

THE LOG THAT FEELS

#18

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81 Washington St., #2
Malden, MA 02148
home: (617) 397-7958
InterNet: pmaranci@tiac.net

TONIGHT'S EPISODE: Ch-Ch-Ch-

CHANGES

...are coming fast and furious these days. As I mentioned in the editorial, I'm leaving my job. Interregnum is going back to the original \$2 per page/issue rate. I've joined a health club and am working out regularly—something I should have done long ago. And a bunch of local Interregnum contributors have started a new round-robin RuneQuest roleplaying campaign, which has provided me my first chance to *play* in a game for a long time.

I regret the rate change for IR, but the rest of the changes seem good to me. In fact, it was fear of change that kept me in a dead-end job for eight years...and it was publishing IR that gave me the confidence and skills to be able to cut myself free and look for something better.

Three Micro-Reviews

Gold by Isaac Asimov (paperback)

Isaac Asimov was the first science fiction writer I ever read, and I always loved his work. Gold is a collection of his last science fiction, packaged along with some editorials from Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine into one large book. I'm sorry to say, though, that the fiction shows that age took a cruel toll on

Asimov's abilities. It's certainly not his best work.

It's strange; I can't make myself put the next sentence in my mind down on the page, so I'll skip it. I don't know if I should recommend that Asimov fans pick this one up or not; it's a last chance to buy something from the Good Doctor, but it isn't a good way to remember him. It's a bit like seeing someone who was strong and healthy their whole life on their deathbed, shriveled and confused.

The editorials and articles on science fiction are better than the fiction, though still somewhat simplistic. Perhaps the best way to remember Asimov is to search out the comparatively rare paperback of his final autobiography, L. Asimov.



The Science Fiction Encyclopedia

This is a new edition of the 1977 work. At \$29.50 it is large and extremely useful; I recall that Asimov mentioned the previous edition in Gold as an invaluable resource.

TSFE is a necessity for any literate science fiction fan. There have, however, been a few changes since the 1977 edition. For one thing, there is no internal art; a real pity, as the art made the old edition much more lively and interesting to read. There are also *many* more Central European authors listed. I don't want to seem ethnocentric, but it gets a little aggravating to see page after page of writers with names like *Cuyjkygjk*, *Emisdjhu J.* each of whom published a single sf novel in 1947...particularly when there are major omissions.

Most notable among these omissions are Quark, the comic science-fiction TV show that starred Richard Benjamin; Shadow On the Land, an outstanding made-for-TV sf movie; the Star Trek shows after Next Generation; and Babylon 5.

The volume *was* prepared some time ago, and the lag between then and the publishing date might arguably be an excuse for the omission of those recent shows. But a large addendum at the end of the book includes such recent events as the death of Roger Zelazny. How could they note that, and considerably more trivial events, and yet fail to mention the new Trek incarnations and the most effective science fiction show in existence?

I also wasn't happy at the near-total elimination of fantasy from the work. I don't believe the the two genres are indistinguishable from each other (unlike most Hollywood people, who don't seem to have learned that there is a difference between advanced technology and magic), but in this case the line seems too strongly drawn. If they're going to

make that sort of division they should produce a second volume.



The Mountains of Majipoor **by Robert Silverberg (paperback)**

I'm a big fan of Silverberg's Majipoor books, which is odd since I don't like any of his other works. When I saw that his new book was set in Majipoor I grabbed it immediately, and read it that night.

The good news: it isn't bad. I've found Silverberg's style to be much more readable when he writes about Majipoor, and this book is no exception. The races and social structures from the first three books are still present, though the book itself is set hundreds of years after the end of Valentine Pontifex. It was probably intelligent of Silverberg to leave the characters and time of the first trilogy and start with a slightly altered setting.

The bad news? Much of the action of the book has little to do with the sections of Majipoor described in the previous books. What's more, the main setting is so isolated, so stark as to be uninteresting. This boring, lifeless quality is enhanced because Majipoor as described in the first three books was so imaginative and vivid. It's a bit like going from the dazzling color of the Arabian Nights to a novelette by Tolstoy—without Tolstoy's genius.

A final point: the hero is a bit stupid, and some of the conflict seems unnecessary. It's the old "there-wouldn't-be-a-problem-if-the-hero-would-do-the-obvious" ploy; not a fatal flaw, but I found myself wishing that I could pick up a phone and call the fellow with some advice. Or clout him on the head with the receiver until he showed some sense.

The book is worth picking up for Majipoor fans. For those not familiar with the world, I'd recommend buying Lord Valentine's Castle instead.



ARISIA '96

Arisia was the first con I ever went to, and it's still the big event of the year for me. This year was no exception.

Perhaps I should take a moment to explain to far-flung readers that Arisia is the spiritual heir to Boskone, the venerable Boston convention sponsored by NESFA. Boskone still exists, but in much diminished form; its decline is due to an extremely poor decision to move it far from Boston and reduce membership years ago. Some sort of disaster was involved.

Registration

Since I was signed up to do a number of panels at the con this year, I was able to register on Thursday night. I was working late that evening, but grabbed an hour to hop over to the Boston Park Plaza hotel and sign in. Registration was not yet set up, but they unpacked the boxes and got my badge. I went back to work, where an emergency project kept me busy until 4:15 in the morning. Fortunately I had the next day off.

FRIDAY

...I overslept, of course. Waking up at 2 in the afternoon, I rushed to get my hair cut (a necessity, given that I'd be dancing in white tie and tails that evening), and drove over to pick up Lois.

Unfortunately the weather was awful, and the traffic was worse. The trip would normally have taken fifteen minutes, but by the time I reached Lois' place it was two hours later—and we were definitely running late.

But the Park Plaza wasn't far away, and we managed to find our way there without difficulty. When we arrived, the line for valet parking was badly backed up. The parking assistants were trying their best, but snow was pouring out of the sky and dozens of Arisia people were trying to get in at once. We parked and unloaded the car (apart from regular luggage I'd brought two large boxes of Interregnum Samplers and promotional issues). While Lois guarded the pile I went to look for a cart to bring our stuff up to our room.

The valets told me to go to the Bell Captain for help, but when I found him he quite rudely ordered me to go back to the valets. I was surprised at his behavior, but didn't waste time arguing with him. I got the impression that he'd never had to deal with a science fiction convention before, and must have just had to deal with a...*quirky* fan. ☺

Eventually we got into our room and had everything straightened away. It was late, and we barely had time to change into our formalwear for the Victorian Dance.

7:30: The Dance

The Regency/Victorian Dance has long been a favorite event for me at Arisia. That's a bit odd, since as a child I hated dancing; I suspect that I like it so much now because it's the only excuse I have during the year to wear white tie and tails. As I've said before, there's something about being perfectly dressed that gives one an odd feeling of elegance and power. And I need all the ego-boosting that I can get. ☺



As we went down to the Dance, I couldn't help but notice that overall attendance at the con was down from last year. The bad weather seemed the likely cause; though the snow wasn't quite as bad as the blizzard of '96, it was certainly bad enough to shut down the airport and make travel difficult.*

Attendance at the dance was also poor. There were less than half as many couples dancing as last year. In previous years there had been a three-piece live band, but this year we danced to music on tape—music that frequently would end much too soon. Dancers held their positions while someone rewound the tape and started it over. Still, it was fun. As always the galloping, sashaying dances were a great workout. The dance ended at around 9:00 PM. Afterwards, we spoke to Michelle, the

woman who put on the dance; she was less than happy. Apparently Arisia had failed to include the Dance in their program, and had given her a lot of trouble when she was trying to set up the event in the first place. She was dubious about the prospect of holding the dance at Arisia next year. ☹

Friday Evening

Dinner was pleasant at The Swans, a small restaurant in the lobby; as we dined we watched latecomers straggling in, and spotted a number of people we knew. After dinner, we strolled around the con. Many dealers had arrived late, and were only then setting up their suites on Dealer's Row. We checked out the con suite, where I overheard one woman remark as I passed "He looks quite handsome" (and no, I don't hear that very often—unfortunately. ☹).

There was little to do for the rest of the evening. I spent an hour or so making notes for the panels that I'd be on the next day; I've noticed that panelists never seem to actually make preparations for their panels, and that often shows in the quality of their presentations. I find that good notes can be extremely useful when speaking.

Late in the evening I took a solo trip to check out the Green Room. Though as a panelist I'd been a guest of the con last year, I hadn't known about this refuge for guests and VIPs; this year I was determined to make use of every perk I could get. ☺ The room was a quieter, emptier version of the con suite with better food. After a few minutes I went back and got some sleep. I had early panels the next day.

* Incidentally the weather was also bad enough to cause Creation Con to cancel their competing event in Boston (for those unfamiliar with Creation Con, it's a profit-making corporation that has a reputation for trying to wipe out competing amateur cons. Nasty people, in other words. Several Arisia staffers were heard to chuckle at the cowardice of the California-based Creation people, to quail at a little snow... ☺).



SATURDAY

As always, Lois and I enjoyed the breakfast buffet at the Cafe Rouge (which is in the hotel building). At \$10.50 it's a bargain; I pigged out. They had croissants, muffins, pancakes, bacon, sausages, scrambled eggs, hash browns, toast, coffee, and wonderful fruit juices of all kinds...I must have had at least ten glasses of fresh-squeezed orange juice. I needed the vitamin C, since I was scheduled for three panels that day.

12:00: "Winning Amateur Videos"

This panel was a complete surprise to me; I'd heard about it only a couple of days before. I'd suggested the topic at an Arisia meeting weeks earlier with the assumption that it was too late to schedule anything new so close to the con. Nonetheless the panel had been created and scheduled—and I was the sole panelist. There was a TV and VCR in the room for me to use, and I was able to borrow a copy of the videos I've been involved with from the video department.

The panel was surprisingly well attended—over twenty people showed up, and only four of them were people I knew. Fortunately I'm immune to stage fright. **Lois Folstein** and **Scott Ferrier**, who've been variously involved with the videos, should have been up on the panel with me; instead they talked from the audience and were an enormous help. Rich Staats also helped with a number of challenging questions and comments. I felt that the panel went well, though two little girls sitting in the front row stared at me with accusing looks after I showed "The Gamemas-

ter's Hall of Shame". I don't think that they understood it. ☺

3:00 PM: "Canned vs. Homebrew"

I had been tapped to be the moderator of this panel; my complete lack of experience at moderating showed, I fear, as it was difficult to keep focused on the subject. In truth, the subject itself was a bit vague; while it seemed that we should be discussing the relative merits of canned and homebrew roleplaying systems, there was little disagreement to be found. System is a matter of choice, after all. And there are few roleplayers that don't modify the system that they use.

Much of the time was spent discussing various homebrewed systems with the few people in the audience. As we spoke, I came to the conclusion that a how-to panel on *creating* homebrew systems might have

been more to the point; as it was, most of the conversation degenerated into campaign war stories, a perennial danger at gaming panels. We also discussed the future of gaming.

At one point I managed to get a sly (or petty, depending on how you look at it) dig in. I noticed that sitting in the back of the room looking through his program was a guy that Scott Ferrier has called the "fat jerk"; the head of a large and carnivorous New England live roleplaying organization. Raising my voice in impassioned cry, I declaimed "The future of the roleplaying hobby is in jeopardy. Why should we go to the effort of creating and running a roleplaying adventure, or *freezing our asses off in the woods at a live roleplaying event**, when we can stay in our living rooms and watch television?" He didn't look up, so I don't know if that shaft struck home...☺



* I'd done exactly that when I'd had a terrible weekend at his for-profit LARP camp, as detailed in [The Wild Hunt](#) years ago. And he knew it. ☺

4:00 PM: Who Said That? **(How to Keep in Character)**

Once again I was moderating. Attendance was better than at the previous panel, though still low; there were perhaps nine or ten people there. The topic was a difficult one. For one thing, it wasn't clear if we were to discuss ways to keep *players* in character, or gamemaster NPCs. We ended up covering both topics in a somewhat scattershot fashion. For player characters, the eventual conclusion was that if they couldn't be persuaded to stay in character and were disrupting the game they would have to be asked to leave.

For gamemasters, the group decided that acting talent was the necessary quality for a GM to handle portraying several NPCs effectively. For those GMs lacking such talent, props were suggested as a way to indicate when different characters were speaking; for example, the GM might wear a hat when speaking as character A, chew on a toothpick when speaking as character B, etc.

Saturday Evening

The rest of the evening was free. I got out and saw the end of the Mezzanine belly-dancing session that Lois and several other dancers have made into an Arisia tradition. Apparently I missed an incident earlier at the event when several kids snuck into the con and started razzing the dancers. They were eventually escorted out by Arisia Security.

After the dancing we toured the con. Everything was in full swing; the Dealer's



Room was a hotbed of activity. I saw **Dina Flockheart** of Cloak and Dagger Productions; she was busier than ever with a huge selection of garb.

I was very disappointed that several of the dealers I'd been counting on seeing hadn't made it to the con. Once again The Weapon Shops of Isher had booked a table, but failed to arrive; bad weather had apparently made it impossible for them to fly to Boston. I'd also hoped to buy certain rare videotapes from Black Troll videos, but he didn't show up either. In fact there were almost *no* videotape dealers at the con, with the exception of one who dealt exclusively in anime. I'd hoped to buy copies of The Questor Tapes, Spectre, and Shadow On the Land, but had no luck.

Dealer's Row had some interesting items, but nothing that really appealed to me. In the end the only thing I ended up buying at the con was a single paperback of dirty limericks by Isaac Asimov.

I wandered around a bit more, spotting **David Hoberman** (who was sporting a wild face-paint job) and several other casual acquaintances (I'm often embarrassed that so many people know me by name, when I can never remember theirs). Lois and I hit The Swans for dinner again, and then it was time for:

8:00 PM: The Masquerade

The Masquerade is *the* event at Arisia. This year it was held in the Grand Ballroom; our seats were better than last year, though still somewhat towards the back.

I'm not an expert in costuming, and so will leave the description of the contest to any of several occasional IR contributors who are considerably more knowledgeable on the subject

than I am. However, it is worth mentioning that the amiable Mike McAafee won an award for a costume based on a creature from Barlow's Guide to Extraterrestrials, and that Dina Flockheart won Best In Show for "Royal Rumble"—a beautiful and funny period display of Henry VII and his many wives.

12:00 midnight: The Interregnum Party

I cannot be accused of learning from experience, and the proof of that is that once again I attempted to hold an Interregnum party. We had been given the Back Bay panel room from midnight till morning. I ran over to the local convenience store to buy supplies. I hadn't counted on the panic buying that takes place during a snowstorm, though, and so was dismayed to find many of the shelves bare. Still, I managed to scrape together enough food and soft drinks to feed everyone.

The party was a bit more successful than last year, I think. I was pleased to meet IR contributors **Joe Teller**, **Kiralee McCauley** and **Cindy Shettle** for the first time. **George Phillies** was there, and (if I recall correctly) so was **Chris Aylott**. **Lee** and **Barry Gold** of A&E were there, as were several other A&Ers; unfortunately I didn't catch their names. I hope I didn't forget anyone I know!

Mostly the party was a lot of chatting. At times the conversation got into fairly deep waters, speculating on the state of the roleplaying hobby and where it was going. The author of the **Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom** RPG module (unfortunately I didn't note his name) stopped by as well, and we all talked until 3 AM or so. After everyone left, I



cleaned up the room, took a last perambulation around the con, and went to sleep. I had early panels the next day.

SUNDAY

We got up at about 9 AM, and went down to breakfast. As always, the buffet was excellent; I was sorry to have to rush through it, but my next panel was at 10 AM. And it was a big one, one of the biggest at the con. Which wasn't surprising, given that it was:

10:00 AM: Babylon 5 vs. Star Trek

It was the largest panel room at the con, and it was packed. There must have been at least 60 people there, maybe more; afterwards I'd heard that there were people standing in the hallway and sitting on the floor.

As the panel of seven started settling in, I asked who was moderating. "You are," someone said, and to my amazement they were right. I hadn't been told.

At the start of the panel I welcomed the panelists and invited them to introduce themselves. Among them was Michael Burstein, a neo-pro author who had a statement to read from Babylon 5's creator, J. Michael Straczynski. Michael had told JMS of the topics of the two B5 panels at Arisia, and in response JMS had sent him messages to be read at each. After the con, I wrote to JMS and asked for permission to print his statements; he kindly agreed. Here's the text:

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STAR TREK VS. B5. You who programmed this panel, you who determined theme and direction, who put the Vs. in the title...have you learned nothing from experience? Do any of you, who organize conventions and do so out of a professed love and familiarity with science fiction, remember

September 1966? That was the year a little science fiction series called STAR TREK debuted on network television, one year exactly after the premiere of LOST IN SPACE in September 1965. STAR TREK, which was panned by reviewers and fans alike who, out of a perceived loyalty to the previous show, described it as nothing more than a cheap attempt to cash in on the success of LOST IN SPACE. LOST was the established norm, TREK the impudent newcomer, a throwback some said from the strong family drama of LOST. TREK fans said that this was unfair, that their show shouldn't have to be compared to LOST IN SPACE, that it should be taken on its own merit.

"Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

There is no STAR TREK VS. B5 except in the minds of those who would profit from continuing feuds on either side of the fictional picket fence. Why not CAGNEY & LACEY VS. NYPD BLUE? They're both cop shows. Why is the one predicated upon the other? What happened to IDIC, Infinite Diversity in Infinte Combinations? Should it be celebrated only in concept, not execution? The science fiction community is composed of brilliant dreamers, practical visionaries, afficianados, costumers, craftspeople...and feuds, in equal measure. And whichever "side" folks come down on at this panel, B5 or ST, it's an exercise in factionalization that achieves nothing because there IS no VS, no OR; it's B5 *and* Star Trek *and* Lost in Space *and* The Prisoner *and* Space: Above and Beyond. Because the future of science fiction is in the cross pollinization of ideas, the interbreeding -- after proper introductions dinners and flowers -- of dreams and visions and extrapolations, which in time results in the birth of new dreams, new ideas, and new visions. Absent that, the species, and the genre, dies.

Yes, it is possible to explore, compare and contrast the methods of storytelling, the effects, the structure and the acting of any two series;

that is the point of the And. In Ali vs. Frasier, the Axis vs. the Allies, Truman vs. Dewey, OJ Simpson vs. an inconvenient truth, there can only be one left standing at the end. But in science fiction, we all stand together, protecting and sharing our diverse dreams, or we do not stand at all.

RE: "B5 is really X in disguise" You're all right, and you're all wrong. Is it Lord of the Rings? Dune? The Kennedy story? The saga of Camelot? The Foundation? A brief history of World War II? The Bible? All these and others have been broached to me by people absolutely sure that this was the model for the series. (And, as an aside, this kind of discussion generally happens only to TV writers; nobody here is doing a panel called "Is Startide Rising Really X in disguise?" This happens to TV writers because somehow it gets assumed that we haven't got an idea in our heads that we didn't swipe from somebody's book. But that's another topic for another time.)

Babylon 5...is a Rohrsharch test. An ink blot created by smashing actors, archetypes, saga-structure, myth and language against a sheet of paper, folding it, and bashing it a few times. When you open it up and look inside, what you see is the saga closest to your heart and your experience. Because like all the works mentioned a moment ago, B5 draws upon the same wellspring of myth, archetype, symbology, and dime store sociology that feeds all sagas, from the Illiad on through to the present.

Writers, science fiction writers in particular, are like the beggar in Alladin, who offered new lamps for old...we seize myths that have fallen out of currency and recast them in newer guise, dust them off and hope a genie emerges. Our myths, the myths of Tolkien and Homer, of Heinlein and Mallory, are eternal; they exchange one name for another, cast off one mask and assume the next. If you perceive their presence in Babylon 5, it is because we have courted the myth, not

because we have echoed one of their names from another place. King Lear vanishes into Londo, Cassandra peers out from behind the eyes of G'Kar, Galahad answers to the name Ivanova, the Oracle at Delphi is now wearing an encounter suit, and Sir Bedevere is...well, that would be telling.

So you're all right. And you're all wrong. Because it's all ACTUALLY based on the 1967 Young Juveniles novel "The Mad Scientists' Club." And I'm actually channeling Eleanor Roosevelt. (Fortunately, I already have the wardrobe.) Oh, yes...and I am the walrus, coo-coo ka choo....

jms

The odd thing is that I thought that *I* was the only one who remembered The Mad Scientists' Club. And I happen to have picked up a copy only six weeks ago. Synchronicity...

Of course, only the first section of the statement was read at the B5 vs. Trek panel. Michael Burstein read it well, and when he finished the audience applauded. Then the discussion began.

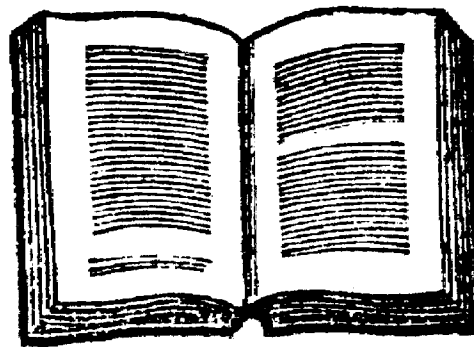
I'd been concerned that the panel would be a bloodbath, with B5 and Trek people rolling around on the floor in a life-or-death struggle. Instead, the panel and audience turned out to be surprisingly in accord. Most agreed with JMS' "not vs, **AND**" point, and so the discussion turned to the subject of story structure and style. A few people made critical remarks about the "protect the franchise" attitude of the owners of Star Trek, and there were some virulent criticisms of Star Trek: Voyager in particular; in fact, most of the audience seemed to strongly prefer B5 to the modern Treks (though classic Trek was always referred to admiringly). A couple of times the

panel seemed to be drifting too far towards an anti-Trek attitude, and I stopped the action and tried to move things in a more positive direction. When the panel broke up at 11 I felt fairly satisfied that it had gone well.

11:00 AM: When Fans Start Writing

This was another very poorly attended panel. A representative from White Wolf was there; I mentioned my difficulties with Stewart Wieck and the old White Wolf magazine years ago, and received an amused and understanding apology.

Of the panel itself there is little to say. We discussed the legal problems of writing about material owned by corporations, including the TSR net debacle and Star Trek. I was interested to hear that the owners of Animaniacs have been rigorously opposing fan writing about their characters (though to tell the truth, I know very little about the Animaniacs—I've only seen it once). We didn't run out of things to talk about, but once or twice we did get a bit quiet...



12:00 PM: Fanzines

The attendance here was better, and the conversation livelier. One highlight of the panel for me came when I mentioned that it could be difficult for a fanzine to get distributed; as illustration, I mentioned the whole Tyler/Pandemonium situation*. As soon as the words

* More old history: Tyler is the owner of a science fiction bookstore called Pandemonium. I was a big supporter of the store for many years, giving them many free copies of each issue of Interregnum and referring dozens of new customers to them. One day, for no reason that I know, Tyler tossed the free IRs back at me and told me that he didn't have space for them any more—this despite the fact that there was obviously a lot of space next to the other free stuff on the floor. I later found out from friends that he had been making disparaging remarks about me...and I *still* don't know why. I don't shop at his store any more, though. —>PM

were out of my mouth, an audience member jumped up. She'd had a bad experience with Tyler too; another guy got up to agree with her. Neither published zines; they had simply been treated rudely. I must admit that these spontaneous declarations tickled my funny bone. ☺

1:30 PM: Amateur Video Showing



This wasn't a panel, but instead a showing of various amateur videos. I'd brought three on a tape: The Gamemaster's Hall of Shame, The Probability Ship, and Fairy's Flight: The Tempest. Sections of all three were shown at the Amateur Video panel on Saturday, and the GM's Hall of Shame

had been shown several other times during the con; it's a popular video. Still, I was looking forward to seeing the audience reaction to all three that afternoon.

We got there just as the Hall of Shame began. Almost immediately the audience began laughing, which was good to hear. After a minute or two, a guy came up to me in the darkness. I recognized him.

Friday night, I'd been getting into an elevator and mentioned to someone (I forget who) that I'd have a panel all to myself the next day about amateur video. A tall, lean fellow had immediately shown interest. What was that about amateur video? he wanted to know. He was in charge of amateur video at the con. When I explained that it was a panel, he remarked that he had nothing to do with panels at the con.

It was the same guy who approached me at the amateur video show on Sunday. "You

know," he said, "this is at least three years old. Have you considered doing something new? You can't keep showing the same old video."

"I'm not really interested," I replied, "it's just too much work, too much stress. I'd have to get another really good idea, but that's a matter of inspiration."

"Well, you really should do something new. People are going to get sick of this one."

Meanwhile, the audience was chortling at my incredibly hammy performance. I shrugged, and he got up and went over to the guys running the videos.

Within moments, a loud and heated argument was in full swing. The thin guy was demanding that his video be played immediately; "*That* guy," he said, gesturing at me "got his stuff played three times and had an hour to himself yesterday!"

The video staffer didn't want to stop the tape in the middle, and was clearly exasperated with the thin guy. The argument got louder and louder, as Lois and I rolled our eyes to the ceiling in embarrassment; finally a third guy, apparently the one in charge, screamed "You can both shut the @%\$# up right now or I swear to God I'll take both tapes and throw them out the &^@#ing window! I swear I will, so *shut up!*"

After the Hall of Shame ended they took the tape out, rather than play the other two items. The thin guy's tape was run. The first section was a mildly amusing piece featuring a little stuffed koala in a submarine superimposed on shots of an aquarium, while someone sang about Kookie the Koala. The next item was odd: it was a selection of interviews done at the last Arisia by the thin guy. Unfortunately the sound on the tape was blurred and muffled, completely unintelligible. I had to leave to go to my next panel before the section ended, but Lois told me afterward that the interviews went on for a very

long time. As the incomprehensible interviews went on, more and more people got up and left the room.

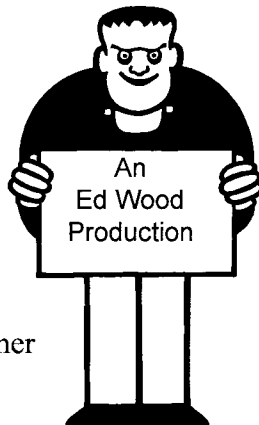
When the tape finished, someone in the audience stood up and asked why the tape had been shown; he hadn't been able to understand what was said. Another in the audience agreed. At this the thin guy became quite angry, until a friend of his stated that the whole thing had been a joke on the audience and they'd been too dim to understand it. He left as the video staff started playing *The Probability Ship*, commenting cuttingly that they'd found their audience for the "old stuff".

2:00: Good Fanzine Writing

There were four people on this panel: Lee Gold, Michael Burstein, a guy named Barnaby Rapaport, and me. This was the real fanzine panel; perhaps I shouldn't be the one to say so, but I thought that it was lively and informative. Barnaby was the moderator; however, he did very little talking, and even less moderating. I'm afraid that Lee and I tromped all over him, though Michael held his own. It was fun.

3:00: Bad SF films

Of all the panels I was on at Arisia, perhaps this was the one I was least qualified for. I've read *The Golden Turkey Awards* dozens of times, and know about quite a few *old* bad movies; my other qualifications include a long history of watching *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, and I've also read the biography of Ed Wood. Still, I discovered at this panel that there are a lot of bad movies



that I haven't seen. My biggest line may have been my opening one, when I said "I've loved bad movies ever since I broke up laughing on my junior high library floor while reading *The Golden Turkey Awards*. Though I have to say that I *hate* what Michael Medved is trying to do to Hollywood."* The audience cheered, and some applauded.

That about did it for Arisia '96; we stopped in at the Gripe Session, but there was little going on. I recovered my car and we went home. It had been a fun con, perhaps a little more low-key than previous years, but also lacking any major disappointments. As always, I don't want to wait a year until my next one; perhaps someone out there can suggest some other good conventions that I might attend.

COMMENTS #16

Rich Staats: VAMPIRE? Better be careful, Rich—you might attract the attention of White Wolf's lawyers. ☺ ✨ Seriously, "Creating Memorable NPCs" is another fine bit of work—useful *and* entertaining.

Elizabeth McCoy: I must admit that I wouldn't have derived the ship-name the *Hell* from four dashes (like so): "----"—but the name that I *would* have derived would hardly be appropriate in a family publication. ☺ ✨ I liked the writeup, and hope that we'll see more.

Virgil Greene: Yet another authoritative and scholarly article, Virgil! I hope that you don't mind my saying that your writing has improved by leaps and bounds over the last two years. Your articles are some of the most frequently-mentioned by people on the Net and at game stores.

Jenny and /-ntara Glover: I'm sorry to hear that you didn't get to see as much of the Intersection con as you'd like. Why were there so many Rumanians at the con? And (forgive me if this is naive) how did you know that they were Rumanians? ✨ Tara, I hope that you haven't forgotten us! ☺

Chris Aylott: It was good to see you at Arisia this year, Chris. It's too bad that we never have enough time to

*Michael Medved was the coauthor with his brother, Harry Medved, of *The Golden Turkey Awards*—a classic and very funny book about bad movies. In recent years Michael has hosted Sneak Previews with Jeffrey Lyons, and has made a name for himself by flacking for the Republicans on immorality in Hollywood. I'm fairly sure that most of *The Golden Turkey* was written by his brother Harry. Harry was the sole author of *The Fifty Worst Movies of All Time*. I should also mention that according to *Spy* magazine Michael Medved is a real jerk, and has been involved with some questionable right-wing funding organizations.

talk much; I wish that I could have an excuse to drive out to your store more often (or that it was closer). Unfortunately I need a really strong reason to attempt a 200-mile drive (round trip) in my scary old car... ✨ Thanks for the condolences on the demise of the Wonder campaign, though it may not be totally dead...more on that later, perhaps.

Gil Pili: Another Gaming Horror Story? They're always amusing, and every one of them resembles something I've experienced. ✨ Re maps: if you aren't a good calligrapher you can still take a modern map and use it. Photocopy a map of Africa at a 65° angle, erase the internal country names and it makes a decent fantasy-world map. Or you could do what I did, and set your game in a fantasy America...something I did long before Orson Scott Card wrote his Alvin Maker series, by the way. ✨ Nice job on the music lists. I'd forgotten some of those.

Dale Meier: You definitely win the record for largest zine so far, Dale! And I'm afraid with the new rates that record is unlikely to be broken for a long time. ☺ ✨ Tales From The Angel's Brigade remains engrossing. Perhaps when you've printed the whole thing I'll put all the copies together, and make a single volume out of it for my own use. ✨ I enjoyed "The Fellowship of the White Lion", though it might be argued that Brother Aidan was a little *too* powerful...definitely not balanced in game terms. ✨ When my old campaign world Disque completed its transformation it reverted to a round world...and its story may not yet be over. ☺ I hope that I've sent you that Pendragon story; if not, let me know and I'll do it ASAP.

Joe Teller and Kiralee McCauley: It was very nice indeed to meet you both at Arisia! It's funny that we've never met despite have been in electronic contact for so long. ✨ The Everway review was interesting, particularly so since Wizards of the Coast has just decided to kill it. I guess that puts paid to our hopes that the Magic: The Gathering craze would spark a roleplaying revival, eh? ✨ The T'phon material was neat, and I was glad to get a look at the complete book at the con—even though it wasn't enough time for me to really give it a good going over. Maybe once I'm unemployed I'll have time...

Michael Lavoie: Welcome to the Net! I think you'll find it fascinating and useful, but will spend less and less time on it over the next year or so. ✨ Great reviews! I was interested to see that we substantially



agreed about The Book of Iod. ✨ The Tuos writeup was interesting, as usual—though a bit short. ✨ I liked the fiction fragment very much—and it didn't seem very fragmentary to me. Well done. ✨ You'll be pleased to hear that **Mark Sabalauskas** is planning on writing more often for IR...did you get to him somehow? ☺

Mike Dumais: I enjoyed "Out of the Scabbard"; somehow it conveyed a certain Victorian quality. I hope that we'll see more, if Mike Lavoie is willing (or you could always do your own zine...☺).

Scott Shafer: Now that's one wacky layout! In fact, it must be the most visually striking layout we've ever published. One of these days I really should make up some awards and pass them out... ✨ Do you really think that the humor in Mommie Dearest was unintentional? I hope not. That movie is one of my favorite comedies of all time. ✨ Re Marvel Comics: I was pleased to hear that their idiotic attempt to start their own chain of monopolistic comic stores backlashed, losing them millions of dollars. I was less happy to hear that they laid off a number of people, given that a) they probably weren't the people responsible for that lousy decision, and b) an old friend of mine might have been one of the people laid off (I don't know—I haven't heard from him in years). ✨

Actually I *did* tell you how I got the title "The Log That Flies"; it just didn't make any sense. Basically, it just popped into my head...it happens.

Dave Dickie: I was recently told to "chill out" too...possibly one of the most annoying experiences of the month. Is it worse or better when it's your daughter? ☺ ✨ Don't worry about catching my bad luck; things are getting better. Even my computer screen seems to be improving, and now that I'm free of that soul-destroying firm my life has to improve. ☺ ✨ The Kethem writeup was quite entertaining. How much time do you spend working on it? I assume that you can't deal with it at work? Or do vice-presidents get more latitude? ☺

George Phillies: I wish I'd taped our conversation at Arisia, George, because I think that IR readers would have been extremely interested. The glimpse into the future of The Warrior Unseen was enticing...possibly a little frightening. I look forward to seeing the actual material.

Mark Sabalauskas: Welcome back! I'm sorry that the graphic on the top of the page was a bit mangled—I need to spend a little more time familiarizing myself with AmiPro. ✨ Re the VistaPro landscape generator program:

is that shareware, or do you have to buy it at a store? Is it expensive? * “Jottings and Jabs” is an excellent format for short unrelated bits. I hope that we’ll see it again in your next issue.

Comments #17

They’ll have to wait until next time, I’m afraid. *sigh*...I remain one issue behind...

NEXTISH

Some of the things I left out for this issue, and possibly a writeup from the new RQ group...we’ll see. Take care!

