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LONG TIME NO SEE: I've been away from my amateur press activities for some time, thanks to an exceptional string of circumstances in my work and home life. (None serious, all time-consuming.) I just finished the first draft of my latest book, Teach Yourself C Plus Plus in 24 Hours, in late January, which gave me a chance to try out this new craze I've been hearing about called "leisure time." So far I'm really enjoying it. I think it will catch on.

For this first issue back, I thought it would be fun to emulate the style of the old fanzines on my new Hewlett Packard Pavilion p6000 computer. I'm writing in Microsoft Word and for the type, I bought a font from the company Vintage Type called Underwood for \$20. The font emulates the output of the classic Underwood typewriter with some wear and tear. The font looks great -- I could forge love letters from Frank Sinatra to Ava Gardner with this thing -- but it does have one big drawback. I can't underline; it looks too good.

To further the illusion, I widened the margins to squeeze more words on each line. It's weird to compose in this type again. As a child growing up in Garland, Texas, in the '70s, I was given an old typewriter by my dad that had round black keys whose letters had rubbed off from heavy use. I was so determined to make use of it that I learned the keys entirely through trial and error. It's amazing to think I ever had the time to do that. Childhood is one big R&D period with an unlimited budget.

As I type this issue, my brain keeps telling me that it's not possible to correct errors without getting out the Liquid Paper. Old habits die hard.

-- Rogers Cadenhead

THE ORIGIN OF SPACE OPERA: The role-playing game publisher Scott Bizar filed a federal lawsuit in 2006 against another publisher, alleging infringement of his trademark Space Opera. Since 1980, Bizar has published a game called Space Opera for science fiction role-playing. The other publisher was soliciting orders for his game Hardnova II, which was subtitled "Space Opera Adventures."

As a science fiction fan and gamer, I was surprised to learn that Bizar was able to trademark a term that's been a generic descriptor of a style of science fiction for decades. But as I discovered through my own thorny experience with trademark law -- a story for another time -- words that you'd never consider suitable for a mark can sometimes be registered at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Bizar and the other publisher, Matt Drake of Politically Incorrect Games, represented themselves in the lawsuit -- a lawyer could eat up the yearly profits for most role-playing game companies in four hours (three if she billed for lunch). They reached a settlement when Drake changed the subtitle to "Space Action Adventures" and paid Bizar's legal expenses. I regard this outcome as a traveshamockery, to borrow a great word from a Miller Beer commercial. Letting one publisher own the term space opera for science fiction is like letting a TV studio own a trademark for police procedural.

Reading about this dispute inspired me to find out where the term space opera originated. It appears to have been first used by the science fiction fan Wilson "Bob" Tucker in issue 36 of his Le Zombie fanzine, published in January 1941. The Tucker archive published on the web by MidAmericon has that issue, so here's the exact moment the term was born:

SUGGESTION DEPT: In these hectic days of phrase-coining, we offer one. Westerns are called "horse operas", the morning housewife tear-jerkers are called "soap operas". For the hacky, grinding, stinking, outworn, space-ship yarn, or world-saving for that matter, we offer "space opera"

MidAmericon has 50 of the 72 issues of Le Zombie in its archive along with other material about Tucker, a Hugo and Campbell award winner who died in 2006 at age 91. Visit <http://www.midamericon.org/tucker> to read them.

Others defined the term space opera a bit more flatteringly. In his 1953 book "333: A Bibliography of the Science-Fantasy Novel," Joseph H. Crawford wrote:

Space opera is romantic adventure based upon a foundation of scientific data which often reaches complexity. It is curiously related to the stereotyped western novel and the radio soap opera. Its hero ... is eventually rescued by his application of super science ...

Also in 1953, the publication Author and Journalist included this mention:

Collier's is very much in the market for science fiction, and can use stories of any length in the area. Not interested in standard space opera or propaganda stories disguised as fiction.

Instead, Collier's is searching for active, dramatic, even ironical stories based on interesting or unusual scientific concepts which permit the intelligent reader to exercise his mind and imagination ...

A 1951 issue of New York's Cue magazine contained this comment, though I couldn't figure out the source while perusing the Google Books search engine:

We also stay away from what we call the "space opera." You know -- you take any old Jack Holt picture, dress the cowboys in futuristic garb, put them in space ships and tell yourself you have a science fiction story.

An online glossary published by the Church of Scientology offered this definition:

[O]f or relating to time periods ... millions of years ago which concerned activities in this and other galaxies. Space opera has space travel, spaceships, spacemen, intergalactic travel, wars, conflicts, other beings, civilizations and societies, and other planets and galaxies. It is not fiction and concerns actual incidents and things that occurred ...

Here's a Wikipedia definition for space opera:

Space opera is a subgenre of speculative fiction that emphasizes romantic, often melodramatic adventure, set mainly or entirely in outer space, generally involving conflict between opponents possessing advanced technologies and abilities. The name has no relation to music, since it is by analogy to soap operas (see below). Perhaps the most significant trait of space opera is that settings, characters, battles, powers, and themes tend to be very large-scale. Sometimes the term space opera is used in a negative sense, to denote bad quality science fiction, but its meaning can differ, often describing a particular science fiction genre without any value judgment.

I've always thought of space opera as science fiction that would sacrifice sound science in a heartbeat to tell a more compelling yarn. That's why it's such a treat to find an author like Kim Stanley Robinson whose stories are both hard science and terrific reads.

Curiously, the Space Opera role-playing game was intended to be the most scientifically plausible on the market. The co-creator of the game, Edward Simbalist, had this to say in a 2000 interview with the creator of the fan site Space-Opera.net:

Space Opera has attracted a core of loyal fans who appreciate a serious attempt at authentic simulation in RPG. They tend to be highly knowledgeable individuals to begin with. ...

Also, I think that SF RPGs have tended to lack something. There have been some good ones, yet the viewpoint is narrowed down to a specific story line -- for example, games committed to Star Wars or Star Trek. Nothing is wrong with that, so long as one is a fan of Star Wars or Star Trek. But such games are designed so that they are not very adaptable to any other SF environment. Also, the hard tech is generally sketchy or even lacking, and some of the storyline science and technology is as fanciful as magick in fantasy role playing. Even more so, sometimes.

I guess I'd say that the SCIENCE in SF is only superficially present in SF RPGs in general. To a gamer who wants the hard tech and science aspects present, this really narrows the field.

As another indicator that Space Opera is less than ideal as a trademark, the owner Scott Bizar used it generically in his own game! Here's how the rules begin:

Space Opera is a science fiction role-playing game that accepts the possibility that mankind and other races will develop the technology enabling them to reach the stars and to colonize worlds far distant from their home planets. The very title of the game suggests the type of adventures that should await the players -- rip-roaring, excitement-filled journeys across the void in the great tradition of Doc Smith's Lensman series and the many other popular "space opera" stories of SF.

The more I look into this, the less I know what the term means.

TO RANDY EVERTS: Since you grew up in Hollywood in the '50s, you will probably enjoy the website of TV and comic book writer Mark Evanier. He's a fellow Angeleno who writes frequently about vanished parts of the city (and vanished entertainers).

Regarding your childhood visit to meet Stan Laurel, Evanier is an enormous fan of Laurel and Hardy who writes about them often. He wrote in one blog post, "In the years after Oliver Hardy died, Laurel made no public appearances despite many offers. He told visitors to his home that he was afraid audiences would be disappointed to see him as an old man." It sounds like you weren't disappointed at all.

You can check out Evanier's site at <http://www.newsfromme.com>.

ADVICE FOR THE LOVELORN: An advice columnist who calls himself Gay Best Friend recently received the following plea for help:

I have been seeing a man from Nigeria off and on for about 15 months. I am seven months pregnant by him. I have been pregnant once before by him, but I had a miscarriage early on. He was mad the first time I had gotten pregnant and told me all kinds of horrible things on the phone. Then when I miscarried he was back up in it two weeks later, raw. He told me that he had a vasectomy after the first time I got pregnant and I believed him because he has six kids from six different women and always talks about how he's always broke because of them.

When I got pregnant again four months later he said, "I don't want you to mother my child because you don't have a driver's license, high school diploma, or any of your other kids, what's going to happen to mines?" Then why would he get me pregnant or not use protection? I always have condoms. He never wants to use them and even takes them off when we're having sex.

I think he got me pregnant on purpose. ...

I am a very pretty woman and I get a lot of attention. I feel like he tried to trap me so I would be pressed to be with him forever. Can a man love you that told you this big of lie about having a vasectomy?

Hard to believe sometimes that you need a license to drive a car, catch a fish or cut hair but anyone can have a kid. Or seven.

GORDON EKLUND'S "A TRACE OF DREAMS": I enjoyed this 1972 novel, which I read last year after chasing down a copy on Amazon.Com. It's a story about a new recruit to a band of anti-government radicals who enthrall and horrify the citizens of Meridian, a planet where human colonists share space with natives called Greens.

The outlaws, the Apostles of the Dark Star, are the leaders of a revolution who have a relationship with broadcasters akin to today's reality TV stars. This element of the story nicely presages what scriptwriter Paddy Chayefsky would do four years later in the movie Network, depicting a band of terrorists who work hand-in-glove with ratings-hungry TV executives. It was a daring concept then, but I wonder if it would raise eyebrows today. People have become more cynical about the ravenous desire of television networks for drama, spectacle and conflict. Thousands of people eagerly volunteer to have their lives depicted and manipulated for the entertainment of millions.

The protagonist of "Trace" is a troubled teen named Mathew. He seeks out the radicals to join them and must survive a membership process in which all

those turned down are killed. This part of the novel is both fascinating and harrowing. Mathew succeeds, of course, but he does something unexpected that stuck with me.

The book hinges on the relationship between the planet's human interlopers and the Greens, who aren't what they appear to be. The ending unravels the mysteries of the planet in the trippy way of a lot of '70s science fiction. I struggled to understand it and am still not sure I succeeded.

I was expecting the book to be about the rise and fall of the Apostles and their charismatic leader, but the scope extends beyond that in the final chapters. Though I liked it, I feel like the main antagonists were insufficiently punished for their misdeeds.

CIGARETTE ADS IN PAPERBACKS: Speaking of misdeeds, the middle of Eklund's "A Trace of Dreams" paperback, published by Ace, contains a color ad for True cigarettes that takes up both sides of a page. "Only one of the 20 best-selling cigarettes can be lowest in both tar and nicotine," it states. "Regular or menthol. Doesn't it all add up to True?"

A 2007 story in the New York Times reveals that the tobacco companies began huge ad buys in thousands of paperbacks after the U.S. government banned cigarette ads on radio and television in 1971.

The Lorillard Tobacco Company, which bought that True ad in Eklund's book, spent \$3 million for ads in 540 million paperbacks by 1975.

Documents from the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library at UC-San Francisco at <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu> show that Lorillard paid \$7 per thousand copies of a book. So if a paperback had a print run of 65,000, the publisher earned \$455.

One reason this practice died out was because tobacco executives found by the '80s that their target market had quit reading. A 1984 focus group study by R.J. Reynolds included this observation:

Most participants declared they very seldom read books, paperback or otherwise. Those who do say they would resent seeing ads in paperbacks.

A younger white male in a focus group said that the only book he ever read was Amityville Horror. The study continues:

Those who did say they read mentioned, in addition to the occasional novel, perusing the Reader's Digest, sports news, the want ads, electronic books, manuals on pot growing (younger white males), science fiction (older white males), romances and mysteries (younger black females).

When they were asked how they thought they might react to advertising appearing in paperbacks, most, presumably paperback readers, found the notion unsettling.

RIGHT WHALE DIES OFF ST. AUGUSTINE: On Dec. 30, 2010, a team of federal and state biologists rescued a severely entangled North Atlantic right whale off the coast of Daytona, Florida. The whale, born during the 2008-09 calving season, was one of 300-400 left in existence from a population that once numbered in the tens of thousands.

The female whale had become caught in more than 150 feet of fishing rope and wire mesh, some stuck in its mouth. This was causing it feeding difficulties that left the creature undersized.

On Jan. 15, 2011, the team sedated the same whale, slowing it down enough to remove 50 more feet of rope. Sadly, the whale died Feb. 2 and its body was towed to shore on Butler Beach south of St. Augustine, Florida, two days later. I drove out to see the whale and witnessed a team of around 20 people conducting an autopsy and dispensing of the whale's remains.

I shared the photos I took on the photo-sharing website Flickr, which are not for the squeamish. The whale was so big they had to use a backhoe to pull it apart. One guy stood atop it with a machete and others climbed inside the animal, a gory process that was surprisingly bloodless. By the time I stopped by a few hours later with my son Max, almost all that was left was a 20-foot long truckbed filled with whale bones. It looked like the remnants of a giant rib dinner. The smell downwind was horrible.

FROM SAD TO VERSE: I occasionally have bouts of nostalgia for the '40s, a decade I was born 18 years too late to experience. I exercise this feeling by reading back issues of the New Yorker online. My predilection was rewarded by the discovery of the following poem by W.H. Auden in the Jan. 6, 1940, issue:

The Unknown Citizen

To Social Security Account Number 067-01-9818
This Marble Monument is Erected by the State

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.

Except for the war, till the day he retired
He worked in one factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
Yet was neither a scab nor odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union says it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
He was popular with his mates and liked a drink.
The press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,
And a certificate shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.
Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Installment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man --
A victrola, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went.
He was married and added five children to the population,
Which, our eugenicist says, was the right number for a parent of his
generation.
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.
Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

CREDENTIALS: I am required by Section 2.2 of the FAPA Constitution to establish my credentials for admission to this august body. Because it would open a hole in the space-time continuum if I did not have the proper credentials *after* I've already been a member, I feel that I should err on the side of caution and provide them now.

In 1989, I was so excited about Tim Burton's Batman film that I produced a fanzine called Gotham Globe. I'm referring to the original film, not the sequels where Batman added pert nipples on his suit and gave himself shapely plastic buttocks. The first issue of my fanzine came out in February 1990.

That was also the last issue. There are copies in the Browne Popular Culture Library at Bowling Green State University and a box in my garage.

I also produced a fanzine for the first issue of CAPA-Beta, an APA put together by the members of the CAPA-Alpha waitlist, in 1990. (For those unfamiliar with the term, a waitlist is what APAs used to have before the web came along and ruined everything.)