

TIGHTBEAM



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TIGHTBEAM - September: is the letter column of the National Fantasy Fan Federation. TIGHTBEAM is published for the N3F in January, March, May, July, September, November and is distributed free to members of the N3F and for trade of other SF fanzines. Persons mentioned in passing are invited to comment, regardless of membership status. Contributions should be sent to the editor: Beth Slick, 9030 Harratt, Apt. 2, West Hollywood, CA 90069, not later than the 5th of the month of publication. (Please write "Tb" on envelope.)

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EDITOR'S LETTER

We have a shorter issue of Tb this time, so I'll take advantage of this and tell you a bit more about my activities (egomaniac that I am--but then that is the prerequisite for any faned!)

After recovering from my elbow injury, I found myself unemployed (after all, I was unable to type for close to two months). I decided now was the time to make a change, and planned to find something in the motion picture (or TV) industry.

This goal proved difficult; movie and TV jobs (in other than the most boring areas) are rare things. During August I spent many hours going to and from Los Angeles--filling out forms, being interviewed, driving and more driving. After going through several studios, employment agencies and classified ads, I got a job.

Jack H. Harris Enterprises, Inc. (my employer) is a movie distribution company that distributes half SF and half "light erotica" (usually rated "R"). Jack Harris is a producer and his most well-known film is THE BLOB (and SON OF BLOB).

I've only had the job a short time, but so far I enjoy it very much. (of course, there are few opportunities where being a SF fan and collector of movie memorabilia are an advantage.) One of the first things I did was get all the free SF pressbooks I could find (for my collection). One other fringe benefit was being able to see (for free) the as yet un-released DARK STAR (a very funny movie), and then several days later having a nice conversation with the movie's Director/Writer (who said he would look at my zine and let me know what he thought). Then too, meeting Robert Culp in the hallway isn't the worst thing that has ever happened to me either.

Since my new job is in Hollywood, I had to move to Hollywood. Finding an apartment during the Labor Day Weekend is something I wouldn't recommend--especially when it involves traveling long distances on the freeway! But I did find a very nice, big, place. Most fen are pack-rats (or worse) and I am no exception--I never had the courage to count the boxes of books and fanzines.

Since I've moved here, it seems that strange happenings follow me. My first day at work was heralded by a bomb threat in the building next to us. (But the horrifying part was when everyone's reaction was, "Oh no! Not again!") When I went to get my drivers license changed to reflect my new location, there, sitting on the sidewalk, was a car that had jumped the curb, knocked down a "no parking" sign and run into the side of the DMV building. Some of the people who come into the office are pretty interesting, too. Like the well endowed young lady who came into our office to speak to Mr. Harris about getting a part in a movie--her name was "Gay Goodenough". I congratulate myself for keeping a straight face, though it was a struggle.

On the fanish side of things, I re-affirmed my insanity and purchased a new (re-built, actually) mimeo. I got tired of using my old Sears machine because it kept crunching the paper--it seemed like I was throwing out 1 ream out of every 10 I bought because the machine would crumple up the paper. My usual outlet for mimeo supplies caught me at a weak moment and presented me with a machine that doesn't crunch paper and does do a lot of things the Sears never did. Of course it cost a great deal more than the Sears, but I felt I got a good price on it. I've run off my first zine on it and it runs like a dream (and I shudder at the nightmares past with the Sears).

Also, this month I had the pleasure of meeting Joanne Burger as she was passing through Hollywood. She showed me what she had purchased at the bookstores along Hollywood Boulevard--and there are some fantastic bookstores along Hollywood Boulevard. She had found quite a few books, ~~many~~ with some beautiful illustrations!

It has been a very busy, and exciting, last couple of months. Be sure to take note of my new address:

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Be sure to write to Tb!

Beth Slick

ALMA

HILL

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July 19, 1974

Somebody might want to hear further about my unscholarly reseraches into the gothic formula. After all, gothic patterns keep turning up in this field, and as LOCUS remarks: category books are increasing and so is the market for them. Ace, for one, is putting out non-gothic boldly labelled ACE GOTHIC with the standard gothic cover--fleeing female with darkened mansion in background, one window lighted to show how late it is at night, most people asleep. Inside there is no such event. Looks as if they are desparate for material. But they change editorially every so often, don't take this as meaning anything in particular. I've heard many complaints about Ace's practices, but they continue to be one of the biggest publishers in the category fields. Be that as it may, the gothics are occupying space of their own in many paperback stores, and selling strongly.

So having been advised that it is a formula-ridden field I've been in serach of the formula, and must say that it varies wildly among publishers. Dell uses formula quite rigidly; Popular Library doesn't seem to know what they are talking about when they label theirs gothics as they are actually murder mystery thrillers--but well done, so they get away with it presumably.

The true gothic is based on the cover theme--a shelter that looks good but is dangerous. In other words it gets tension from the conflict between old ideas and new. This is what brings in the cinderella theme. These ideas are so much a part of today's re-examination of old values and the stress on individual responsibility (which gets tough at times so we'd all like to find a helpful prince) that it explains the popularity of the form. The themes are universal anyway, but the readership varies a bit--men look for more violence, women take more interest in background and character.

Story formulas don't turn me off, incidentally. A good pattern can be a real help. It's not the form that matters, it's the artist anyway. Some comics are routine, some are art; Kelly and Disney did comics. Jane Austen did boy-meets-girl formula; Sigrid Undset did sin-suffer-repent. Many authors do one pattern all their lives, interestingly different every time. Writing is hard work so at least it must interest you. Only then can it interest a reader. So unless gothics interest you, read no further.

My first attempt at a gothic didn't sell well right off, too different or wrong publishers, so I filed it for a year and recently found an agent willing to work with it, courtesy of a good friend. I have more in mind, but right now am working on a book about Passamaquoddy, sercon, so looking into gothic patterns is just data-gathering and for the fun of it right now. Still, these books make good relaxation so the data has been, oops, have been filling in.

Harking back to the basic theme, a gothic really should include an old building. (The House of the Seven Gables is a good prototype. The one they show tourists even has a secret passageway that goes up beside the fireplace in the dining-room. It must've been an old smuggler's roost once upon a time.)

Nathaniel Hawthorne had quite a feeling for gothics; his times included a lot of adjustment to new ideas too, and though he fought notions that are no longer issues, the attitudes are similar to ours in a broad way. His young hero is a photographer; this was new science then. They all leave the old house to go to brighter and newer accommodations. They find a hidden treasure which is no longer worth much. And they turn their backs on snobbery--there is a lot of gothic in that book.

The cinderella is usually the main and viewpoint character. Some publishers demand ugly sisters. Some, like Hawthorne, will go along with a heavy villain instead. The gothic form always takes a split view of masculine characters as related to the cinderella. One is the villainous invader who is usually too slick for her to suspect (cinderellas don't have to be too bright) and one is the prince who is invariably taken with her right away but makes her nervous. She suspects him instead. He does a lot of lurking, you see, partly because he likes to follow her around, naturally, and partly because he suspects the villain. (The prince is supposed to be extra bright except for being susceptible to girls.) I'd say these character set-ups are sine qua non to a true gothic. So is the old mansion, castle, or cave or whatever with lots of passageways, trapdoors, secret rooms, antiquities. This building should not be very new, for its subliminal suggestions is of the childhood ways and old situations that should be reevaluated in terms of adult opportunities, risks, and responsibilities. There is usually some social activity (cinderellas like balls as a rule) and most gothics, I notice, have a good deal to say about food. Breakfast may serve tea or coffee but is fragrant with some kind of hot bread and smoked fish or meat. The cook is never, as far as I've noticed, an ugly sister type. She belongs to the godmother category, but there may be one or more of those. A cranky housekeeper who may have a heart of gold under the whaleboning, or may be plotting to get the inheritance, or even be a psycho killer, is a frequent character in these stories, but not obligatory. There is a killer loose in any gothic, and instead of losing a glass slipper, cinderella sprints for her life.

All cinderellas are orphans, usually losing both parents in a car crash. This has gotten too cliché for editors, but happens all too often in real life, so it probably doesn't bother readers much. An invalid mother and eventual loss of father is a second choice. Once in awhile it isn't mentioned except in passing. But the subliminal effect is the loss of parental protection, as with all adults. This carries out the basic theme. I personally doubt the advantage of the ugly-sister-step-mother characters, because this detracts from the image of the cinderella as having any common sense at all, but this may be just an idiosyncrasy of my own. Nasty-nice girls do turn up as competitors and/or adversaries. The cinderella is by definition a nice girl, but the truth is that some of them snoop--it forwards the plot--and a good many fib. This helps to thicken the plot also.

A good gothic contains water scenery--ocean or lake or rivers or falls into which the villain can stumble. High cliffs are good, and the cinderella may fall flat at the verge so that the villain trips over her and vanishes into the gorge in the last scene. Mostly, though, she is rescued by the prince in the nick of time. This last is especially handy if she is trapped in an old tomb or such. Old tombs ought to appear somewhere in any gothic as they too symbolize the bygone.

The opening should be threatening though not necessarily a real danger. A stormy approach to the old castle, or a dizzy height will do. An actual attack by an unseen villain is okay too. The cinderella should be attacked several times. Tiles and flowerpots fall from above; doors slam and leave her alone with scurrying mice; the bedtime warm milk tastes bitter so she drinks only half and discovers that she is being hypnotized every night and etc.

But as in murder mysteries, a genre which as you can see overlaps gothics, she wanders around and falls through rotten floor boards, annoys the villain, and above all goes out at night after being well warned to stay in. A midnight run is expected of all cinderellas, but as a rule just in the last episode. In the course of the story she should explore some dusty attics (symbolism obvious) and moldy cellars.

Scenery should open on something as gloomy as the House of Usher, but as the booklength requires contrast, good weather can intervene, especially when getting acquainted with the prince. Of course if they are caught by a rainstorm and shelter in an old cave that is fine too. The gothic does not have to be all cobwebs, mildew, and fungus, but should have plenty. One that I recall kept to an outdoor color scheme of gray and green for a whole chapter, and a good deal was said about the dangerous nature of the offshore shoals. It had little to do with the actual plot but made an effective opening and supplied some of the story background, making a good example to follow. Water, of course, always symbolizes the unconscious, the deep source of all life, and is de rigueur in any gothic background. So is a good deal of forest, preferably shadowy. Cinderellas are apt to be overcivilized, so savagery in the background balances the effect. But animals (horses and dogs mostly) are more in the nature of child-images, harmless and friendly. Children may appear and may even help to find the cinderella who has been trapped in an old trunk/cave/tomb/secret room. But they are not required in the basic pattern.

Now let's see: cinderellas usually arrive at the castle for a job. They are usually newcomers but may be relatives, even daughters called home to care for invalid parents (parents if still alive do not usually last the book). They may or may not be heiresses; if so they may be unaware or incognito as in the goose-girl theme. After a stormy opening the shelter proves to have cozy aspects. The reader will stand for a good deal of description as to what the castle is like inside. There are other residents and other events which alternate cozy and scary, and plenty of outdoor scenery. Cinderellas go for lots of walks. Gets them in condition to run for their lives. The killer is either a secret psycho or out for money or both. If I'm right, the formula has a lot of room for variation. Well now, have I missed anything?

By the way, I haven't dropped out of the Writers' Exchange; it is just that I cannot take responsibility for running it. Am therefore most grateful to Arty Hayes for doing so, as I can thus stay on the list. Anyone who wants to ask me for plot help, remember I have had lots of practice and some luck. In the long run, writing advice is just whatever you can make of it, and it takes work to make it work! But some writers get a lot of good consulting.

(beth(Formula stories have long received criticism for their very nature. It is fascinating that a genre can survive, indeed thrive, with its basic plot a forgone conclusion. If the public wants a little excitement,

without the fear of an unhappy ending; how can SF appeal to the public-- or should it? Thanks, Alma, for this interesting look at gothics.))

DON

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D'AMMASSA

August 9, 1974

In the last TIGHTBEAM, Roy Tackett, in pointing out that our modern educational system fails to "put the necessary emphasis on science", seems to imply that this is because too much emphasis is put on "humanist" subjects, presumably literature, English, history, and the like. If so, he only sees half the problem. The simple fact is that almost no emphasis is put on anything nowadays that has much to do with formal education. Teachers are reduced (often willingly) to teaching discipline rather than their subject matter, conformity rather than initiative. School administrators care little whether or not the students are getting an education so long as schedules are maintained and disciplinary problems are routine. The result is not only that students don't have a working knowledge of the physical sciences, as Roy pointed out, but that they are incapable of interpreting what they read, or of writing a decent sentence. I supported myself at college for quite some time by correcting the grammar of high school graduates who would sprinkle their papers with terms like "but yet still" and "those there figures" and "it was an affective means". What results is an entire generation of semi-educated people who are so used to having knowledge spoonfed to them, they are incapable of doing elementary reserach, or of intelligently communicating their ideas to others.


Which leads me to Stan Woolston's mention of TV. Television has brought many benefits to the world. Information is disseminated better than ever before. In some cases (SESAME STREET, for example) it has been used as a constructive force in education. But in the field of entertainment, TV has fallen down horrendously. I'm not pointing to the tendency to stay away from controversial matter, although that is a factor, but to the simple fact that TV is designed for a passive audience. The viewer doesn't have to do anything in order to comprehend what is going on. He can get up and use the bathroom, raid the refrigerator, or read the newspaper during most TV shows without losing any of the meaning of the show. And as his ability to interpret data lies dormant, it atrophies. This doesn't mean that all TV shows should be complex or particularly meaningful, but it does mean that the endless string of mindless pap (BEVERLY HILLBILLIES, LOST IN SPACE, BRIGIT AND BERNIE, etc), most of which is simply rehashed versions of other shows, is dulling the senses of the public--which were never particularly alert in the first place. As an example, incidentally, I understand that the series based on the APES movies is going to be filmed from old western scripts, a more telling indictment than which I cannot imagine.

Frank Balazs might be interested in knowing that the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series seems to have been just about terminated, so it is unlikely that Lin Carter will ever get a Hugo for his admittedly excellent editing of that line.

(beth(Relating what Don says to Alma's comments; TV is really the ultimate in formula stories. When they find something that works, they use it, re-use it, copy it, refine it and stick with it until ratings kill it. It is rarely an audience the executives are trying to please--they're out to earn numbers, not kudos. # 20th Century-Fox (TV) which brought us Irwin Allen (LOST IN SPACE, etc.) and the APES films has used "old western scripts" on JUDD FOR THE DEFENSE in the past and I have no doubt that they would do it again or have done it before then))

HARON

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HITE WILKERSON

August 10, 1974

Thanks for TIGHTBEAM, Beth. It is really a nice issue. I was sorry to hear about your fractured elbow, but I'm glad your elbow has recovered well.

I want to inform everyone that I have legally changed my name. Well, my last name.

I think Will Norris' idea for the Teaching Assistance Bureau is very good. I have just completed a Science Fiction course. I can't say that I enjoyed the complete list of books that we read, but I did enjoy the discussion on Science Fiction better than anything else. The instructor seemed to be well informed on the subject of Science Fiction. The class was designed for the SF reader to be able to discern good narrative art from the far more prevalent trash that gluts the SF market. There are an increasing number of colleges that are offering Science Fiction classes and I think a bureau like this is badly needed.

I received a letter from Stan Woolston the other day. He said we are going to need a new head of the membership activities bureau, so I thought that I would mention it.

DAVID

30 East Laurel Street
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HANK

August 13, 1974

Recently I had finished my "tour of duty" at the Andover School of Business and now I've got to look for a job. At least I can devote some more time to fanac now that the Spartan-like atmosphere of study-study-study has been lifted. It was a good time and in some areas it was a bad time. Two years is long enough for anybody, but I just won't quit, gang. I would definitely like to go to night school to pick up a few more subjects. The more ideal subjects would be Speech/Oral Communication, a course in typing, and most important of all, a course in Spanish. I wouldn't take the whole ball of wax--just Conversational Spanish. America is getting to be a bi-lingual country because of the influx of Puerto Ricans, Cubans, South Americans, and just plain Mexicans and Hispanos (Spain).

Regarding my line of work--I will start at the lowest level. Computer operations is where I'll start--but it seems like everybody requires experience even at the bottom of the heap. If all else fails, I'll opt for a job working at a keypunch machine. I've had experience using the IBM 5496 Data Recorder and the IBM 024 Data Recorder. But at school there seems to be no change in machines--why won't they get the latest 80 column keypunch machines, I don't know.

There has been sad news floating around. For those of you who had a good deal of correspondence going with Sean Summers and wanted to know whatever happened to him, it has been heart breaking to hear that Sean got busted along with 3 others in Canada for selling and possessing narcotics. Fortunately for him, his sentence (which would have been 5 years) was shortened due to the help of his father, Archibald Summers. His mother informs me that he can receive unlimited letters, but no packages of any kind. His address is P.O. Box 160, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, CANADA.

I can't understand why Sean would do such a stupid thing. Bob Whitaker, who told me about his conscription in the first place told me he had dropped out of U of T and drifted to nowhere. Maybe the best thing for Sean would've been the Armed Services. Now he'll be lucky if the U of T or any other place will take him.

Tsk.

Lately I've been reading Wertham's critique on fmz and I think it's a humdinger. But I get the feeling that I've been had, mainly for the simple reason is its short length. But to the average mundane who picks up the book, no I say--the above-average (anybody who spends \$10 for a 144+ pp has to be a bit offcentered) mundane, 300 pages of fanzine analysis might swear him off the idea of even trying to become one of US.

Dr. Wertham is a nice man after all. So is Richard Shaver. Ever since Donn Brazier has had the violence-crusader and the Dero-seer in TITLE, I've come to the conclusion that TITLE makes near-myths metamorphosize into ordinary people.

Who would think that the madman who hated comics (bullshit) would turn out to be such a perceptive individual--who would think that a kook who looks for deros under his bed be such a sensitive philosopher.

Would you think so?

PS: You must see THE NATIONAL OBSERVER for the week ending June 29/74. There is a big article on K.C. titled:

Kansas City

JUST A COWTOWN?
NO, IT'S NOWTOWN

the article is by David W. Hacker. The illo spotlighting the article is that of a man with a cow's head but with a human haircut playing saxophone.

KC is an enigma because it's situated in two states. How Texarkanish can you get?

PS: The BOSKONE XII is slated to have Anne McCaffrey as the Guest of Honor. It will be held February 28 to March 2, 1975. Membership is \$3 (I believe) and the co-chairpersons are Terry and Ann McCutcheon of NESFA. The hotel rates at the Sheraton-Boston have gone up \$1. I believe the pool has been converted to year round use, too.



BENJAMIN P.
DICK

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August 15, 1974

Nope, I haven't anything to say about TB, other than my pleasure at its readability and fine editing (except your comments were tough to read--the stencil did not pick up the typing well.)

I did send a trivial contribution directly to 4E and urge everyone else to send anything. It's a great project!

Anyway, I did want you to know your editing work is appreciated--even by so tired a one as myself.

(beth(The results of typing with the script was really not worth the effort, so back to parenthesis set off by my name. # Thanks for your support to the Ackermansion.))

The program will be held on...
It will be held...
The hotel...
The pool has been...
The program will be held on...
It will be held...
The hotel...
The pool has been...



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T I G H T B E A M

Beth Slick
9030 Harratt, Apt. 2
West Hollywood, CA 90069

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