

Fantasy Press



Part II

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A step backward, after making a wrong turn, is a step in the right direction.  
--Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*

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**THIS ISSUE OF *eI*** is for Harry Bell, for <http://www.cosmicminds.net> and for GET HARRY, the campaign to bring Harry Bell to Austin, Texas for Corflu Quire in February 2007.

Harry Bell has been a prominent science fiction fanzine editor, cartoonist, and artist for many years. His fanart covers the spectrum from ridiculous to outstanding, as the two examples below illustrate. The ease with which he moves from bug-eyed-monster spaceships to bug-eyed-monster cute, cuddly greeting-card kiddies, is revealed in the rare example of Harry's color fan art.

Harry Bell is also well known in the [world of fine art](#), with many excellent canvases to his credit. Beyond that, he is the proprietor of the Yahoo discussion group Inthebar where numerous old farts swap lies and bullshit and plan vast schemes like simultaneous PC connected parties and like bringing Harry Bell to Austin where he can be properly inundated with [Corflu Quire](#).



In the exclusively science fiction world, it is also in memory of Charles L. Grant, Philip E. High, Bob Leman, and Helen Weston.

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As always, everything in this issue of *eI* beneath my byline is part of my in-progress rough-draft memoirs. As such, I would appreciate any corrections, revisions, extensions, anecdotes, photographs, jpegs, or what have you sent to me at [earlkemp@citlink.net](mailto:earlkemp@citlink.net) and thank you in advance for all your help.

Bill Burns is *jefe* around here. If it wasn't for him, nothing would get done. He inspires activity. He deserves some really great rewards. It is a privilege and a pleasure to have him working with me to make *eI* whatever it is.

Other than Bill Burns, Dave Locke, and Robert Lichtman, these are the people who made this issue of *eI* possible: Harry Bell, Lawrence Block, Robert Bonfils, Bruce Brenner, Ned Brooks, Ed Gorman, Jacques Hamon, Earl Terry Kemp, Arthur Iortie, Todd Mason, Lynn Munroe, and Robert Speray.

**ARTWORK:** This issue of *eI* features original and recycled artwork by Harry Bell and recycled artwork by William Rotsler.

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Most fascinating game there is, keeping things from staying the way they are.

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*

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## ...Return to sender, address unknown.... 19

### The Official *eI* Letters to the Editor Column

Artwork recycled William Rotsler

We get letters. Some parts of some of them are printable. Your letter of comment is most wanted via email to [earlkemp@citlink.net](mailto:earlkemp@citlink.net) or by snail mail to P.O. Box 6642, Kingman, AZ 86402-6642 and thank you.

Also, please note, I observe DNQs and make arbitrary and capricious deletions from these letters in order to remain on topic.

This is the official Letter Column of *eI*, and following are a few quotes from a few of those letters concerning the last issue of *eI*. All this in an effort to get you to write letters of comment to *eI* so you can look for them when they appear here.

#### Tuesday August 1, 2006:

Again, *eI* hits eFanzines with maximum force. I've managed to lead off the LetterCol again. It must be those hyperactive typing fingers I've got.

The story of the founding of Fantasy Press is very similar to the way several movie studios were founded. In fact, I'm told that there were several movies of the 1980s that started off as discussions at WesterCons in LA. Hell, my film *The Chick Magnet* was begun with the phrase "How much dough you think it'll take?"

I think I've come across that story "A Voice From The Ether" in an issue of *Amazing* I bought at WonderCon. I'm pretty sure that I really enjoyed it, especially since I'd been in a very pulp mood at the time since Dad had given me the few pulps he had managed to scrounge up to give to my cousins.

"The Anthem Series" seems like a big deal. It might turn into one of those things that shows up in a fanzine and everyone references frequently over the next decade. *The Legion of Space* was one of the first Williamson books I ever read. I loved it. It's what got me interested in Williamson (this was about 1989) and that's not worn off yet. I think *Darker Than You Think* was a book that had a much greater influence on my fiction than I'd care to admit (especially since I've never managed to get good at fiction writing). The fact that Jack is well beyond 90 and still putting out great material is simply amazing. *Sinister Barrier* was one of the books I remember picking up but never finishing.

Gotta say that all those pieces of strip art in the Jeff Hawke article really make me wanna invest in the volumes of collections that are out there and far too expensive for me to afford. The article was great. I love these kinds of articles. *Banana Wings* has done a few like it that made me smile, even if it's not always easy to decipher what's going on...much like reading the eLists everyday.



Good to see John Nielsen Hall in the pages of *eI*. He's one of my TAFF nominators, in fact. As a matter of fact, when I was a kid, I also came away with the idea that Los Angeles was the greatest place on Earth, though that was based on the way it was presented on TV shows produced by Aaron Spelling. Amazingly, there's a mention of "Phoenix City," the Roland Alphonso song that really turned me on to Old School Ska. For a while, I was a serious authority on the history of ska. I even appeared on NPR talking about the origins in late 1999 or so. I've stopped listening to it for the last couple of years.

I'm not sure why, but I'm fairly certain that Free Radio has pretty much killed off musical invention. When there was a battle for limited air space, before FM became the money modulation, there were stations that would try to carve out niches by playing daring music (for the time). I've recently come across a few Border Radio tapes from the 1950s that really show the point. These were magical pieces that celebrated offbeat music and talk.

Must find a copy of *The Gas*. It sounds like a hoot.

Hey, what's with all the Brits? I can't think of the last time I read an American fanzine that included so many Britishers.

I think Dick Lupoff read *Terrors* at Borderlands Books in SF a few weeks ago. I couldn't make it, which bummed me out, but I'm planning on making it a part of my next Claims Department (the zine where I go somewhere and read a book, watch a movie, and listen to some music). Mr. Lupoff and I met not too long ago and he gave me a couple of magnets that promoted his books. I've started a small Lupoff section of my personal library. I must collect them all!

--Chris Garcia

#

And a WONDERFUL piece "A Rocket A Rover" is too! A perfect Web symposium, beautifully put together.

Now, must stop myself from trying to buy all those goodies mentioned. Memo to self:

No room in the house.  
No room in the house.

etc. etc. etc.

--Andy Sawyer  
Science Fiction Librarian  
Special Collections and Archives

**Wednesday August 2, 2006:**

I will probably write more about "The Anthem Series" but a couple of immediate comments.

The hardcover copies of the 1966 index never actually existed (though I have seen one listed for sale). They would probably not have been worth having anyway.

It was like this. When *In Memoriam: Clark Ashton Smith* was close to going out of print, I suggested to

Jack in a telephone conversation that he bind a few in hardcover. He liked the idea, and I got put in charge of making it happen. So I spent a couple of weeks making phone calls and visits on vacation leave getting quotes on it. We took an ad in George Bibby's *Fantasy Collector* and used the response as an indicator of how many to bind. We did ten of only which half or so were actually sold, between the estate and our own copies. I picked them up and took nine of the ten to Jack's place where he signed all he could and limitation stickers went in. I still have the only unautographed copy, and once in a while wonder if it might be worth more than the rest. The binder warned us that they would not hold up to much use.



We figured to do hardcovers of the publishers' thing. By the time it started to run out, Jack was in military training and left me the remaining copies. It was at that point, maybe six months after publication, that the first order for a hardcover came in.

The reason that the book existed at all is that I lost my job in June 1965 and did not find another until November, so the bulk was written in those months. Every month or more often we found something that we missed, and it was wrapped up in May and again in August. I had not noticed before that Jack says in the third edition that 88 copies of the May version were produced. It is really more like three, two to the copyright office and one for Jack's shelf, lord knows why.

Part of the reason that the tone of the second and third editions differ is the growth of lawyers. I would heartily agree that the 1966 version came at a critical point -- by a year or two later, the size of it (84 quarto pages) would have doubled. The latest CD-ROM version produced is way over a thousand of them.

--Mark Owings

### **Wednesday August 2, 2006:**

e/ Brilliant and fascinating! Brilliant and fascinating! Always the same damn thing, brilliant and fascinating! Is there no end to it?

Er, sorry.

I actually do have a speck to add this time. The planned *White Lily* by John Taine, announced in the 1950-51 Fantasy Press advertising flyer, appeared in 1952 under the title *The Crystal Horde*. *White Lily* was the title of the *Amazing Stories Quarterly* magazine appearance. Presumably Eshbach decided it didn't sound fantastic enough.

The first Fantasy Press book I saw was in about 1958 or '59, when I was 10. I had seen the Pick-a-Book ads in *Astounding* and scraped my pennies together for a copy of Eric Frank Russell's *Dreadful Sanctuary*, being very fond of Russell (the perfect SF writer for a 10 year old). The title also had an irresistible resonance (not as good as *Sinister Barrier*, but Pick-a-Book didn't have that one). When the book arrived I was astonished. It was one of the original full cloth bindings rather than the chintzier Greenberg bindings, and I had never seen such a sumptuous-looking book. And an exploding spaceship on the dust jacket! What more could a nearsighted 10-year-old want? It was a gateway drug.

--John Boston, Wegenheim

## Friday August 4, 2006:

I just wanted to say that I thought you'd done a great job on my piece; it looks really good, and I'm really pleased with it.

So far I've only read the Charnock pieces, but as soon as I get chance I'm going to sit down and devour the rest of the issue. Especially looking forward to the Fantasy Press article. Great Stuff, again.

--Peter Weston

## Sunday August 6, 2006:

Many thanks for another outing into your inner works with *eI27*. As always, I am going to try to make this letter interesting with some commentary about your e-zine contents... notice, the key word is try. Always is. Try, I will...



Sure agree with Chris Garcia on Larry Flynt and *Omni*. *Omni* was a great read nearly every time, and gave me a good hit of science most times. Guaranteed, *Omni* was the only Flynt publication that was ever going to come into my household back then.

A shame that a namesake, Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, passed away only a few years ago. I'd very much like to see what he had printed in the *Toronto Star Weekly*. Unfortunately, the *Star Weekly*, which continued on for many years, is no longer in existence, but who knows, the *Toronto Star* may still be able to provide access to this story. Those Fantasy Press titles look terrific...how many of these titles are still in print? Too few, I would imagine.

Peter Weston's article also details a little of my own childhood. My grandparents from Aye, Scotland, used to send fine British chocolates to us spoiled grandchildren for many years, and on a regular basis, would send newspapers from Scotland...*the Ayrshire Post*, *the Sunday Post*, *the People's Friend*, and British comics for me. I'd get the *Beano* and the *Dandy*, and when I was older, the *Hotspur* and the *Wizard*, and occasionally, the *Rover*. I was getting these comics in the '70s, and some of my research proved that some of the stories were recycled from one generation of readers to another. I remember strips like *The Bash Street Kids*, drawn by Leo Baxendale. D.C. Thomson, the publisher, just celebrated 100 years of operations, and old D.C. may have been a distant relative...my mother's maiden name, and my own middle name, is Thomson. I remember reading *The Amazing Wilson* in the *Wizard*, a story of a man who discovered an ancient potion from an old mountain man, and learned to extend his lifespan to several hundred years, which was enough for various adventures, including fighting in World War II. I wish I'd been able to keep my comics, but parents, as they are wont to do, demanded I get rid of the stacks of comics forming in my room, and I learned to be a bit of a businessman, selling those comics to the neighborhood kids for a few quarters, supplementing my income from my two paper routes. I learned a little while ago that some of these comics are no longer in existence, like the *Hotspur* and the *Wizard*. Part of my childhood is gone forever, so I hope they might still be available through the Internet, even only fondly remembered.

I did a little reading on Radio Caroline, too... One of the most popular DJs on BBC Radio 2 (which I listen to occasionally through the Internet) is Johnnie Walker, who I remember as being one of the most

popular DJs on pirate radio, especially Radio Caroline, broadcasting from an old steamer off the British coast. (I also used to listen to Radio Luxembourg.) I also found a series of old British paperbacks in a Goodwill store in Toronto, all about Johnnie's favorite songs. I wish that old age of pirate radio was still around, but broadcasting is so corporate these days, I don't think pirate broadcaster would be around for even hours.

--Lloyd Penney

**Thursday August 10, 2006:**

Gosh, don't you read the greatest fanzine ever to hit a monitor screen:

<http://www.efanzines.com/EK/eI10/index.htm>

--Jim Linwood, Inthebar

#

I live in Ajijic and have for a few years, and thought it may interest you to know that I'm pretty sure I'm acquainted with the Pepe to whom you refer several times in your ezine articles, which, by the way, I enjoyed reading. The Pepe I know is about the right age, 50-ish I'd guess, and walks with a cane these days because several years ago somebody shot him and threw him over a cliff, but he somehow survived and came crawling out of the canyon 2 or 3 days later with about a dozen broken bones, or so the story goes. I saw him last night at Tom's Bar, which is located at Constitución #32, just a few doors from your old digs at #14, and asked him if he remembered a gringo writer named Earl Kemp from the '70s, and he said that he did, so I suppose he must be the same fellow. For what it's worth, he reputedly still makes his living in the kinds of entrepaneural ventures as he did when you knew him.

A week ago last Saturday, on July 30th, Pepe's younger brother, Sergio, was found dead in their house on Calle Nicolas Bravo, not far from the lake. Supposedly the cause of death was from a hemorrhage when an ulcer ruptured, but Pepe says la policia had something to do with it. We'll probably never know for sure.

--Gary Anderson

**Thursday August 24, 2006:**

Lloyd Arthur Eshbach's article, "The Fantasy Press Story," was fascinating. Reading this made me feel like I was stepping into a Way-Back Machine. Reprinting articles like this is what makes fanzines so dagnabbin' wonderful: I learn *so much* from your zine that it seems like I'm in a doctoral seminar on science fiction fandom and you're the professor. Thank you so much for running this article. I really enjoyed it.

The next article, "The Anthem Series," was likewise way cool. (Even better was the Vonnegut lino between these articles, but then again, I've always enjoyed Vonnegut's sense of humor.) The color reproductions of the covers is a really nice touch. I can't even imagine what some of these editions are going for nowadays at auction or in the dealer's room at the worldcon. Or any convention, for that matter. But I gotta tell you, this is a wonderful stroll down memory lane, and makes me faunch even more for getting to cons and slowly browsing through the huckster tables. Man, I really miss those days! (I can rectify this situation, of course, but my con-going is really going to be few and far between.) No matter what, I can't wait to see Part II come October and feast my eyes on the goodies therein.

"A Rocket A Rover" was an interesting read, but really didn't do much for me since my background on this particular subject matter is extremely limited. Still, some interesting commentary, and I loved the illustrations. Totally fun stuff.

I enjoyed the rest of this issue, but really have no pithy comments to make, so I think I'll simply leave off here. Many, many thanks for the zine, and it was likewise quite enjoyable, albeit very brief, to chat on-line with you at the Launch Pad pre-WorldCon party.

--John Purcell

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Simplicity of language is not only reputable, but perhaps even sacred.

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*

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# Lawrence with a W and Block with a K\*

By Ed Gorman

## About *Cinderella Sims*

Lawrence Block writes the best sentences in the business, that business being crime fiction. No tortured self-conscious arty stuff, either. Just pure, graceful, skilled writing of a very high order.

No matter what he writes—the dark Scudder private-eye novels; the spunky Bernie Rhodenbarrs about the kind of thief even a mom could love; or his latest creation, John Keller the hitman, an existential figure full of quirks and kindnesses rare in his profession—no matter what he's telling us, he always makes it sweet to read. He's just so damned nimble and graceful and acute with his language.

By now, his story is pretty well known. Wrote a lot of erotica in the late fifties and early sixties, all the while writing his early crime paperback originals and stories for magazines of every kind. Started becoming a name in crime fiction in the seventies, really broke out in the nineties and is now posed, one would think, for superstardom.

Block has always reminded me of a very intelligent fighter. He knows what he's good at and sticks to his own fight, unmoved by popular fads and critical fancies. He writes about women as well as any male writer I've ever read (though since I'm a guy, I may just be saying that he perceives women the same way I do) and he deals with subjects as Oprah-ready as alcoholism and failed fatherhood realistically, yet without resorting to weepiness.

One senses in him sometimes a frustrated mainstream writer. He's always pushing against the restrictions of form and yet never failing to give the reader what he came for in the first place. No easy trick, believe me.

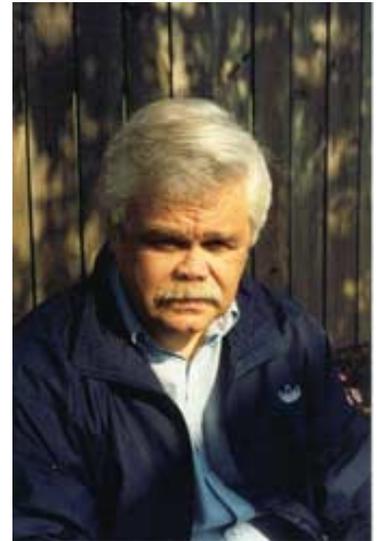
For some reason, I've always hated the word "wordsmith" (probably because it's popular among pretentious young advertising copywriters who don't want to admit that they're writing hymns to beer and dish soap), but that's what Block is. A singer of songs, a teller of tales, a bedazzler.

I recently read three of his erotic novels and I'll tell you something. They're better written (and we're talking 1958-1961) than half the contemporary novels I read today. He was pushing against form even back then, creating real people and real problems, and doing so in a simple powerful voice that stays with you a hell of a long time.

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I wrote the above as a way of setting up a Larry Block novelette I was reprinting in an anthology called *Pulp Masters*. I don't see any reason to change a word. Not because they're such graceful or pithy words but because they convey my feelings about Lawrence Block the writer.

I always say that I'm glad to see writers make it up from the trenches and into the sunshine of national prominence. Few writers spent so long in the trenches. Larry sold his first story in 1958. He first hit big in



Ed Gorman

the middle 1990s. That's a long time to breathe the dusty, sometimes dank air of literary obscurity.

Larry began his career, as most of us know by now, selling short stories to the crime magazines of the time and to the sort of paperbacks that local religious groups were always trying to drive from the newsstands.

We called these, as I remember, the motley crew of outcasts I hung with in my early college years, right-handers. I think you can probably guess what I mean by that.

I read a lot of Midwood and Beacon and Nightstand novels in those days. I quickly came to realize that some of the writers were much better than others. Max Collier, for example, wrote some of the most perverse books I've ever read. As I remember them, he frequently paired up his bitter hunchbacked heroes with heiresses. Clyde Allison was usually thin on plot but great with patter. Orrie Hitt sometimes got too perverse for my tastes but usually supplied a kind of second-rate James T. Farrell-like blue collar take on the standard "sexy" plots.

And when I say "sexy" I mean "sexy" in the way of the movie comedies of the 1950s and early 1960s. Short on actual details but long on suggestion. And metaphor. Orgasms were frequently portrayed as "searing volcanoes" or some such.

A few of the right-handers were written reasonably well. No great masterpieces slipped through, you understand, but some of the books' were actually...kinda sorta actual *novels* rather than just the usual monthly tease.

Which brings us to some guy named Andrew Shaw. This was one of Larry Block's pennames circa the late fifties and into the sixties. Other writers' would share the name later on (someday somebody will do an article on how contracts to one writer secretly get handed off by that writer to another writer, a particular form of "ghosting" that goes on at the lower levels of publishing even today) but the early Shaws, at least those I've read, read like Larry Block.

Not the Larry Block of today. The Shaw prose isn't especially polished; the Shaw stories don't always escape cliché; and the Shaw attitude is sometimes not unlike the hardboiled crime fiction magazines of the day—i.e., too tough for its own good.

And yet.

Yet you can see in glimpses—and sometimes sustained for long stretches—the Larry Block of today. The idiosyncratic take on modern morality; the dour irony that hides fear and loneliness; and the seeds—just planted—of the style that would' become the best of his generation.

*Cinderella Sims* was originally called \$20 *Lust*. The editor obviously spent a long time coming up with that one.

I'm not sure what else Larry was writing at that time. I suspect he was upgrading for an assault on Gold Medal and better-paying markets. I say this because *Cinderella Sims* seems to fall between his sexy books and his early Gold Medal books. Not quite worthy of that little gold medallion but damned close.

One thing Larry Block always had was the ability to move a story forward while giving you detailed character portraits. He has a fast eye for the unusual, the quirks in us, and he makes us come alive with these details.

So is his skill in giving you journalistic snapshots of urban American. Re-reading *Cinderella Sims* today is like traveling back in time to those pre-hippie sixties when crew cuts were still the style on college

campuses and free love was something only the ridiculous Hugh Hefner experienced.

I'm not going to tell you that this is a great book because it isn't. But it's a damned interesting look at the artist-in-making. I think you'll agree with me that, from the very beginning of his career, Larry Block was a vital and powerful storyteller.

### **About *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man***

As for my review of *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man*, Block has figured out a) the laziest way ever devised to write a porno novel or b) the most cunning and hilarious way ever thunk up to write one.

I'll go with the latter. Laughs on every page as the story unfolds in letter fashion--letters to the publisher who fired him; letters to the wife who ran off with one of his friends as the book opens; letters to the friend who made him a cuckold; letters to his occasional hippie lust babe; letters to the real estate agent who wants to evict him from his apartment for rent arrears; letters to his first wife; and letters to the Catholic school girls who pick him up one boozy and disoriented night, him not all troubled by the fact that they are all seriously underage, and even though there's no real sex that first night, he eventually bangs them all. You've got your oral sex, a fair amount of anal sex, and even some plain old fashioned screwing every once in awhile.

As I've long said about Block, he writes the best sentences in the business. I can't think of a more compelling and polished writer. And even in a quickie like this, the word choices are sometimes incandescent, really stunning. And the dialogue is Block at his best.

The rumor is that *Ronald* is a take on the Scott Meredith Literary Agency when Block worked (I guess) as both an agent and a fee reader. If that's so, the snarkiness is mild and comprises little in stage time. After all, this being an epistolary porno novel, how much sex can you get into scenes dealing with office problems?

This book is good enough to be listed among Larry Block's most daring and successful novels. Not to every taste to be sure. But certainly a hilarious ransacking of all the porno tropes that filled the *Nightstands* and *Beacons* of our misspent youth. For Block fans, it's a must read.

Oh, and by the way, I mentioned earlier that Larry Block was well on his way to becoming a superstar? Well, between the time I wrote that and now, Lawrence Block has become a superstar not only in America but throughout the world. And deservedly so. What an amazing body of work he's given us.

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\*Revised from an original appearance as the Introduction to *Cinderella Sims* and a book review of *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man*.

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Ideas or the lack of them can cause disease.  
-- Kurt Vonnegut

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# Naughty Nancy's Grasp of Unendurable Ecstasy

By Earl Kemp

I have been so lucky, during my life and publishing career, to work with some very special people. The only problem was, the work schedule and hectic pace of producing all the pornography that's fit to print didn't allow any time at all to stop and admire the roses. They bloomed and faded out of sight right before my very eyes, and I never saw...never smelled a one of them at the time.

Of all the writers I worked with at The Porno Factory, many were standout successes in their later lives, earning every major award and accolade available. Some of them, long after their sleazebooks had been replaced with mainstream bestsellers, even wrote of their experiences as full-time porno hack writers.

Not the least of them was the lovely Linda DuBrieul [D. Barry Linder and numerous other pseudonyms], the unquestioned Queen of Pornography. Linda, unlike 99% of the other prolific hack writers of the 1960s and '70s, did it all by herself...alone. She was self-taught as far as fiction writing goes, and deliberately put herself into a writing-machine mode. For over eight years, she produced an average of one book a week while, at the same time, managing households, two sequential husbands, two delightful children, and all the usual woes of the world. Linda would pound the pavement and visit book publishers, editors, and office staffs. She had no literary agent and did all the groundwork for herself, eventually working, regularly, simultaneously, for a number of different publishers.

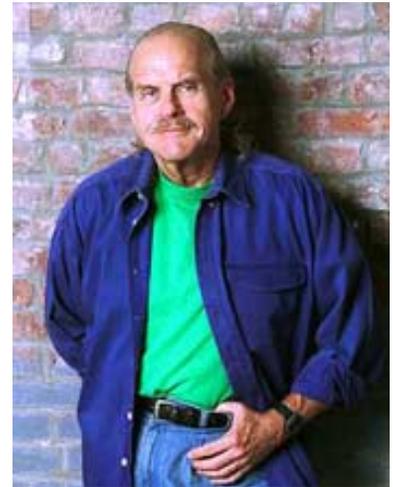
Late in her career, she summed the whole experience up in her autobiography, *The Woman Who Wrote Dirty Books*. I wrote about Linda's story in "H.R.H. The Queen of Pornography" in *eI12* February 2004.

The next largest group of full-time writers came from Scott Meredith's Black Box pornography operation that supplied most of the sleaze available on the marketplace from the late 1950s until into the early '70s. From this select group of significant writers to be, five of them wrote extensively of their experiences producing beat-off books for Scott Meredith's profit and the need for something similar by the masses.

Hal Dresner [Don Holiday] was one of the better-known writers of the period and the first to produce a semi-autobiographical book about the sleaze novels he was writing for Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc. *The Man Who Wrote Dirty Books* was Hal's story, and I wrote about it in "Futting With the F.B.I. Futter" in *eI4* October 2002.

The great Donald E. Westlake [Alan Marshall] was next to come out of the closet with his sensational novel *Adios Scheherazade*, that I wrote about in "Nobody Can Write This Shit Forever" in *eI13* April 2004.

Science fiction icon Robert Silverberg [Don Elliott], one of the Black Box group's most prolific writers, wrote "My Life As A Pornographer" that was reprinted in *eI14* June 2004.



Lawrence Block  
photo by  
Athena Gassoumis



Thomas P. Ramirez [much better known as Tony Calvano] wrote of his stint with Scott Meredith and crew in "Into the Abyss," that appeared in *eI21* August 2005.

At last (I've never been known as timely) I have managed to get a copy (a gift actually, from Lynn Munroe, who had the writer inscribe the copy to me) of the final book inspired by having been a Black Box pornographer...the one and only Lawrence Block's [Andrew Shaw's] *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man*.

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*Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man* (1971), by Lawrence Block, is an X-rated classic in many ways a companion volume to Westlake's *Adios, Scheherazade* and Dresner's *The Man Who Wrote Dirty Books*. In those two the authors write about their years writing adult books. This is more of the same, although Block has changed it to a children's magazine, *Ronald Rabbit's Magazine for Boys and Girls*. Block's alter ego here is named Laurence Clarke. Hilariously nasty.

--Lynn Munroe, List 24, 1993

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In *eI14*, June 2004, in "\$20 Worth of Cinderella," I had this to say about Lawrence Block as a writer:

"Shaw was a prolific writer, and he kept Henry Morrison happy with his black boxes and that in turn kept Scott Meredith happy. He could continue thinking that, behind those secret black boxes of his, he wasn't really the biggest supplier of pornography in the entire country, only he was exactly that for several years, and he was ripping off his writers at the same time.

"I recognized right away that Shaw was something special in the way of a craftsman. His novels were noticeable better than those coming from his contemporaries who had coalesced into a Friday night poker and rip a new hole for Scott social club that they called The Happy Pornographers. I have touched upon that club on numerous occasions in *eI* and have no doubt that more will come along shortly.

"In *eI13*, April 2004, in ["Nobody Can Write This Shit Forever,"](#) I described Andrew Shaw's manuscripts in this fashion:

"Now let's take another writer's manuscripts: Lawrence Block. He had his own individual style of typing, his own fingerprints all over his manuscripts. To begin with, he used a better grade of typing paper than most of the other writers did; his manuscripts were very easy to spot because of it. He had nice wide margins all around each page with lots of room for the editor's eyes to read the words and his pencil to write in whatever is needed there. He was a pretty good typist too, and made relatively few strikeouts. And, especially important, he took the time, now and then, to correct some of his typos. The only negative I can recall is that occasionally Block would stretch his typewriter ribbons a bit beyond endurance.

"Working a Block manuscript, for an editor, was relatively easy. The big stack of reasonably typed pages seemed to dwindle before the editor's very eyes."

"Those years seemed to roll by faster than they should, and hundreds upon hundreds of same-formula sleaze books passed through my hands and, always, Shaw's were among the very best written and frequently the best selling ones.

"Eventually, as it always happens, Block grew too good for that field and moved on to bigger and better novels and publishers. And, to very wide recognition and acclaim. Naturally, many honors came to him

because of the superiority of his efforts and he should wear all of them proudly.

“I have been amused by watching him playing the success game, and reading his interviews and listening to radio broadcasts of some interesting discussions that he participated in through the years. I always felt that Larry was a friend even long after he and I had parted from our professional writer/editor relationship that I had cherished for so many years. You can always tell who your friends really are by the way they treat you.”

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## Letters from Laurence Clarke

On the back cover of *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man*, Lawrence Block writes:

“In the late sixties...I wanted to write some frankly erotic books that would be fun to write, and might even be interesting to a reader with a three-figure IQ. My agent found an enthusiastic publisher, and I did three books in all, publishing them under a female pen name, one I'd used earlier on a pair of lesbian novels.

“*Ronald Rabbit* was initially intended to be a pseudonymous paperback original. I wanted to write an epistolary novel, but not the traditional series of narrative letters from a single character in the manner of Richardson's *Pamela*. Instead I was inspired by Mark Harris' comic soufflé, *Wake Up, Stupid*, and my good friend Hal Dresner's hilarious *The Man Who Wrote Dirty Books*. Each tells its story through the medium of the collected correspondence of the protagonist, letters written to him as well as letters written by him, and that's what I wanted to do in *Ronald Rabbit*.

“I wrote *Ronald Rabbit* in four days...One letter kept leading to another. I was completely caught up in the realization of the havoc that could be wrecked by a single manipulative maniac with a typewriter....”

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It occurs to me that readers might want to know they can order the book from me; while the Subterranean Press edition of *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man* is out of print, I have autographed copies for sale on the website for \$20. Here's a link: [Lawrence Block - Author](#)

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As I began reading *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man* I was shocked to discover that it was pretty much classic kiddy porn. Then I did a thought-shift and allowed my memory to return to those 1970 years, when the novel was written, and remembered that kiddy porn was all the rage. In fact, the letters we received at The Porno Factory overwhelmingly reflected an ever-increasing demand for more and more kiddy sex books, preferably with direct family incest involved.

Within *Ronald Rabbit*, Block has this to say, helping to lock the genre into the reader's thoughts:

“You really couldn't have done much for the first thirteen [years], anyway.”

“Maybe not. What is it they say? *'If they're big enough, they're old enough.'* Is that what they say?” (p. 98)

It was unbelievable at the time, that the marketplace had so shifted in its always search for the thing that would do it best for the purchasers. Every publisher in the business was trying to fill that demand.

That's one of the contributing factors that brought about the heavy repression and total ban on all kiddie porn material in the USA.

So, besides being a perfect reflection of the marketplace when *Ronald Rabbit* was written, what else did it have in common with all the other sleazebooks available then?

Lawrence Block used all the stock Scott Meredith tricks of pulpdom, and he used them with effect and skill. *Ronald Rabbit* is written as a collection of letters from the protagonist to various friends and lovers. As letters, the individual pieces of *Ronald Rabbit* fall into many random lengths, the shorter the better. And each letter begins with space wasting filler like letterheads, addresses, dates, etc. The single easiest way to make up a manuscript so it will pass in a casual inspection as a book-length work.

Make no mistake about this, it is good craftsmanship. It is the best, easiest, most saleable way to write anything for publication. And that goes for the rest of the tricks passed along by Scott Meredith to his writing staff.

Lawrence Block wrote in recognizable clichés so his readers could readily identify with the characters he wrote about. He wrote in short, easy-to-read sentences. He frequently repeated the text he had already written as often as he dared in order to use up more manuscript space. He deliberately arranged to leave big spaces at the ends of each section and, even with all this “word-fat” filler stretching the text out to the maximum, *Ronald Rabbit* still make only 148 pages in this Subterranean Press edition.

Another example of this “manuscript filling” is the innocent appearing name of the magazine at the center of the whole affair, *Ronald Rabbit's Magazine for Boys and Girls*. The secret in the background is *the number of words in the title of the magazine and the frequency of repetition of those words*.

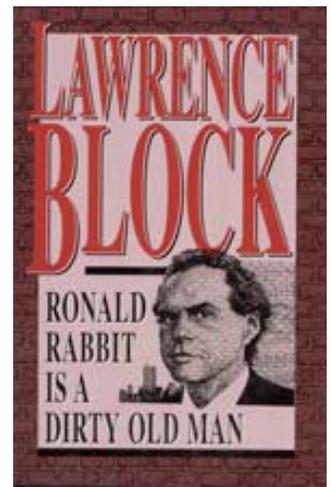
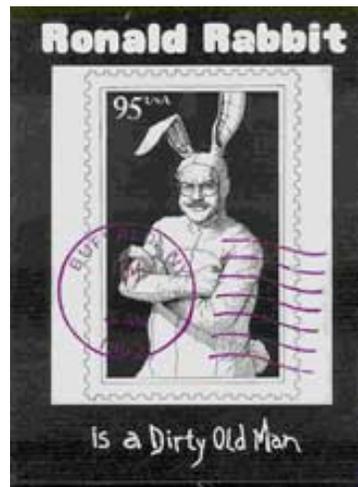
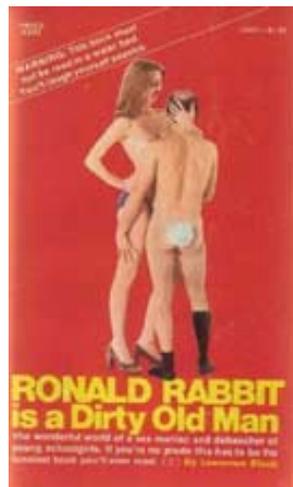
The more prolific Black Box writers used each one of these writing tricks extensively and each is extremely effective in capturing and holding reader identification.

This is praise, not condemnation. Grade A+.

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## A Hutch Full of Bunnies



The hardcover first edition of Lawrence Block's *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man* was published by Bernard Geis in 1971. The dust jacket had an illustrated cover and a back cover photograph of the author reading to two of his daughters. The author's credit says: "'Lawrence Block, shown on the back jacket pretending to read a filthy book to his two innocent children, has written several novels under various aliases, low ceilings and threats of exposure. He divides his time between a New York apartment and a farm in New Jersey, and his activities in both places are too nefarious to contemplate. However, any resemblance between Lawrence Block, author, and Laurence Clarke, hero of *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man*, is entirely....'"

The paperback edition was published by Manor Books in 1974. It features a photo cover and although scarce was the version of this hilarious dirty book many of us first read. The grind of turning out a new Andrew Shaw book every month is represented herein by the grind of churning out a monthly children's magazine written and edited by "Laurence Clarke." In spite of this innocent setting, *Ronald Rabbit* is naughtier than any of his Andrew Shaw titles.

In 1995, ASAP Press presented a new edition signed by Lawrence Block and illustrator Phil Parks. Limited to 150 hardcover copies and 100 perfect bound copies, this edition had no dust jacket, but did have illustrated boards with cover art by Phil Parks.

*Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man* was something of a scarce cult novel until 1999, when Subterranean Press brought out a trade paperback making the book available to a much larger audience. This edition features a new cover by Phil Parks.

--Lynn Munroe

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In *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man*, Block's protagonist is Laurence Clarke or "Laurence with a U and Clarke with an E" who was hired to edit *Ronald Rabbit's Magazine for Boys and Girls*. Following the kiddy porn trail, Clarke has been hired because the previous editor was caught red-handed with an 11-year-old boy doing some really disgusting things with each other, and they'd been doing them for a while already. It was Clarke's job to clean up the tarnished reputation of the children's magazine.

Instead, almost as if it had been heredity, Clarke inherited some of his predecessor's lechery, thanks to a group of six extremely talented and adventurous teenagers from the nearby Catholic Girl's School. There were six of them, each more ravenous than the other, with the youngest of the group, Naughty Nancy, who, just 15, was by far the most adept of the playful gaggle. She had somehow perfected a special position for sexual intercourse that involved her much-practiced grasp. She had a way of clutching her partner's most rigid intentions and holding on far beyond the point of unendurable ecstasy, leaving them limp with exhaustion and covered with sweat.

Besides those persistent youngsters, Clarke also had current and past lovers and wives whom all deserved portions of his time, physical presence, and competitive endurance balling.

After a quarter of a century, it is amazing how thoroughly effective the eroticism is in *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man*. The scene with Naughty Nancy's grasp being a prime example of just that.

At one point in the story, Clarke is called into the Big Boss' office. Clayton Finch is the character's name and he could have easily been modeled after any one of the sleazebook publishers of the time period. For Block, the encounter goes this way (p. 11-12):

Mr. Clayton Finch's office is on the fourteenth floor, which is one floor above the twelfth. Clay Finch is not, as one might understandably guess, a target for particularly adept skeet shooters. He is in

fact the president of Whitestone Publications, the fount from whence flows a torrent of paperback books and magazines of no particular distinction. In this capacity he has been, for just less than ten months, the employer of yours truly, Laurence Clarke.

He looked more like a cast-iron owl than a clay finch, anyway. He gazed at me over his desk, all eyes and a couple of yards wide. His was a much larger desk than mine, and his office, unlike mine, had windows. Several of them. Let it be known, though, that I in no way begrudged him these trappings of status. I was perfectly content with my little desk and my airless cubbyhole and my subsistence-level salary.

“Laurence Clarke,” he said.

“Mr. Finch,” I said

“Laurence with a U,” he said. “Clarke with an E.”

“With an E,” I echoed.

I’ve been in that office many times, facing that clay pigeon.

And, what did Lawrence Block write about writing pulp fiction?

...I’m enjoying this! Do you know I haven’t written this much in a couple of years? All these words winding up on all these pages, and all with no discernible effort on my part. I just sit here at the typewriter and let it all hang out, as the children say.... (p. 8)

...And here I am beating this typewriter to a pulp, the words just rolling straight from my brain through my fingers and onto the page. Pages. Page after page after page.... (p. 21)

Anyway, the point is that I’ve decided not to fight my typewriter. Whatever it wants to do is fine by me. I spent a year and a half deep in writer’s block, and now that I think about it I can’t avoid the suspicion that it happened because I would sit down at the typewriter with certain preconceptions that kept getting in the way. I would decide to write a certain poem, and that poem just wouldn’t happen on the page, and as a result I didn’t write anything for a long time, until I decided to shortcut the whole operation by not sitting down at the fucking typewriter in the first place.... (p. 23)

I wrote *Ronald Rabbit* in four days...One letter kept leading to another. I was completely caught up in the realization of the havoc that could be wrecked by a single manipulative maniac with a typewriter.... (back cover)

These quotations are almost exactly the way every one of the Black Box writers would feel about the endless task of producing those sleazebooks of the 1960s and ’70s.

Finally, at page 126, in closing a letter, Block uses the expression “Adios, motherfucker,” only he really isn’t saying “Adios, motherfucker,” he’s passing along a personal message to good friend Eddy Westlake. It is a silent salute to Donald Westlake’s own porno past novel, *Adios Scheherezade*, known to one and all as “Adios, motherfucker.”

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Earlier I said that I assigned Lawrence Block a grade of A+ for *Ronald Rabbit is a Dirty Old Man*. I wish I could do more than that because Block deserves all the egoboo he can grasp and hold. I note elsewhere

within this issue of *eI* that mutual friend Ed Gorman says that Block “writes the best sentences” ever and Ed is certainly correct in that.

Block’s sentences take me on much longer journeys that they should, with the way they flow and the perfect control over that flow...the choice of bull’s-eye words to tighten Block’s control over my imagination...the thrill of allowing me to participate in his thoughts...what’s not to love...?

...and one gold star....

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Some critics take issue with me because I make my points and discuss my ideas with jokes, rather than with oceanic tragedy.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, 9/18/02, *McSweeney's*

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## Curious Couplings 8

By Earl Kemp

As I wrote in *eI19*, I have noticed a number of odd coincidences regarding sleaze paperback covers and other publications that have intrigued me. Some of them were reasonable and understandable, some of them were outright criminal theft, and some of them were beneath contempt.

What I propose to do is to run a few of them in some issues of *eI* to see if I can create real interest in perusing the venture. It is a participation project. You send me jpegs of your favorite duos to [earlkemp@citlink.net](mailto:earlkemp@citlink.net) and I'll take it from there.

Here then is the next set of examples of Curious Couplings. The two covers below are from the collection of Lynn Munroe:

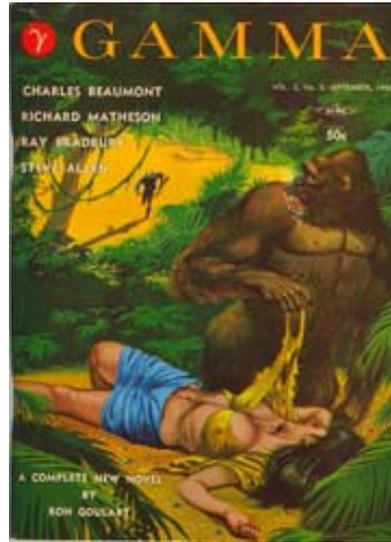
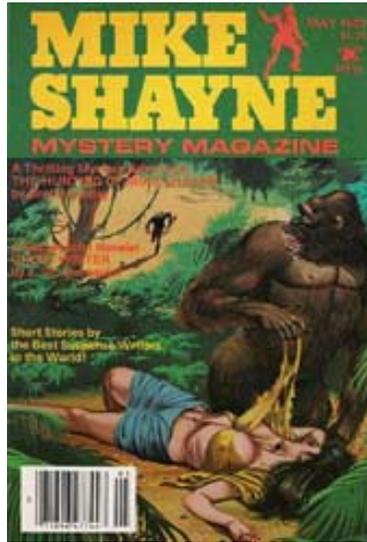


Of these two covers, Lynn wrote: “The book on the left is the original 1970 *Burden of Guilt* with cover art by Robert McGinnis. Book on the right is a later book, *Trouble Is My Business*, by Jay Flynn, with a rip-off of the McGinnis art.

“*Trouble* was published by a 1970's New York outfit called Leisure Books. Although it gives a copyright date of 1967, this edition could not have come out before 1976, the date of many of the other books advertised in the back. THIS Leisure Books was not publishing in 1967. (Your Leisure Books in San Diego was.)”

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The two covers below required the combined efforts of Ned Brooks, Arthur Iortie, and Todd Mason to gather together:



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We welcome your contributions to this series. Please email your jpegs to [earlkemp@citlink.net](mailto:earlkemp@citlink.net) and thank you very much for participating in this novel and interesting exercise in futility.

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True terror is to wake up one morning and discover your high school class is running the country.  
-- Kurt Vonnegut

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[Copyright material deleted at request of author.]

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I'm paranoid as an act of good citizenship, concerned about what the powerful people are up to. I suspect them of making money any way they can. It intrigues me that people want to be rich, and I try to imagine what they do when they are rich.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, 1963

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