it *is* odd...and perhaps mildly reassuring to know that I'm not the only one who has a problem with typos.

The conspiracies listed are pretty up-to-date—the fall of the USSR and even the craziness of Vladimir Zhirinovsky are included. I always pause, though, when I read claims that Communism is dead; how is it that everyone overlooks the largest country in the world?

Fundamentalists would go absolutely nuts over this book, I think. It's the kind of thing that would really dig into their paranoia and set off rockets. Though who knows? Perhaps they'd think that they'd found some sort of real guide to secret societies...if Pat Robertson could think that RPG characters are cases of demonic possession (it's true, I have the 700 club scene on videotape), than they could probably believe anything.

The index at the end is well done, which is nice.



To sum up: It's a good book. That's not particularly surprising. Overall, it is rather focused toward the Nephilim system and modern society; Secret Societies' usefulness as a reference work for non-modern campaigns would be low. But for a GM gaming in a modern-day setting the book is obviously an excellent source of information about secret societies. And I'm sure that it would be indispensable for a Nephilim GM.

I don't want to rate this one; I'm not really qualified. Instead I'll ask Scott Shafer to decide the grade in the next issue, if he hasn't published one already. But if you must twist my arm...okay, I'll say A- for a Nephilim GM, and B to A- for a modern-society GM depending on how much use they have for secret societies.

COMMENTS #14



I've often admired the compact layout that Gil Pili and others have used for their comments; it seems an ideal way to include detailed reactions to contributors' zines while not taking up too much space on what is, after all, essentially a self-referential topic (though if I should happen to develop a major thread of discussion in a comment, I will put it into an article of its own).

Scott Ruggels: Thanks very much for the cover! It's nice to have a backlog of non-medieval art, particularly of that quality.

John Kratman: Welcome to IR, John—and thanks for filling in as guest columnist. I hope we'll see more of your stuff in the future. * Re Vintage: well done indeed. The narrative style has a nicely punchy quality, with good dramatic emphasis. In a few places it becomes a little wordy—a Hemingway infusion wouldn't hurt—but I do like the fact that you balance long and short sentences, for the most part. I did have a bit of difficulty with the transition between the second and third pages, though. It took me more than a moment of thought to understand what had happened (perhaps I'm a bit slow...nah ☺). All in all it's a fine, well-written story.



Elizabeth McCoy: How many apologies do I owe thee? Ouch! I've discovered that there's a limit to the amount of shame an editor can feel in his career...I used it all up on you. ☺ Nonetheless, I *do* apologize...and I devoutly hope that I never forget another zine. * I like the selection of Plot Hooks. Amnesia would probably win my vote for the most useful and intriguing general plot-hook in existence. Perhaps that's because it deals with the basic question of identity, which give absolutely wonderful opportunities for dramatic roleplaying. Come to think of it, that's probably why soap operas love amnesia so. Say...do you think soap operas might be a good source of inspiration for plot hooks? I hope not.

Virgil Greene: Once again your crystal ball seems to have put you on the leading edge of current events, Virgil. My memory may be failing me, but if I recall the Unabomber hadn't hit the news in a big way until after you wrote your zine—am I wrong? * Re The Old Switcheroo: reversing the stereotypes of gaming is a natural step in game design, I think. And it's a fine way to surprise jaded players. But then the reverse stereotype becomes the norm, and everyone assumes the the blood-flecked vampire is actually the good guy...this can lead to a series of reversals of stereotype. Alternatively might it lead to three-dimensional characterization? * The list of near-classic SFTV was helpful and

interesting, as your lists always are. I might quibble on one point: in my book *Kolchack: The Night Stalker* was definitely a classic. * Sorry about the error in the next-to-last column; I was rushed while I was DTPing your zine.

Jenny & Antara Glover: I hope that I indicated the alternating authorship correctly; at a few points I wasn't sure who was speaking, and so had to guess. "Like mother, like daughter" applies to writing styles too, I guess. ☺ * Re "dork": most vulgarisms seem to acquire multiple meanings, Tara, so I'd say that you and your mother were both right. And I wouldn't take the word's use on TV too seriously; when the definition is vague, modern censors seem more likely to let a word through. I'll admit that I can never read about the city of Dorking without smirking like a kid, though. ☺ * A random thought: do you get "Beavis & Butthead" over there? I've heard that The Simpsons is popular, likewise Babylon 5; but I don't know if MTV is at all available in the UK. If not, I suppose it will be soon. * If you ever get to the US, Tara, you must go to the White Mountains in New Hampshire. They have some neat wolf stuff up there (as well as some spectacular views, of course). * You're lucky that Edinburgh is a 24-hour town; I envy you. Boston shuts down at around 1 AM, and if you don't have a car you're up a creek.

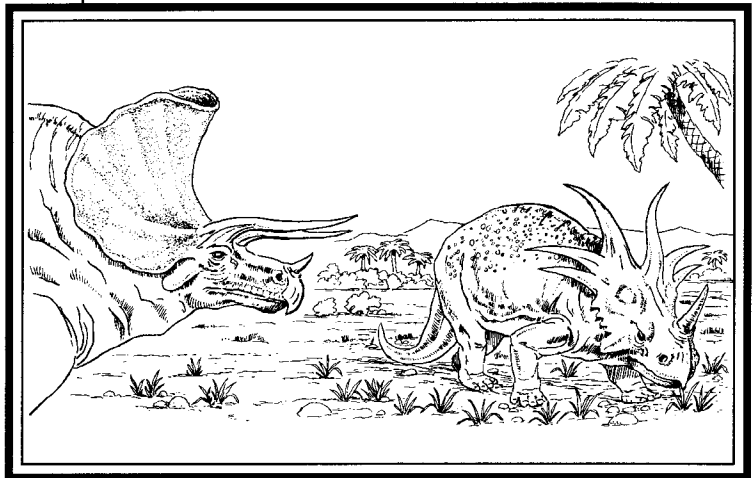
Gil Pili: Lovely NPCs, Gil! They're nicely "hooky" (is that a word?), and useful. * Re operating systems: I have come to really hate Microsoft. Maybe it's just because they're so bleeping big, but I think it might have something to do with their incredible arrogance. I won't be buying Windows 95. I won't switch to OS/2 Warp either, though I do wish them well (who would have thought that the day would come when I'd support IBM?). Changing operating systems is just too much of a pain! * Thanks for the movie reviews, though I didn't see any of them. Maybe if Scott gets them out on video, and I have nothing better to do... * In the case of the Sacrifice plot hook, the players did indeed go for it. I must admit that I was one of the players, and as I recall I definitely made one of the sacrifices (but not of my life, though I regretted that after the fact). I think we agreed to it all because A) we were really involved in the campaign, and giving up would have meant the end of the world, and B) it built up gradually—the first sacrifice was comparatively trivial, but by the time the guardians started demanding major stuff we'd already lost too much to quit. It was something like a gambling addiction, perhaps.

Dale Meier: Thanks for picking up on my award suggestion, Dale. It's nice that *someone* responded to the idea...(sniff). ☺ * Nice reviews. I'll have to write to

Apocrypha and see if they'd like to list the IR home page in their RPG links section. My condolences on the Star Wars comics, but comics based on films/TV have never been good in my experience. Even the Babylon 5 comics were iffy. * "Tales From the Angel's Brigade" is coming along nicely. I sometimes have difficulty following the plots in cyberpunk stories (do you think that's a fair description of the story setting?), but that's not a problem in this case. * Unfortunately I'm not surprised to hear that Marvel is being nasty again. They *are* the TSR of the comic world, after all! ☺ Though I should watch what I say, as an old friend of mine was working at Marvel as of seven years ago (haven't heard from him since).

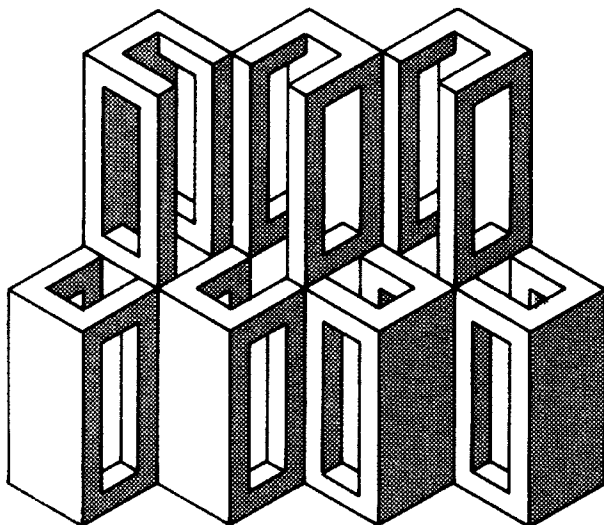
Andrew R. Howes: Welcome back! I hope there'll be less of a gap until your next issue. * A full-blown adventure! Thanks a lot. There's nothing I like to publish more. And maps, too...very nice. I have only one question: who was the fiend who killed Mr. Rodgers? ☺ * I liked the views of the tower from various angles; I've never seen that done before. Did you come up with that idea, or is that commonly done in modules these days?

Joseph Teller & Kiralee McCauley: I'd be remiss if I didn't thank you for putting up an interim IR page. It was really thoughtful of you. * Re "Hard Lessons": I certainly know what it's like to have a campaign fall apart because the players insist in going their own way. Come to think of it, as a player I've often been guilty of the same behavior.



Many gamers seem to be loners by nature; I know that it's a stereotype, but it's hard to deny that many roleplayers are somewhat lacking in social ability. * I have to admit, though, that the piece was a very good horror story, and was actually rather funny...I guess if it isn't happening to me I can see the humor of it all. ☺ * Re your Rosencrantz NPC, I found him very interesting. But I did keep wondering when you'd include his associate, Mr. Guildenstern. ☺ * Kiralee: your article on religion and

character made some excellent points. I was reminded of a game I was in; when I wanted to play a religious character, the GM told me to make up my own religion. He seemed to be surprised when I asked for some—any—information about the religious history of the world, so that my PCs' religion would fit in...



Michael A. Lavoie: I LOled at the dialogue between the NPC and the PC who interpreted his words as being obvious manipulations by the GM...I've been there. A cartoon in issue #2 of the "Knights of the Dinner Table" comic book detailed the same syndrome. Funny stuff. * Nice picture of your NPC for Call of Cthulhu. Is he related to Thurston Howell the 3rd? ☺ * I liked the reviews; particularly the review of TSR's "Player's Option". There's something deeply soul-satisfying about seeing a TSR product get an "F" rating. You won't see that in Dragon magazine! ☺ * The beginning to your Tuos campaign was quite interesting. Did I already say that I thought the University was an excellent party genesis story? * I don't recall if you mentioned if your players were, in fact, college students. * I read "King Tuoni's Legacy" with interest; although the story certainly ends on a strong note, it seems that there must be more to tell. Do you have any plans? * Re Star Trek: Voyager: I wonder if your opinion of the show has changed any more. I can't see it these days without screaming a bit at the screen. Janeway is so lame...and the plots are pure soap-opera with a New Age flavoring. I wouldn't call it science fiction at all.

Scott Shafer: The front page of this issue confused me a little—I wondered if a page had been lost along the way. * Although I sent several copies of IR to the prisoners who asked for samples, none of them has written back yet. * Some of your questions about NPCs touch me to the quick, but I dare say no more at this time. ☺ * Why "The Log That Flies"? To tell you the truth, I'm not entirely sure. My

zine for TWH was "Rack & Rune", which I thought a rather clever pun. But when I started IR it seemed that I should have a totally new zine title. I'd have liked it to be clever and meaningful, but since I couldn't think of a title like that I just made up a nonsensical phrase. Though I did some back-logic to theorize that paper is made of trees, and IR is sent via airmail... * I'm sorry to hear that the game haiku were less than challenging; to tell you the truth, almost nobody seems to like them. Oh well! I guess not everything can be a success. ☺ * The "turtle" haiku was about Gamera, the giant flying turtle from Japanese monster movies. He spins, and flame comes out of the holes in his shell. You've never heard of him? * About the Factsheet 5 controversy; it's a long story, one which took a long time to die a natural death. Still, far be it from me to stir it up again! ☺ I sent several copies of IR to Factsheet 5, a large magazine that reviews zines/small press. From the first review they printed it was completely obvious that they hadn't read IR at all. Still worse, it was a fairly poor review. I wrote to them about it, they admitted their fault and promised to do better in the next issue...and they didn't review us at all. I remarked (as diplomatically as I could) on the subject when someone else brought up a similar incident in the zines newsgroup, and was bitterly attacked by the F5 people. They then printed a review calling me an asshole. Pretty mature, eh? Fortunately few roleplayers read F5. I eventually let the whole thing drop.

Dave Dickie: Welcome to IR! It's always nice to see TWH contributors come on board. * Gaming does seem to be responsible for a lot of college students dropping out of school. Or do you think that gaming attracts the sort of students who were going to fail anyway? ☺ * Did I get that right—you did Shakespearean acting? Did you ever do Romeo & Juliet? * Re retroengineering player's twisted scenarios into your campaign: I'll admit that I've done the same thing. Amazing how they come up with such apt explanations, isn't it? From the other side of the screen, I recall one case in which the GM was so obviously making use of the ideas we came up with during player discussion that we started delaying our conversations on tactics until after he'd left the room. If that game had gone on much longer, we'd have probably started planting red herring details in staged conversations for him...☺ * Kethem is an extremely interesting setting. I liked the e-maps; they're a bit like some maps I did for my PBEM, but much more sophisticated. How did you create them? * "IMMEDIATE RESPONSE REQUIRED"...did that work? My biggest problem with the RQ PBEM was getting players to respond at all.

George Phillis: "The Warrior Unseen" is speeding along nicely, George. I'm really getting involved in it; the flow of narrative is extremely smooth, and I think I've picked up a decent understanding of the world. Have you done any

gaming in that setting? * Your dialog is particularly deft and natural-sounding; do you actually sound it out for yourself while writing it, or is it just a natural gift? * I like the bits of poetry in this section. * I was amused at your reworking of Salvor Hardin's quote on violence. Can it be that Elaine and Susan are living on a planet during the Interregnum after the fall of the Galactic Empire? ☺

David Dunham: Another Great Pendragon Pass writeup, David. Keep them coming! * Ahh, Soothing Touch, giving the pains of childbirth to the father of the child. What a bizarre spell. I've heard it said that most men lack the stamina to cope with a long, painful labor. That gives me an idea: a murder plot in which the murderer tricks a man with a weak heart into engendering a child, and then secretly casting Soothing Touch. It's probably not possible according to the rules, but it would be a very unique way to kill someone... * About the multi-generational nature of Pendragon Pass: How has that altered the depth and involvement of your PCs' roleplaying, if at all? Since they play each character for a shorter time than in most RPGs (I assume), I have to wonder if they allow themselves to get as emotionally close to them. * I hope that your daughter Kati is being careful about meeting people on the Net; as someone I know discovered recently, there are a lot of slimy guys out there who misrepresent themselves. * Since you like "Knights of the Dinner Table", you might be interested to know that the KODT comic book is mostly new material (if you didn't know that already).

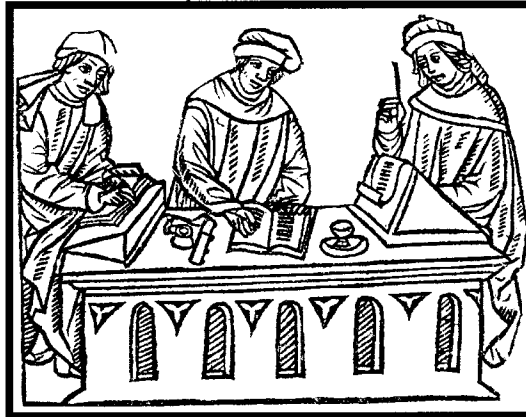


Dale Meier: With the new Star Wars movie coming out soon (when?) I suppose that there may be renewed interest in the Star Wars RPG. I was stunned to see an advertisement on TV for Star Wars novels recently. I wouldn't mind playing a game in the Star Wars universe, but once again must admit that it's unlikely that I'll get a chance. * The NPCs were neat. * I'm glad that you liked the cover of IR #13; that was the first fully digital cover. For all the

previous ones I had to cut-&-paste the image. * I don't actually look like the picture in the editorial page; I'm pretty much bald now, and recently lost about 35 pounds. A

pack of young women at my firm recently told me that I look better *now*, which I can tell you was something I didn't mind hearing. Particularly since that picture is about eight years old. ☺

* While reading your comments on CCGs I had a crazy idea: a stock market in collectible cards. Imagine the trading that might go on in the pit... scary. ☺



COMMENTS #15

A short issue, but I have to say that this was one of the most entertaining IRs yet—the topic seemed to bring out the, um, interesting side in everyone. ☺

Rich Staats: Great stuff, Rich! I laughed myself silly over the horror story. So did a lot of other people I know. It was one of the best examples of GM favoritism gone amok that I've ever heard. "The Convention" was absolutely hysterical!

Scott Shafer: I'm sticking with Windows for Workgroups 3.11 too. The benefits of changing to *any* new OS simply don't outweigh the grief. For one thing, Windows 95 won't support my favorite word processor, PC-Write 2.5—a program that came out around 1985. * I've heard of Aptiva, and was shocked to hear that they're sold through Radio Shack. I've never been impressed with that chain; all the salesmen seem to reek of cheap aftershave and act like rejects from a used-car lot. * Re Nephilim: Although I'm not familiar with the system (as I mentioned above), what I derived about the game from Secret Societies seemed somewhat repugnant, now that I think about it. The view of humanity as inferior beings compared to the Nephilim PCs makes me wonder if the game isn't basically a re-take of Call of Cthulhu in which the players are the monsters. Maybe I'm wrong. I'll let you make the call on that one, since you know far more about the system than I do. * I know what it's like to have a GM and players decide to kill your character for kicks. I remember quite well when two giggling girls joined a game of Stormbringer I was in; it soon became obvious that they were simply there to screw things up and annoy people. Within a couple of weeks they killed off most of the party for no reason, and it was clear

that the GM was helping them. I ended up being poisoned, though I'd specified that I was only eating food from the common bowl after I watched them eat from it, and from the same place in the bowl. When the GM informed me that I was dying from poison, I reminded him of my precautions. In response, he shrugged while the girls giggled madly. * I seem to attract trouble with machines, but only for ones that actually cost me money; my friends don't share my curse. Not that I've seen, anyway. ☺

Mike Lavoie: #5 already? Time flies. * Re Chris, the awful player/GM: The way that Bob ended that campaign reminds me of the way that some friends of mine ended a terrible campaign: one started chanting "Demogorgon, Demogorgon, Demogorgon" while the GM rolled every time for the 5% chance that he'd show up. The other player started chanting "Orcus, Orcus, Orcus". "Orcus!" "Demogorgon!" "Orcus!" "Demogorgon!" Eventually they both showed up and destroyed the world. The two players were never able to schedule time to make up new characters after that... * My goodness, that just brought back an old memory. When I was just starting out in AD&D™, I remember discovering what I thought was a great secret: that there was a full 25% chance that Hastur the Unspeakable would manifest if you spoke his name. For a long time thereafter I made it a point to have my characters shout "Hastur, Hastur, Hastur!" when they were about to die, on the theory that if they had to go they'd rather take out everyone else in the immediate area, too. Unfortunately it never worked. ☺ * RAE'd the reviews and "The Gathering Storm". Good, solid stuff.

Virgil Greene: I hope that you're right about the US Presidential election; though Clinton isn't my ideal candidate, he's done a hell of a lot more good than anyone else out there. My dream candidate would be Bruce Babbitt (or maybe myself), but Bill Clinton is head and shoulders above any of the other folk out there. And he was the first President to make solid progress on the deficit. However, I'm not so sure that he'll be re-elected; he faces incredible obstacles. For one thing, the media seems to be totally against him. Even on supposedly liberal PBS and NPR (which are thinly disguised conservative venues in my book), I notice that they always refer to him as "Clinton" in a slightly disdainful tone of voice. Damn few people ever spoke that way about *President* Bush. * It's the little amount of reading that I've done in semantics that has sensitized me to those subtle media biases. I wonder if the field is still considered credible? Robert Heinlein placed great stock in semantics, but I haven't heard much about it since. * I should get off the topic of politics, but I will say this: although Clinton (okay, *President* Clinton) has a hard row to hoe, at this point the one thing that could help him is the incredible unappealing personalities of all the Republican candidates. It's hard to imagine that the

American people could ever elect someone as physically ugly and grating as Phil Gramm, for example. * Re "Bait & Switch": you're entitled to your opinion, of course, but I don't agree that the work of character design for the troll game was wasted. Sure, the PCs lost access to their friends, family, and most of their other assets—but knowing that they existed should have had a large effect on their outlooks. It's like *The Fugitive*, or *Nowhere Man*; their outlawry means more because you know that they've lost their wives and lives. And those lost details were things that the scriptwriters could hang plot points on through the show. Of course, the troll game ended before any of that could happen, but I'm sure that it would have been dramatic and exciting if the game had lasted. It may simply have been that the players didn't have the stomach to face a tough, uphill situation. If Frodo had taken that attitude, Sauron would be the ruler of Middle-Earth. * I figure that RPGs will be dead by 2020 because lots of us will be. ☺

George Phillis: It still sounds as if you need a literary agent. I once knew a fascinating older woman (I think she was in her eighties, but wonderfully tough—she was a SCAan) who was a frequently-published SF author. She told me that an agent was really a necessity in the literary field, and that the only way to get an agent was to have a story published in a magazine. *Catch-22*? Maybe. * Perhaps I shouldn't urge you to get an agent after all; the first thing she'd do would probably be to stop you from publishing in IR and A&E. ☺ * Another exciting installment of *The Warrior Unseen*; see my previous comment to you for specifics (why repeat myself? ☺). The death of the Yeti was rather sad and touching. The ending thisish was something of a cliffhanger, I must say...





Gil Pili: So far you're the only IR contributor who has turned his zine into a Web page, Gil; I suspect that you'll be the only one for a while. I'm not sure what percentage of contributors have Web access, but I suspect that it's not more than 60%. * I'd forgotten about your "settings" article, but it must have stuck in my mind; at least, it seems a likely source of inspiration for the next issue's topic. * I've heard that Windows 95 has a couple of fairly major bugs. Scott (Ferrier) said that he saw a news story on the Net connection bug on CNN, but though I watched it for hours they never repeated the story. And the newspapers



had nothing about it, either; that seemed odd, given the amount of puffery they devoted to the debut of the product. It's hard to believe that the news is deliberately being censored in this day and age, but perhaps market forces accomplish the same effect. Microsoft wields a lot of semolians...perhaps the news corporations are simply filled with respect for Bill Gates' bank balance. * Thanks for the movie reviews, though I must admit that I didn't see any of them. * If you liked the print version of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, come over some time and I'll dig up the original SCTV sketch. It's hysterical. * What, no fiction?

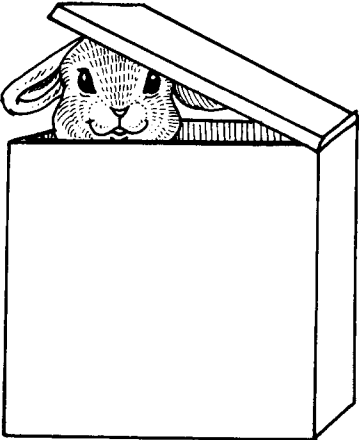
Dave Dickie: Whoa, a Vice President! Congratulations. * I'm afraid I'm too set in my ways to change over to a Mac now. It's been ten years after all. And a lot of people in the industry are saying that Apple's failure to expand their market share beyond 10% is the pretty much the kiss of death for the Mac. It may take twenty years, but most computer advice people that I've spoken to or read (even Mac supporters) say that the writing is on the wall...unfortunate, if true. Still, things could be worse. Originally I wanted an Amiga. ☺ * Kethem continues to be neat. Are some of the sections written by your players? If that's the case, they have a remarkably uniform writing style. * I'm impressed that you've managed to keep up with your PBEM and your zine, what with your kids and your job.

Scott Shafer: Ah, late night zineifying. That's when I do most of my work. * Congratulations on your DSS and Playstation acquisitions; though I don't play video games very often, I'm deeply interested in any alternative to cable. I don't remember if I wrote about it in IR but a couple of years ago I had a huge battle with our local cable company, Time Warner. It's a long story...suffice it to say that they really went to town on their monopoly. Unfortunately I seem to recall that DSS and PrimeStar are both owned by the large cable companies. Also, isn't that little disk a near-certainty to be ripped off? * I just rediscovered Wal-Mart while on vacation with my parents up in Maine. I shopped up a storm. What fun! I didn't realize that they carried a lot of game magazines, though; I must have missed that section. * Re editors and gorillas: Ahem. ☺ * Thanks for the info on video game systems; that's an area that isn't often covered here, and it should be. * You bought your three year old a TV/VCR?? Yeep! I broke my family's only TV when I was just four or five, and I credit the TV-less year that followed with turning me into a full-fledged bookworm. ☺ * Just out of curiosity, what color are Zoë's eyes? I'm always interested in the eye color of redheads; probably because my own coloring is fairly unusual (I have red hair, pale skin, and very dark eyes).



FLASH!

(Adapted from the Impressionist painting "Sam & Max Get Collected")



WANTED:

DEAD OR ALIVE

Max, the Psychotic Bunny. Considered armed (somewhere) and ridiculously dangerous. Likes to hurt people and break stuff.

Fans of Sam & Max, Freelance Police will be overjoyed to hear that a giant new compilation of *all* S&M comics has just been published. It includes 17 pages of new color strips, full-page color cover plates from past issues, and two neat fold-out game thingies! They're selling out as soon as they reach the comic stores, so good luck finding them...here, this might help. The ISBN is 1-56924-814-1, the publisher is Marlowe & Company, the cost is \$12.95, the publisher's net address is Ldeneault@aol.com and the author is, of course, Steve Purcell. Run out and buy lots and lots of copies! Who needs a retirement fund, anyway? ☺

Yeep! Another startling development: according to the inside front page cloth editions and signed copies

are available! I'm ordering mine today. And I'm very *pleased* about it.

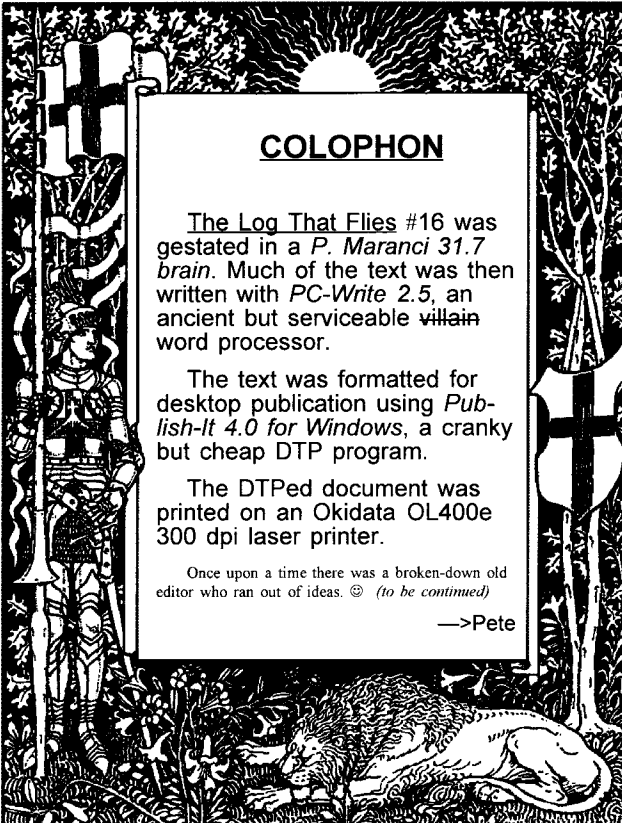
Yet another S&M newsflash (again?): the Sam & Max, Freelance Police CD-ROM is now on sale for...I think it was about \$13. The package includes the hint book that's virtually necessary to win the game, which used to come separately and cost \$12.95 by itself. It's a great game (I think Scott reviewed it in a past issue), so even non-S&M people might want to pick up a copy. And they probably make great gifts. Non-computing friends could use the disk as a coaster or frisbee or something.

Nextish



More reviews, more "From the Closed Shelves" (I *like* doing that!), doubtless other things...time will tell.

—>Pete



COLOPHON

The Log That Flies #16 was gestated in a *P. Maranci 31.7 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 *Pub-lish-It 4.0 for Windows*, a cranky but cheap DTP program.

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

Once upon a time there was a broken-down old editor who ran out of ideas. ☺ (*to be continued*)

—>Pete