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Ionisphere is the publication of the National Fantasy Fan Federation's Fan-Pro Coordinating Bureau. It is published bimonthly. Contents pertain to the purpose of the bureau, creating better regard between fans and professional writers, artists and editors of fantasy and science fiction, and maintaining good contacts. Relevant material is customarily accepted. Back issues are available in the N3F annals at <http://n3f.org> .

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EDITORIAL



Feuding and Internal Conflict

Little can be gained of value to the science fiction fan by feuding, that is, by finding matter for conflict within our literary realm and carrying it into actual battling via the medium of the US Mail or the Internet. That feuding exists within science fiction fandom is well documented in Sam Moskowitz's book *THE IMMORTAL STORM*; I have myself "witnessed"—you don't actually witness things occurring on paper, but they get quite a grip on the imagination—several notable feuds. There was the time Dave Kyle and the Dietzes were contesting fannish matters in a court where suing was involved; there was the big fight over where a Midwestcon was to be held; there was a battle over the passage of the Fantasy Rotator in the Cult which resulted in a pamphlet being circulated as a fractional rotator called "You ----ing Son of a Bitch #1", and at a later time in the Cult's history there was a broadsheet distributed called "T-----, You Silly Bitch"; there was the big dispute with Claude Degler and a feud over Richard Shaver and one in which I was involved concerning the worth of the writings of Edgar Allan Poe, all of these things which should not have occurred in literary societies. Writers, too, have gotten warlike, such as Isaac Asimov reacting to parodies of his work by fan Randall Garrett with a poem saying Garrett had two heads and calling him an "s.o.b."

These do science fiction and fantasy fandom no good and are not the order of the day when they occur. It would seem that people with similar interests which unite them in printed form should be able to do better than to fight about things; discussion, even argument is more in order than some of the blasts that get started, such as "derogations" and the like, which someone tried to institute as a fannish tradition.

We have the remains of these early feuds and feuds occurring at the present time both to contend with in fandom today, all of them matters which could be resolved by

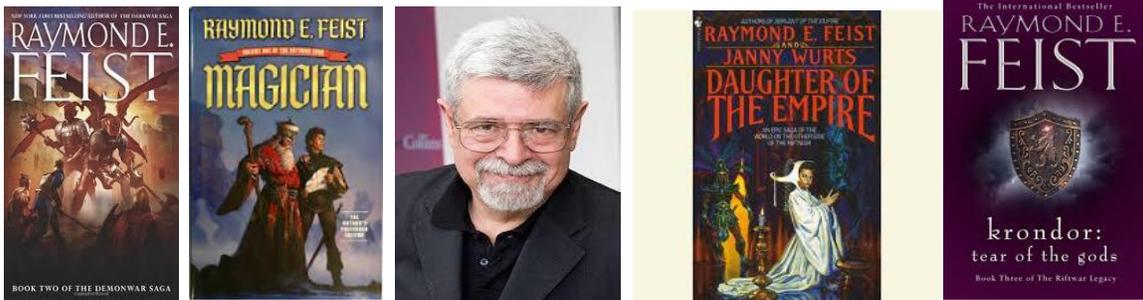
people trying to resolve them, but there isn't enough effort being made to bring these conflicts to an end—maybe people are enjoying shouting at each other. You can see how this is not what is favored in this bureau, which is a Fan-Pro COORDINATING bureau, not intended as a stirrer-up of strife. Yet there is considerable conflict going on, chiefly behind the official scenes, in the N3F itself, and a lot of blocking of communications, too, which might result in part from attempting to interfere in conflicts, but which is itself a conflict. Before these matters get even more out of hand than they have been from what I have been seeing, I'm bringing forth a note of pacifism in this editorial, so that there will be at least something said in favor of peaceful solutions. I don't mention names here; you see that I am trying not to cause any trouble myself about this. I'd like it if we were doing what we ought to be doing, and by that I mean what's known to all to be what we ought to be doing, rather than being my own ideas about what we ought to do—we ought to do what we ought to be doing instead of fighting. Surely we did not join the NFFF to fight amongst ourselves.

If there is a place for fighting, it should be somewhere other than our organization. Now I am wondering if observation of current events, which are riots all over the country and conflict with the government and epidemics, might be the cause of the conflicts occurring within science fiction fandom. I remember Degler used to say that fans were superior to other people, and that seemed to be the source of the trouble which was centering around him—a conflict with people outside of fandom getting into a conflict with people inside of fandom, since the people in fandom were also people outside of fandom, what with their regular lives. They shouldn't be asking "which side are you on" of other people in a literary society.

Science fiction is full of warfare conflict, but need we do any acting out of what we are reading in the amphitheater of science fiction's readership? Let's not make a personal matter out of the things we read in our books. For instance, "Is technology a good thing" is something that could be a matter of dispute among writers, and it may end up being debated in science fiction fandom, but let's not enact what's in the stories as a consequence of disputes of this nature. Save the action for the reading, and don't try to emulate the protagonists of novels whose points of view are in dispute. Or at least, don't do it with science fiction fans whose views of the things of science fiction are different from our own.

The essential thing is to maintain a peaceful attitude. Let's try to maintain that here.

AUTHOR INTERVIEW: RAYMOND E. FEIST by John Thiel



JT: I learned when looking over your bibliography that you were doing some of your books in collaboration with William Forstchen, who was a student at the same college I attended and whom I met at the Wabashcon held at Purdue. This leads me to start off this interview with a question about this. How did you happen to meet Mr. Forstchen and what brought about this collaboration?

RF: That's a long story. The short version is I was approached by a publisher who wanted me to do a "big name/little name" spin-off series. I refused, given any book with my name on it I co-write. Back then it was a trend to have people like Clive Cusler or Robert Ludlum spin a story with the person who did the actual writing, then take most of the money. My editor at Harper made me a better offer to stay with them, and I convinced her that I should do those three books with three authors. I knew Joel Rosenberg, but only knew Bill and Steve Sterling through their work, which I admired. So I flew out to North Carolina and visited Bill in his office and it took less than an hour for him to agree, and I said "I want to do Sharpe's Rifles", and he said, "I want to do Xenophon", and the basic premise of Honored Enemy was born. I've co-written with four writers, and I will say Bill turned out to be the easiest of the four to team up with. I think my work with the others turned out well, even brilliant in the Empire series with Janny Wurts, but Bill was fun from start to finish.

JT: Seems he would be. It's always been a big thing to see science fiction and fantasy books on the best-seller lists of newspapers. I find you were on the **New York Times** best-seller list and the **London Times** best-seller list simultaneously. Which of your books have been best-sellers? How many were sold when the books started selling well? What were reviewers and critics saying about them?

RF: Fantasy hit the lists when the last volume of LORD OF THE RINGS was published in paperback in the mid-1960s. In the 1970s, Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Phillip Jose Farmer, Arthur C. Clarke and Frank Herbert all started hitting the best seller lists. By the

time I came along, Terry Brooks, Stephen Donaldson, and others also had best-sellers, so it wasn't as much of a deal as it had been before the 1960s. As for my books? My first New York Times best-seller was the paperback edition of *A DARKNESS AT SETHANON*, and my first hardcover was *PRINCE OF THE BLOOD*. As for the Times (London), my first there was *Darkness* in hardcover. Since then I've lost track, as some titles hit lists in one market, but not another, so I can say over my career, I've pretty much had something on one or another list around the world, in Australia, Canada, Brazil, France. As for numbers, I don't keep track. My publishers and my agent have a better sense of that than I care to bother with. In the thirty-eight years since *MAGICIAN* was published, in all languages and editions, I think we're somewhere in the twenty million copies of the thirty-three current titles out. The thing to keep in mind is that I've never had a book go out of print in the US/UK markets, which is my proudest achievement. Not a lot of books published in 1982 have been continuously in print.

JT: Have you published short stories in fantasy magazines?

RF: A few. My first publication was in a little-known magazine, **Fantasy Book** (issue 4) in May of 1982, even though the story, "Profit and the Grey Assassin" was written after *Magician*. I did a couple for the *LEGENDS* anthology edited by Robert Silverberg, and a *THIEVES WORLD* story for Lynn Abby, and a Dominic Flannery story for a tribute to Poul Anderson, and a collaboration with Jenny Wurts for a collection edited by Al Sarantonio. Short fiction is harder than novels, in my opinion. It's why some of Stephen King, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway's best work has been short fiction.

JT: Apparently you have done computer games, and there are also computer games related to your books. What do you think of science fiction computer games? Some of these are said to be role-playing games. Do you think these games make for a more active fan activity?

RF: I'm not sure I understand the question, as all media, books, games, comics, and film/tv have been cross-pollinating, so to speak, for decades. I'm old enough to remember when *FORBIDDEN PLANET* came out and it was the first full-color wide screen large-budget science fiction film, and it was a long time before we saw something like *STAR WARS*. Same with TV. *LOST IN SPACE* got better ratings than *STAR TREK* in the 1960s, but look at the *Star Trek* franchises now. Same with games. Those old low resolution DOS games spawned the evolution of home entertainment to the point where you have over ten million people playing *World of Warcraft* every day, and people lining up overnight to get the first copy of the new *BLACK OPS*, *HALO*, whatever

title. I guess my point is this stuff isn't linear. Everyone is madly stealing ideas, or at least being inspired, by everything else going on around them. I reject the notion of "fan" in the old sense. There are people playing World of Warcraft who have never read a fantasy novel, and folks watching STAR TREK: PICARD who've never heard of Heinlein or Clarke. There are people who've seen THE BLACK PANTHER who have never read a Marvel Comic. It's all mainstream today.

JT: Do you know when computer games came about? What is some of the background of these games?

RF: That's a very broad question. If you mean computer games in general, I'm sure there are many books on that. My first exposure was to a text game called ADVENTURE, that you could play on the mainframe computer at UCSD when I was a student in the mid-1970s. That led to early home computer games on the Atari, TRS-89, Apple II, *etc.* I can't recall the first time I saw graphics for a game that weren't little colored (or black and white) dots and boxes. It was the late 1980s when the home game market started to take off. By 1990 it was a major entertainment segment. As for my games, I was approached by a terrific guy at Dynamix (a division of Sierra On-Line) named John Cutter, who wanted me to write for them. I explained he couldn't afford me to write a script, but educated him about licensing, and the result was *Betrayal At Krondor*, which won several game of the year awards. A few years later we did *Return To Krondor*. That industry was a lot like the Wild West back then and companies rose and fell rapidly. The serious players like Activision, MicroProse, Electronic Arts, Blizzard, all grew morphed, merged, and today the computer gaming industry is a major segment of the entertainment world; witness how many films are now spin-offs of game franchises.

JT: You have an Empire Trilogy. I doubt if that resembles Isaac Asimov's, but he also did a trilogy referred to as an Empire Trilogy. Did you ever get into any discussions with Asimov about this coincidence?

RF: I met Isaac, as we were both published by Doubleday for a time, and ironically, his editor then, Jennifer Brehl, is now my editor at HarperCollins in New York. Isaac passed away just a few days after *MISTRESS OF THE EMPIRE* was published, and I hadn't seen him in seven years or so. He was a New Yorker (who wouldn't fly) and I lived in California, so the only time I ever saw him was bumping into him at the Doubleday office or at an east coast Science Fiction convention. We didn't start calling it *The Empire Trilogy* until a year or so later. One thing about titles, there are many coincidences. In November 1982, there were three books called "Magician" published. One was my

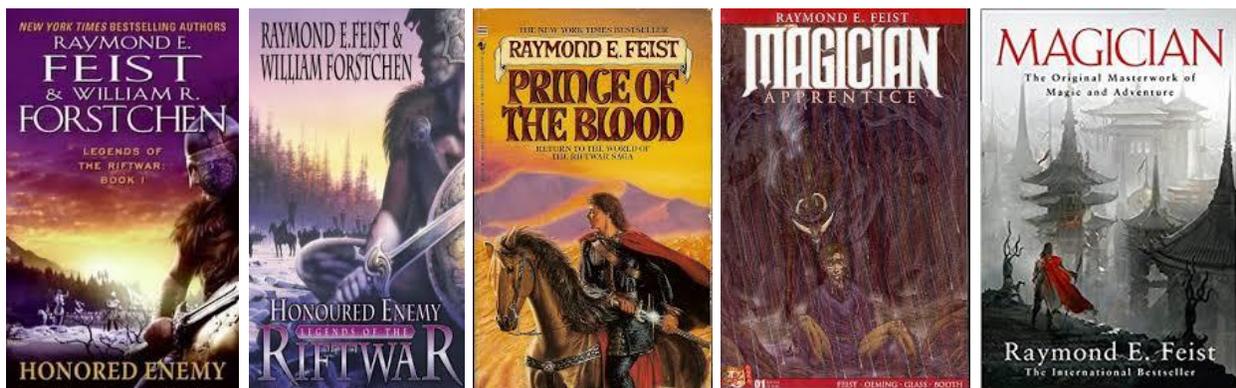
novel. One was a psychological thriller. And the last was the biography of a stage magician.

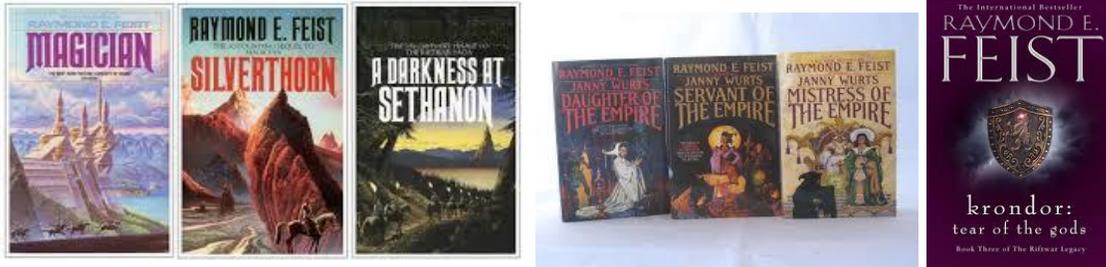
JT: How did you get started writing fantasy? What attracted you to the fantasy field? How about science fiction?

RF: I grew up reading adventure novels, Robert Louis Stevenson, Sir Walter Scott, and historical novels, and fantasy was the closest I could get to that in a modern market. Also I had been working on some world building for a game we played in college, so I just borrowed Midkemia from the gang of friends and started writing *Magician* in that universe. Apparently people liked it enough to keep me writing in that world for more than thirty years. The thing about fantasy is you get to look at human behavior in a very exaggerated way, which is why I think it attracts so many readers of fantasy novels and a massive audience for fantasy films and TV shows. Supernatural has been running on TV for fifteen years now, but I remember as a kid watching *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*, *OUTER LIMITS*, and other science fiction/fantasy shows. Because the worlds of fantasy can be so rich and varied, you can take characters to places you can't go in "real world" fiction. Not better, just different, and that's what appealed to me.

JT: Is there anything you would like to say about the science fiction and fantasy fields and their significance in literature?

RF: It's established a place. There are science fiction and fantasy works that have garnered literary praise after decades of being dismissed by academics and literary critics. It's the work of people like Ursula K. LeGuin, Octavia Butler, Neil Gaiman, Johnathan Carol and others that are now being taught alongside Herman Melville, Maya Angelou, and the writers I was brought up on, Twain, Hawthorn, Austin, *etc.*





CATHODE RADIATION

For Karen Westwood

by Cardinal Cox

The faint glow of the screen when you turn off the light
Your parents threatened you would end up with square eyes

The tiny dot after announcer said goodnight

Later discovering wasn't one of their lies

Public information films between the testcard

The schools' programmes on the box all through the morning

We didn't know our retina was getting scarred

The late-night horror films that left us all yawning

Fast food and toy adverts during the children's shows

News reports at six brought death to the living room

Telling us this is how the end of the world goes

We are broadcasting until the big bomb goes boom!

We were just a lab rat TV generation

Suffering from optic nerve degeneration

COUNTER CULTURE by Jeffrey Redmond



art by Isac Bernardo

A new way of living came into being

From the ancient Er-Dan manuscripts (Codex 2559), as translated by Ed-Mon:

On the three-mooned planet, in the salt mountains beyond the deserted regions of the furthest continent, there lived many survivors of the invasions. They had retreated to

there in order to avoid the endless wars and destructions, and had made new laws for themselves, in the numerous and previously uninhabited valleys and fields below the hills and peaks. They set up their own encampments with the beginnings of farms, villages, and other places. And, in time, they even developed their own culture and system, and independent existence. Because of their isolation from all of the other places, they were seldom visited or troubled by anyone from elsewhere, and were relatively safe and secure in their mountain world.

The inhabitants soon thrived in their isolation, and they prospered in all of the more important ways. They gathered in the abundant mountain and forest creatures for domesticated livestock, raised edible crops, and fished the salt streams and rivers for foods. The males and females developed more equal interactions with each other, and offspring were raised in relative health, comfort, and secure safety more than in other places on the continent. A better system of trade developed, along with more, freer elections for community leaders. Finally, temples to the solar star, the three moons, the forces of the seasons, and the deities of the sky, land, and water were all built. In this way all religions were respected and assisted, leaving nothing to fate or chance. And displeasing no individual, force, or power in the tangible or intangible existence they now had achieved. Around these temples they began forming permanent communities of houses and other buildings, and the inhabitants enjoyed lives of peace, harmony, and tranquility.

The salt mountaineers had little of wealth in the way of precious metals or gemstones, but began to achieve remarkable amounts of progress in the accumulations of literary texts. Not having to spend their non-laboring or resting times in military pursuits, they were able to devote much of their energies to more scholarly pursuits. They first recited poems, songs, and stories to their young, and, in time, these were written down on whatever available materials were obtainable. Scrolls of documents on parchments, skins, and even cloths were slowly but surely amassed, and eventually in numbers enough to store in quantity in the temples' new archives. These places then became both spiritual and learning centers, and each community soon competed for the prestige of having the most knowledge in their temple. Musical instruments of all kinds were made and then their uses taught to the young. And, in time, despite their separation from other places, the mountains communities became quite cultured.

Along the rocky coasts of the continent, the villages of the fishers of the fresh water seas were slowly but surely destroyed by endless raids from the marauding bands from

the hinter places of the interior. The fishers had been survivors of naval invasion fleets which had been lost to too many battles or storms, while the marauders had formerly been members of conquering or conquered armies. There had been endless fighting throughout the continent, and finally the coastal dwellers gave up and sailed away in their small boats to other places, leaving the raiders with no one else to prey upon. This was quite an upset to the leaders of the bands, because now they would have to try to lead attacks against the other marauding groups. Attempting to fight other armed and combat-experienced warriors was much more difficult, and far less rewarding, than merely attacking and stealing from unarmed fishers and their families.

The leaders of the bands decided, reluctantly, to meet and discuss their new dilemmas. They argued and threatened each other at length, but eventually decided, reluctantly, to try to unite and form themselves into one larger force. However, once this was done, they all realized that they were now an army without a purpose. And they decided to get a reason for being, renewing their continued energies and violently forceful existences, in the same ways as before. They had heard rumors of the inhabitants on the other side of the continent, and of their being both prosperous and unprotected in the valleys of the distant salt mountains. After much discussion, the leaders of the now united bands decided to venture out to this ultimate destination. They made many long and powerful speeches to their followers, and excited them with reports about all the wealth that would be theirs, just for the easy taking. Eventually this new plan was accepted by all of them, and they formed themselves up into as much disciplined order as they could manage, for the great undertaking to come.

The combined bands set out from the coasts and marched inland across the barren places. But with so many to provide for altogether, food and drink became scarce, and the winds grew colder each night. The movement proceeded more slowly as time went on, and the ranks of the united marauders dwindled. They began dropping from starvation, exhaustion, or desertion. Soon after this, they began killing each other over formerly trivial complaints, and even fell to attacking their leaders to replace them with themselves. Eventually, a much smaller number of the banded raiders reached the salt mountains than had originally started out. Even fewer survived the travails through the many passes to the valleys beyond. Yet the survivors eventually reached their destinations, and at long last beheld the lush and fertile communities the inhabitants had made.

For the mountaineers already long there, these ragged and completely worn

newcomers seemed very strange indeed. The former initially welcomed the latter as guests to be revived and entertained. Soon, however, they realized the armed arrivals to be the crude, coarse, ill-mannered, cruel, and wildly indifferent fellows they really were. As they recovered, some of the raiders tried to compete and pick fights with the native inhabitants, and sought riches and places to seize and plunder. But this was all in vain, as they soon realized that the far more numerous locals were necessary for their recoveries, and far too peaceful to provoke. And the inhabitants had little in the way of precious items to steal and carry away. The livestock had to remain in the valleys, and it was impossible to seize and carry off an entire farm. Some of the more dangerous of the marauders then began to once again quarrel with each other, and this caused more than a few funerals that season. Yet, there was still a great threat to the native inhabitants, as it seemed that these wild nomads from the deserted regions could eventually decide to begin just slaughtering them, for no logical reason at all.

As they recovered from their arduous journey, the self-made leaders of the bands met with the elected leaders of the valleys, and argued about all of the sudden changes that had come about because of the new situations they all found themselves in. A final meeting of the two sides came about, out of total necessity, to prevent any further attempts at increasing the plundering and bloodshed. There were then a great many threats to fight made by all these leaders, despite the elected ones knowing that they had little or no combat experience, and the self-made ones knowing that they were vastly outnumbered. If there was actually any kind of open conflict, both sides knew they would lose heavily, and neither side had much to gain from a real war. But there was still much loud shouting, and attempts to dominate the proceedings, especially by the newcomers. The meeting was held in the main Three Moons temple, and the vocalizations were amplified and echoed throughout the walls and surrounding areas. It went on all day with neither side giving in to any of the other's demands or arguments. Yet, this too was not to last forever, as a great surprise for all in attendance there suddenly occurred.

The temples each had a musical performance every evening at sunset, to honor the deities and forces each represented. That evening it was the turn of El-Lena, a soft and sweet, wise and intelligent, delicate and gentle tube pipe player to perform there. She decided that despite the chaotic proceedings she would still attend, as a true professional, as scheduled....the noise and clamor notwithstanding. After only a brief hesitation, she forced herself to remain courageous, and went into the temple past all of

the yelling and screaming males. El-Lena took her usual musicians' place by the altar, put her long wind instrument to her lips, and began to play. These were lovely harmonic and melodic tunes, reflecting her own personality, and these began to entertain them.

Slowly but surely all of the males stopped their nonsensical noise making, to begin listening to the wonderful pipe music. El-Lena played and played the whole while that they remained there, and her soothing tunes eventually calmed all of them down. After a while, the males continued with their meeting, but now in much more rational and hushed tones. They eventually concluded everything in much more relaxed and positive ways, and they decided to begin working together for the best for all. They finally left, after pledging themselves to permanent and binding agreements, and established a lasting truce. And everyone who had been there well remembered the beautiful music that they had heard, and the wondrous effect it had had on all of them. Being males, they didn't always think to remember to give praise to the female who had performed it all so well, but they had appreciated it all nonetheless. And it was not to end there.

After much furthering of negotiations, but these times without threats, new family ties were established. The main leader of the invaders arranged it to marry one of the native daughters of the leading elected one. Soon after this, the next in command of the newcomers married the new young priestess of the main Solar Temple. She had taken a liking to him for his fame and dynamic character, and letting him know that she was dancing just for him during the seasonal ritual ceremonies. And the third one in command after him had been so impressed with El-Lena that he had not been able to take his eyes off of her all during her performance. He was so enchanted by her tonal talents that he pursued her night and day to finally marry her himself. The mountaineers generally felt these agreements and marriages to be positive things, as they would all help to restore order in the communities. But the former marauders didn't all think so. And because of the changes and agreements their leaders had now made for them, some left the mountain life to return to from whence they had come. Their fates in the deserted wastes are unknown.

The rest of them put away their weapons and stayed to become more absorbed into the native population, through laboring or marriages, and further settlement throughout the abundant valleys. Many of the local females were attractive and desirable, and more than some were as yet not married. Many of the former raiders decided to follow their leaders' examples, and began behaving themselves more, remaining where they had gotten themselves to. They took up the more prestigious occupations of farming,

livestocking, fishing, or crafts as it suited them. They even began to participate in the elections, and generally ceased their more aggressive and nomadic previous ways of life. They became, in turn, more attractive as mates for the females, and in this way began to establish themselves more and more in the communities.

As the many seasons went by in the salt mountains, the wilder newcomers more fully mellowed in their older ages. They too eventually joined in the studies and maintenance of the cultural arts, preserving and protecting their adopted ways of life, as the others had done. And no meeting of leaders anywhere in the lush valleys was ever held again without gentle music being played the whole while. And even though the musicians were not always as fully praised or rewarded as much as they should have been, their talents and abilities were nevertheless encouraged and appreciated by all of the others in the society. Their deliciously tranquil music playing kept a quietly soothing blissfulness of gentle passivity upon the new culture. And in this way the peaceful coexistence for all was thus preserved. And all of the combined inhabitants' descendants continued to intermarry and to dwell among the mountain valleys, in peace and prosperity, for many, many seasons into the future.

THE DECADE OF THE WEIRD by Will Mayo

Back around fifty years ago I had a weird fascination with Von Daniken's theory of ancient astronauts from the stars above. It took some convincing from my betters back in the mid-70s to bring me to conclude that it was simply a racist belief to claim that long ago native people in Africa and the Americas could not just master astronomy and architecture all by themselves without any need for extraterrestrial visitors to lend them a hand. But for a while with me the belief in ancient astronauts held strong along with other more esoteric stuff like ghost ships in the Bermuda Triangle and extrasensory perception. It was an interesting time to a kid. Yes, that was the Seventies, the decade of the weird.

WHAT'S THAT? by Neal Wilgus

once is enough, he told himself but he wasn't listening so he did it again

which was all right he figured

if he could just remember what it was in the first place maybe.

MALLORY REXFORD by John Polselli



Art by Sofia Antonova



The sun was bright and golden when I stepped out of my car and began browsing through an outdoor market during a sultry afternoon in mid-July. I was in a seaside town—a settlement in which heretofore I had been unacquainted. As I perused the numerous folding tables that were filled to overflowing with assorted merchandise my attention was drawn to a woman who was standing several feet from me and casting brief looks in my direction. Initially I construed her furtive glances as being scarcely more than an instance of misinterpreted resemblance. However, when she grinned from ear to ear and gestured to me that I join her, I understood clearly that her end in view was a romantic affair. After purchasing one or two items at the outdoor marketplace she proceeded to invite me to her home, which was scarcely a mile from the market.

Mallory Rexford was a conundrum in both her physical appearance and her disposition. The second-mentioned was made up of a deportment that was unusual for a woman of the present age. Her lifestyle was notably out of date. Entering her house was comparable to having journeyed through time back to the America of the mid-nineteenth century. I observed not a trace of contemporary home furnishings or habiliments. With the exclusion of indoor plumbing all was conspicuously quaint and colonial. Be that as it may, her corporeal frame was certainly the most egregious characteristic of her substance. To define her as being exotic is in no way inaccurate. Nevertheless, the adjective falls short in delineating the precise otherworldly nature of her physiognomy. Her eyes were large, pearl-gray in color, and curved in the direction of her temples. Her nose, though pronounced, was shapely, bestowing her face with a hint of high breeding—the lips full, yet pallid, as was her complexion. She had long shiny hair of an auburn shade. At the same time, it was the interminglement of her features that gave rise to the concept of unearthliness. Offering me a glass of port, she motioned that I seat myself on the sofa. As I fixed my eye on hers I felt a chill creeping all through me. Instinctively I ascribed the sensation as being scarcely more than a symptom of my

inherent shyness. But as my visit wore on I became certain that my apprehension was brought about by an accuracy of discernment. When nightfall came near my host went to a large mahogany cupboard and drew forth a pair of candles in pewter holders. Reaching for a lengthy wooden match she lighted the tapers with ritualistic prudence, then placed them gently on a tea table in advance of the sofa. I watched the flickering of the candle flames scattering weird shadows upon her face, and in a period of spontaneous reverie I fancied those reflections as being delineations of evil spirits lying hidden in the secret chambers of her soul.

For a while she didn't speak. But in the course of time she began asking me a series of conventional questions in order to lay the foundation for courtship.

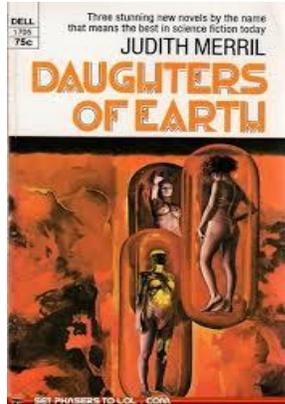
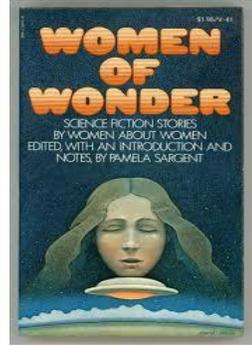
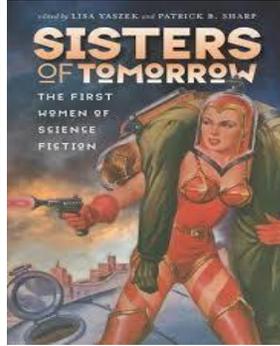
While she was talking I took notice of a peculiar wooden box that was placed observably on the mahogany cupboard. Square in shape, the box had a faint outline on it which seemed to be in the likeness of a human head. In the location of where a face would be there was a crimson blemish. As I puzzled over that unusual container a strong foreboding swept over me, becoming more intensified as each second went by. At the same time a sense impression of euphoria was combined with the feeling of abject fear, and ultimately became dominant. Before long I had become a victim of sorcery. Whatever it was that lay hidden in that box had the capability of transforming me into an automaton—a marionette—a prisoner of Mallory Rexford.

Within a short period I was thrust into a state of enchantment and wandered through the house for an indeterminate amount of time captivated by an assortment of ornaments and various bric-a-brac as though they were the most glamorous and beguiling objects in existence. For the duration the sorceress was caught up in a fit of diabolical laughter.

"I want to live with you in your magical house always!" I cried out. Yet even as I spoke those words I knew they were not true. I craved for escape, but my volition was in duress. Still I fought. I resisted. I staggered towards the door with the sound of her black-hearted laughter echoing through the recesses of my mind.

It was at that moment that I saw the wooden box begin to tremble on the cupboard. It shook faintly at first, but soon it increased in velocity. I stood paralyzed as I watched the lid of the receptacle begin to open. That's when I saw it—a claw-like appendage stretching hideously from the box. In panic I turned away, and resisting this spell that had been cast upon me I bolted straight for the door. As I drove home I watched the freight trains passing by in the loneliness of the menacing night.

BEHIND THE SCENES: Why Is There A Problem With Women In Science Fiction?
by JEFFREY REDMOND



Since 1953, the Hugo Awards have been one of science fiction's most prestigious honors—past winners include Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and Ursula Le Guin. When

the 2016 results were announced women and diversity were the clear winners.

However, if you saw the list of titles in contention for the awards, you'd have noticed some oddities, such as Chuck Tingle's *Space Raptor Butt Invasion* and My Little Pony's *The Cutie Map*. That's because the awards—nominated and voted on by science fiction writers and readers—were targeted by two major voting blocs: the Sad Puppies, who started their campaign in 2013, and the Rabid Puppies, who appeared the year after and have been growing stronger ever since.

The Sad Puppies wanted more traditional, mainstream popular science fiction on the ballot. The more extreme Rabid Puppies, who have ties with the Gamergate movement, were about creating chaos. So their bloc included ridiculous-sounding works, both to mock the awards and stack the ballot to prevent more diverse books being nominated.

Both groups' gripe was with contemporary trends in science fiction toward more literary works with progressive themes. Vox Day, leader of the Rabid Puppies, complained that "publishers have been trying to pass off romance in space and left-wing diversity lectures as science fiction". Last year's leader of the Sad Puppies, Brad R. Torgersen, likewise complained about "soft science majors (lit and humanities degrees) using SF/F as a tool to critically examine and vivisection 21st Century Western society". The Hugos, he said, were being used as an "affirmative action award".

A significant number of those "soft science majors" writing "left-wing diversity lectures" were, of course, women. Female authors have dominated science fiction awards of late.

Recently, women (and people of color) did very well at the awards. Ironically, the Puppies' activities have now galvanized more progressive members of the World Science Fiction Society to use their voting rights. The best novel was *THE FIFTH SEASON*, a tale of a planet experiencing apocalyptic climate change, written by N.K. Jemisin—a black, female writer. Best novella was "Binti" by Nnedi Okorafor. The best short story, "Cat Pictures Please", was written by Naomi Kritzer and both best editor gongs went to women.

But the ongoing saga of the Puppies and their attempts to derail the Hugos exemplifies broader conflicts within the realm of science fiction—an enormously popular, lucrative and controversial genre that has major issues with women.

In recent years, the bestselling female-authored *Divergent* and *Hunger Games* series have been made into multi-million dollar movie adaptations. But women's contributions to science fiction have historically gone unnoticed—as a look at any compilation list of

the “best” science fiction books will attest.

MIT Technology Review’s Top Ten Hard Science Fiction Books of All Time includes one woman. “Hard sci fi” tends to stick to real scientific theories and physical laws.

FORBIDDEN PLANET’s list of Fifty Science Fiction Books You Must Read includes three women, with Ursula K. Le Guin appearing twice (making it 92% male). The Best Science Fiction Books website has four women in their list of twenty-five (84% male). And Goodreads’ Best Science Fiction list has ten women in the top one hundred (making it 88% male), with Le Guin Books chosen three times. The books of Le Guin’s that appear in these lists—THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS (1969), THE DISPOSSESSED (1974), and THE LATHE OF HEAVEN (1971)—all have something very significant in common: male protagonists.

Seventy five percent of science fiction writers are men. Consequently, there are not a great number of realistic or relatable female characters. No wonder fewer female than male readers have traditionally found it a rewarding genre. Indeed, feminist science fiction writer and critic Joanna Russ has famously stated that there are “no real women” in science fiction, only images of them, since so many women characters are based purely on male fantasy.

Recently, science fiction and fantasy reader Liz Lutgendorff published an article in the **New Statesman** after reading the National Public Radio’s list of the Top One Hundred Science Fiction and Fantasy Books—voted on by sixty thousand readers. Lutgendorff found the “continued and persuasive sexism” within these books to be “misogynistic” and “shockingly offensive”.

Speculative fiction writer and critic Sarah Gailey, meanwhile, recently noticed that, of the thirty-one genre books featuring female protagonists she had recently read, two-thirds included scenes of sexual violence. Writing on the TOR website, she called for genre writers to “do better” when it comes to imagining alternative realities for women:

“We can’t suspend our disbelief enough to erase casual misogyny from the worlds we build. We can give a wizard access to a centuries-old volcano-powered spaceship, but we balk at the notion of a woman who has never been made to feel small and afraid.”

Gailey mentions the Hugo-winning NK Jemisin as one of the rare writers whose “imaginations are strong enough to let their female characters have stories that don’t include sexual violence.”

Still, this objectification of women in science fiction sadly extends beyond the page.

Hugo Award winning fan writer Jim C. Hines reminds us that science fiction superstar Isaac Asimov was notorious for harassing women at conventions. Hines recently urged the science fiction, fantasy and comics community to stop “looking away” from the problem of sexual harassment in the industry.

An ongoing debate in the science fiction community is about the merits of “hard” vs “soft” science fiction. And the role of gender is significant here.

Robert A. Heinlein—considered the “dean” of science fiction writers and counted alongside Asimov and Clarke as one of the three key figures of the genre—has defined science fiction as: Realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method.

Hard science fiction tends to stick to or extrapolate from real scientific theories and physical laws as they are currently understood. These include Andy Weir’s *THE MARTIAN* (2011), Carl Sagan’s *Contact* (1985), and Arthur C. Clarke’s own *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY* (1968).

Soft science fiction is not so concerned with exploring the finer details of technology and physics. Although its stories are generally set in the future, it is more interested in psychological and social aspects of the narrative. These include works such as Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* (2011), Margaret Atwood’s *THE HANDMAID’S TALE* (1985), or George Orwell’s *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR* (1948).

Hard science fiction tends to be a boys’ club, while soft science fiction can be seen as more accommodating to female writers. There is a perceived hierarchy of merit operating in these classifications as well: “hard” sounds masculine and virile, while “soft” connotes a weaker, less potent, feminized form of the genre. This is why “hard” science fiction is more likely to be considered among the “best” science fiction, and why the “soft” science fiction that more women tend to write doesn’t often get acknowledged.

In 2013, the judges of the Arthur C. Clarke Award, Britain’s most prestigious science fiction prize, disqualified a number of submitted books on the basis that they were not “technically” science fiction. They were deemed by the judges to be fantasy—a genre that does not require the realism of science—which has twice as many female authors compared to science fiction. As Damien Walters has observed, women’s writing is “dismissed as fantasy, while the fantasies of men are granted some higher status as science fiction”.

The Hugo Awards, like most major literary prizes, have also traditionally been

dominated with books by and about men and boys.

In 2015, the Sad Puppies successfully placed dozens of books on the final ballot. They then released a tongue-in-cheek Terms of Surrender to their culture war with the Hugo Awards, declaring,

“Only those works embodying the highest principles of Robert A. Heinlein shall be permitted. Girls who read TWILIGHT and books like it shall be expelled from the genre. We will recognize THE HUNGER GAMES as a proper SF novel, but the sequels are out.”

These jibes reveal sexist undertones, intolerance for diversity, and disdain for the kind of speculative fiction that is written by women and read by girls.

The hierarchy of “hardness” in science fiction, as well as being a dubious way of judging merit, puts women at a distinct disadvantage. There’s a serious shortage of women working in science, and only twenty-eight percent of the world’s scientific researchers are women.

If women aren’t encouraged to pursue careers in scientific fields, it’s unlikely they’re going to have the confidence to write in a genre that uses science as a launch pad for fiction.

And yet, the first example of science fiction is often said to be Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s gothic horror FRANKENSTEIN, the tale of a man who, through scientific experimentation, discovers a way to imbue inanimate matter with life. The novel was first published anonymously in 1818.

Overall, it was popular and well-received. But when critics discovered Anonymous was a young woman, the author’s gender caused such offence as to render the writing irrelevant. **The British Critic** famously concluded its scathing review thus:

“The writer of it is, we understand, a female. This is an aggravation of that which is the prevailing fault of the novel. But if our authoress can forget the gentleness of her sex, it is no reason why we should. And we shall therefore dismiss the novel without further comment.”

Discrimination on the basis of sex isn’t surprising for the time, but what is surprising is how little has changed for women’s writing over these past two centuries.

Women may not be likely to publish anonymously these days, but they may still erase their female identities to appease male readership. Many women are encouraged to publish under their initials, to choose a gender-neutral name, or even to take a male pseudonym.

Science fiction writer Alice Sheldon, winner of two Hugos and three Nebula Awards

under the pseudonym James Tiptree, Jr., passed her writing off as male for around a decade between 1967-77 before she was exposed as a woman.

Not only did she enjoy more success as a male writer, she was also in a better position to advocate for female writers. She even found that her female pseudonym Raccoona Sheldon was more likely to be included in anthologies if her submission was accompanied by a letter of recommendation from Tiptree.

Unfortunately, once it was revealed that Tiptree was, as she so sadly described herself, “nothing but an old lady from Virginia”, she lost much of the authority and respect she had previously enjoyed in the male-dominated science fiction community.

Today, the fact remains that most female writers would still be better off using a male name. In 2015, emerging novelist Catherine Nicholls found that when she sent her manuscript out under the name of “George”, she was eight times as successful as when she sent it out as “Catherine”.

More than half of the human race is female, yet three-quarters of the voices heard in science fiction are male. And the rest are under consistent commercial pressure to sound male too. Of the thirty science fiction writers named the industry’s highest honor of “Grand Master”, only five are female (16%).

A study of the habits of readers in 2014 found that men “tend to gravitate to reading more male authors”. During the first year of publication, it found a female author’s audience will be around eighty percent female. A male author’s work will be read by a fifty percent split of men and women.

But trying to tackle this problem by using a pseudonym or an author’s initials perpetuates the invisibility of women on bookshelves, denying other women role models. It’s vitally important to have more women writing science fiction—using their real names, being reviewed, being read and winning awards.

But the Puppies groups stand against affirmative action as a way of redressing the imbalance between the sexes in science fiction. However, there are many reasons why affirmative action by publishers and reviewers is needed in a genre suffering from entrenched sexism.

The latest SF count—the speculative fiction community’s own mini version of the VIDA count of women in literary arts—was announced in May this year. The SF Count tracks the gender and race balance of both books reviewed and their reviewers.

It concludes that six out of every ten books reviewed were written by men. But that’s an average of results across all publications, and there is wide variation within the

sample. The lowest percentage of reviews of books by women was seventeen percent from Analog Science Fiction and Fact. The highest was eighty percent from Cascadia Subduction Zone, a publication that specifically aims to represent women writers.

The story told by these figures changes significantly when you consider only the five publications that are purely science fiction focused—Analog, Asimov's, New York Review of Science Fiction, Foundation: the international review of science fiction, and Science Fiction Studies. Of these, the average percentage of reviews of books by women is twenty-two percent, meaning more than three in four books reviewed in science fiction are written by men.

The gender balance of book reviewers averaged across these five titles is similarly low, with just eighteen percent of them women. What's particularly shocking is that arguably the two most famous and prestigious science fiction publications—Analog and Asimov's—both averaged zero percent female reviewers. The fact that the two most celebrated publications in science fiction asked next to no women to review books is clearly unacceptable.

And yes, reviewers can cry the impossibility of reviewing what isn't published, just as publishers can claim the impossibility of publishing more women's writing when it isn't submitted, and judging panels can lament the impossibility of considering more women's books for awards when so few are entered.

But it would be far better for the science fiction industry to recognize it has an ethical responsibility to work to correct the imbalance it has perpetuated for far too long, and get started.

It is, as publishing veteran Danielle Pafunda points out, "an important part of the position of editor to actively seek out new work and to shape the direction of a publication or publishing house."

We need women to be able to participate fully and equally in science fiction's conversations about humanity's future—to shape how women are portrayed in those visions, to consider the roles women might play in those futures, and to imagine what a truly evolved and advanced society might look like for women.

Until gender equality is achieved, science fiction remains only a fraction of what it could be. Affirmative action for women in science fiction is not only warranted, it's essential for the growth of the genre.

AUTHOR INTERVIEW: J.P. Redding by Tamara Wilhite

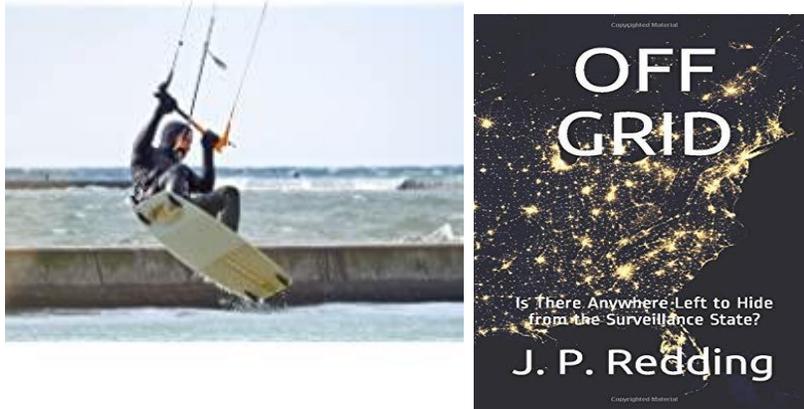


Photo shows the author engaged in a favorite pastime, water sports

I had the opportunity to interview author J.P. Redding (a pseudonym) shortly after his first book "Off Grid" came out. Initially, I thought it was a survivalist book. The subtitle, "Is there anywhere to hide from the surveillance state?" suggested that. It turns out that it is a science fiction book, as well.

Tamara Wilhite: Most of the survivalist fiction I've read that crosses into the science fiction realm is post-apocalyptic. The survivalists are surviving the aftermath of a genetically engineered plague, electromagnetic pulse weapon or even a supernatural disaster. Think "The Road", "Dust", or "Lucifer's Hammer". Fleeing an oppressive regime with a new high-tech gadget is fairly rare, much less fleeing to a rural area with a plan of anything other than blowing it up. Would it actually be possible to escape with it? And what could they do with it beyond hide it from those in power?

JP Redding: I would not characterize OFF GRID as a survivalist novel—although there are aspects of how rural communities would "survive" a new order where the populace is dependent upon, and surveilled by, an ever-expanding government. While there is a catalytic event in the novel, the disintegration of our current order is like watching a slow-moving car crash—these societal changes are occurring today right before our eyes. I tried to provide a political/philosophical framework to understand these changes while putting an action/thriller wrapper around it.

The title, OFF GRID, can be understood on two different levels: 1) staying off the surveillance grid by abandoning your electronic tether (PivPal) and 2) living off the grid by not being dependent upon government-regulated services, utilities, and food

distribution.

The plasma drive invention would assist in living off the grid. It would also be a threat to entrenched interests like the fossil fuel, solar, and wind power industries. As the novel depicts, it would be impossible to conceal such an invention for long. Perhaps the inventors have a different plan than concealment...?

Tamara Wilhite: Real world tech question. How does PivPal in your book compare to China's Sesame Credit system?

JP Redding: There are some obvious parallels. China has now gone beyond the credit scoring and loyalty program aspects of the Sesame system to implement a full *Social Credit System* whereby citizens are graded on their trustworthiness and behavior that is acceptable to the Party. This is a further extension of China's mass surveillance system and may tie rewards/punishments to a citizen's allegiance to the Party. Is the U.S. approaching this? Probably not yet, but all the ingredients are there, including access to U.S. citizens' financial records, buying habits, browsing habits, travel history, communication history, political and religious affiliations, *etc.*

Perhaps more alarming is the use of social media to punish and shame conservatives with cyberbullying, doxing, and "cancelling" people as well as actual physical confrontations. We have seen this type of repression before: the student-led Red Guard during Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution.

Tamara Wilhite: They say write what you know. Writing about hiding out in rural Michigan certainly counts, since you live there. How much of the other topics touched in the book come from personal experience? For example, would you consider yourself a prepper?

JP Redding: No, I am not a prepper in the traditional sense of stockpiling guns, food, gold, and getting ready for the bad times. However, I am mentally preparing myself for further government intrusion into our lives and the continuing decay of a common morality. It is very disheartening—but I try to offer some hope in OFF GRID. With respect to other topics covered in the book: I am an extreme water sports enthusiast (kiteboarding, windsurfing, *etc.*), I am an entrepreneur with multiple patents including the use of smartphones to track people.

Tamara Wilhite: Your background is in political science and philosophy, though you earned an MBA. How has that background influenced the book?

JP Redding: I present a *Political Ecosystems Matrix* in the novel to provide a framework for the range of political systems and where the U.S. might be heading. I have been

noodling with this matrix since college. It uses the axes of Law *vs.* Freedom and Spiritual *vs.* Secular to position and explain political systems...with all roads leading to The State.

My background in business has also influenced my writing. I have experience ranging from startup entrepreneur to large corporate executive. In both cases, I have seen the constraints put on business by over-regulation as well as bureaucracies. I have personal experience in the government rejecting a no-brainer solution in favor of a politically connected, but flawed, alternative solution. Once again, very disheartening.

Tamara Wilhite: And is the plasma drive based on anything you're worked with?

JP Redding: As I explain in the novel, there is ongoing research into plasma drives and ion thrusters. Some may be used for deep space exploration. We may see commercial applications within our lifetimes. With respect to the plasma drive presented in OFF GRID, I will say—somewhat cryptically—that I was exposed to this concept back in the '80s by very reputable sources. It has haunted me ever since...

Tamara Wilhite: What non-fiction and fiction works have influenced your writing the most?

JP Redding: As one might expect, Ayn Rand's ATLAS SHRUGGED and George Orwell's NINETEEN EIGHTY FOUR have been major influences. In fact, I see many Orwellian parallels with the current Progressive agenda including thoughtcrimes (political correctness), doublethink (trying to rationalize obvious contradictions), and thought police (cyberbullies, doxxers and snitches). Another major influence was Herbert Marcuse's ONE-DIMENSIONAL MAN...a fascinating, if somewhat thick read that points to consumerism as the lid on the boiling pot of revolution. This neo-Marxist could not quite figure out that free market capitalism is the worst economic/political system in the world...except for all the rest!

Tamara Wilhite: This is your first novel, to my knowledge. Are you considering writing a sequel to "Off Grid"?

JP Redding: OFF GRID stands alone as a complete novel. However, I have left some dangling plot lines that set the state for a possible sequel.

Tamara Wilhite: Is there anything you'd like to add?

JP Redding: OFF GRID should not be pigeon-holed as a survivalist novel or a conservative diatribe—it is much more than that. It explores the very foundations of political systems and political dynamics, all the way down to basic human nature—in particular our existential *fear* and need to *control*. I wrap this exploration in a pro-faith, action thriller to have a little fun on the way.

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Late at night, if the wind's in the right direction
You could pick up a distant radio station
Aerial must have been a mighty erection
Sending adaptations to our education.

Accompanied by the ghosts of Hawkwind's synth players
Caught in curious pockets of the atmosphere
Whistles and warbles from the heavyside layer
Generally added to the growing sense of fear

Spectre trails maidens or rocket about to crash
Robots programmed to murder or monsters from Mars
Do not worry the hero is about to dash
And race along dark country roads in souped-up car



end of issue