
Callisto Rising
Number 1
Volume 1

Callisto Rising Volume 1 number 1 whole number 1

Editor: E.B. Klassen
Cover: Dan Cawsey*

Callisto Rising is a fanzine of commentary and critisism on almost every aspect of speculative fiction (including the use of that term). CR is to be published irregularly, four times a year. The contents are

CR is available for the usual (articles, artwork, printed loc's, whim), at the remarkably low rate of one dollar Canadian per issue, or the introductory subscription rate of one year for three dollars.

In addition, each issue the best out-of-house article or art piece will be given an honorarium of five dollars (this in a blatant attempt to get submissions while still maintaining a reasonable budget).

Submissions and loc's may be addressed to;

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Callisto Rising is a Month's End Press production.

*This cover and other Dan Cawsey-drawn art pieces are available as prints from Month's End. Write for information c/o the above address.

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Front cover by Dan Cawsey

this zine was laid out (layouted?) under pressure after three trips to the dental chair.

edited by E. B. Klassen

*EDITORIAL**

Welcome to the premier issue of Callisto Rising (my zine, eh?). Though by no means as elaborate as I had hoped it would be, at least I've finally got it on paper.

This issue is, I am forced to admit, a bit shy on artwork. That's because I am not an artist. The cover artist, Dan Cawsey, already does illos and art for TREKKADA and Stardate, as well as all the posters and con book cover for IMAGINE, so I wasn't in a position to ask for too much more. Besides, I like diversity.

I'm interested in having people write for CR, people other than Edward Torr and myself. If you would like to review something, write on something, or simply remark on something, this is the place to do it. I would like this to be the home of the informal essay. Preferably typed when it reaches me (but hell, you can't always get what you want, eh?).

When it comes to art, please be assurred that I will take good care of originals, and that I will repro it as faithfully as I can (regardless of thish, not photocopy). Small cartoons, etc. are great too.

Frequency is quarterly, everything else is the usual. What can I say? I'm just another zine at the moment, though I hope to get better the more I go along. This means that with more interesting articles, artwork, fillos, etc. the zine will get more interesting. And that is the main hope that I hold for Callisto Rising, that the contents be interesting.

Next ish I'm hoping for an article on power bases and male-male bonding in the film Flash Gordon, the first part of Yes, We Have No Nirvanas (an essay on Vonnegut's Player Piano), more zine reviews, and that loc you're about to write. See you then,

E.B. (Bernie) Klassen

EXPLAINING GOD TO MAN...

—E.B. Klassen

Every author, it seems, wishes to take a crack at the really big, important questions; does God exist, what is the meaning of life, the universe, and everything, etc. Not every author can do it, should do it, or gets around to it. But of those that do, a large number are SF writers. I'm not entirely certain of the reason for this, but I think it has to do with the nature of the genre. There seems to be an affinity between the theologists of the middle ages and the modern SF writer. Chaucer and Blish, Milton and Miller seem to share, if not brilliance, at least a similarity of vision, of viewpoint. This shared nature leads them all to attempt to explore the relationship between God and man, and discover how man might best serve both God and Man, without being false one to the other.

Walter M. Miller Jr.'s A Canticle For Leibowitz is probably one of the most famous novels in this particular sub-genre of SF. Canticle won a Hugo for its author in 1961, and I doubt that it has been out of print since (having become a favorite on SF course reading lists).

In the novel, monks of the Albertian Order of Liebowitz have salvaged a hodge-podge of before-the-final-war books, and this knowledge is being kept safe for man through the barbarian centuries. When reading the novel, one feels a sense of security. Not only that the books are secure (and the knowledge in them), but also a sense of security about the sense of God's word, as well.

These monks are actively involved in the politics of their day, but only as it concerns what they see as their duty to God--worshiping Him, and keeping the works of man safe for man, waiting until he is ready to accept it.

There is a metaphor developed by Miller where the keeping of the books is the same, in essence, as keeping God's word. Both are outcast in a world that has less tahn no use for them. But when man is ready to accept the word (and/or the knowledge), the monks will be there to give it to him. The monks stand firmly upon the shadow-ground between the effable and the ineffable, and yet are secure in their sense of place in the universe.

Michael Moorcock takes a very different approach to religion in his darkly moving novel. In Behold The Man, Karl Glogauer (a jew in our near future), haunted by a dream of redemption, steals a time-machine and travels back to crash a year or so before the crucifixion of Christ. Following a believably plotted series of events, Karl Glogauer is crucified a year later, giving rise to the Christ-myth he sought so single-mindedly.

Filled as it is with visions of Glogauer as a wooden cross and women as silver ones, dark masturbatory fantasies, homosexual encounters with choir masters, and the like, the novel emerges as a view of the psyche's need for myth, but does not allow very much room for the possibility of the objective truth of myth (except in a blackly humerous manner; Glogauer finds Jesus, son of Joseph the Nazarene carpenter, but the child is a cretinous

hunchback with deformed limbs who can only speak his own name over and over. A beautiful allegorical symbol of the modern church, perhaps, but surely not the true core of a myth).

Religion, in Moorcock's novel, emerges as being warped and twisted, rising out of cultural demands, but not influencing culture (except in the manner that a culture wishes to be influenced). This view reduces religion to only being the psyche's demand for myth, disallowing any objective existance. This may well be an important factor in the pervasivness of religion in western culture, but does this reasoning explain martyrs? I remain unconvinced on this point, feeling that the affinity that man has for myth does not extend unto death.

More than giving me a feeling for the character of Karl Glogauer, Moorcock's Behold The Man gives me insight into the feelings of western society as filtered through Michael Moorcock. Karl Glogauer does seem to achieve his redemption at the end of the novel, but the redemption comes through his crucifying himself on a cross of his own devising. A cross that comes from both believing and not believing.

Still I Persist In Wondering is a collection of short stories in which religion is seen more than once. Pangborn's own view of the subject can best be summed up in a quote from "The Children's Crusade" where he writes "I have no wish to give myself to God, even if God lives. Human love is greater than divine love—divine love is at worst an illusion, at best a dream for some imaginary future time. Human love is here and now."

Even while claiming this in "Crusade," Pangborn insists upon using religious motifs and characters in several of his stories. The ostensible purpose of this usage is to undercut the value(s) of religion by having well-drawn characters who are in some manner involved with religion, deny the worth of any and all religious teachings (like love for one's fellows?).

Pangborn, however, is not skillfull enough to pull this off properly. His characters always seem to have a hollowness that comes from having renounced their religious beliefs.

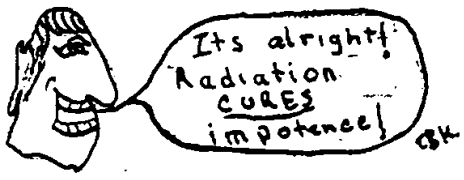
A good example is the the priest Jermyn Graz in "My Brother Leopold." Jermyn is a monk and a precentor of an Abbey. He has lost his faith in the religion that he has spent most of his life following, and has replaced it with the deification of an idol found by his brother.

Persecuted by a reborn Spanish Inquisition, this humanist at the breast of the church becomes (as it were) a martyr for the humanist faith. Pangborn deals at length with Jermyn Graz's persecution, and ignores the fact that Jermyn has become a follower of forms without having the prerequisite faith--Pangborn completely fails to deal with his character's hypocracy and final idolatry.

Pangborn does not wish, it seems, to deal with the problems of faith in the material world, but rather would prefer to deal with the emptiness his characters feel when they deprive themselves of this faith. Where Moorcock has dealt with the crisis of belief, Pangborn deals with the lack of the same.

Jesuit preist Father Ramon Ruiz-Sanchez is a far cry from the hypocritical precentor Jermyn Graz. Although damned, a heretic, and possibly a demonolater, Father Sanchez is a survivor in the arena of crisis-of-faith in James Blish's A Case Of Conscience.

The story involves the discovery of a planet, Lithia, inhabited by a race of reptilian creatures. The central conflict of the novel arises from the fact that the Lithians have evolved a complex set of ethics which seem designed to confound basic Christian tenets. The Lithians



are totally rational-- claiming by example that all basic tenets of right and wrong can be arrived at through intellect alone, and that faith has nothing to do with anything. An attractive notion to modern sensibilities, certainly, but let Father Sanchez explain:

> Indeed, the only way in which we can distinguish the Lithian from an organic computer is his possession and use of a moral code.
>
> And that, I beg you to observe, is completely irrational. It is based on a set of axioms, a set of propositions which were 'given' from the beginning-- though your Lithian sees no need to postulate any Giver. The Lithian...believes in the sanctity of the individual. Why? Not by reason, surely, for there is no way to reason to that proposition. It is an axiom. Or:.. the right of juridicial defense, in the equality of all before the code. Why? It's possible to behave rationally from the proposition, but it is impossible to reason one's way to it.
>
> One begins with belief: 'I think that all people ought to be equal before the law.' That is a statement of faith, nothing more. Yet Lithian civilization is so set up as to suggest that one can arrive at such basic axioms of Christianity, and of Western civilization on Earth as a whole, by reason alone-- in the plain face of the fact that one cannot. One rationalist's axiom is another one's madness.(pp.73,74.)

Father Sanchez feels that the Great Nothing is setting us up with this planet. The Lithians recapitulate evolution out of their own bodies, in the seas, swamps and jungles of their world -- and by this, the soul is unnecessary to the final appearance of rationality. Father Sanchez lists nine points, nine premises, at which Lithian existance is designed to confound Christianity. They are;

One:Reason is always a sufficient guide.
Two: The self-evident is always the real --((remember,matter is solid.))
Three: Good works are an end in themselves.
Four: Faith is irrelevent to right action.
Five: Right action can exist without love.
Six: Peace need not pass understanding.
Seven: Ethics can exist without evil alternatives.
Eight: Morals can exist without conscience.
Nine: Goodness can exist without God. (p. 78)

Within these propositions, Lithian society works. Although they have many small, geographically-isolated countries, there are no language differences, no regional hostilities or competitions, the Lithian society is, in short, too perfect. And Father Sanchez believes that it is being shored up--by the Adversary.

As a present, one of the Lithian young is brought back to Earth with the expedition. Egtverchi, as the alien is known, is a first a celebrity, and, later, a highly disruptive force in the rigid society of the future.

Wildflower Wine

A tous autres
nous ne faisons que des fleurs
qui poussent
pour nous feter.
petits fous
enivres du parfum
des roses debordantes.

To the rest
we are only making flowers
that blossom
to celebrate ourselves.
little fools
drunken on the scent
of roses overflowing

--Paula Johanson

By the end of the novel, with Egtverchi causing riots (and eventually stowing away aboard a ship headed back to his home planet, Father Ruiz-Sanchez stripped of everything meaningful to him (but not quite excommunicated for heresy), Lithia is on the verge of being turned into a planet-sized fusion-bomb plant. Father Sanchez has been to see the Pope, and has been told that he made a very severe mistake --the Adversary need not be creative, but simply may construct a planet-sized hallucination. And Father Sanchez should have tried to exorcise the entire planet.

Standing on the moon, Father Sanchez is connected to Lithia by means of a sub-space comm-link (with such minimal time lag as to be effectively instantaneous). At the same time that an experiment in fusion power is being tried on Lithia (there is some fear that it will fail and blow the planet), Father Sanchez, taking up the arms of St. Michael, repeats the rite of exorcism. The planet dissolves into cleansing fire.

The destruction of the planet can be seen as a lucky accident, if one chooses to do so. But this is wrong. The destruction of Lithia is, in Father Sanchez's words, "like the case of the sick child, for whose recovery prayers were offered."

> These days, most sick children recovered in a day or so, after a shot of spectrosigmin or some similar drug, even from the brink of the terminal coma. Question: Has prayer failed, and temporal science wrought the recovery?
>
> Answer: No, for prayer is always answered, and no man may choose for God the means He uses to answer it. Surely a miricle like a life-saving antibiotic is not unworthy of the bounty of God.
>
> And this, too, was the answer to the riddle of the Great Nothing. The Adversary is not creative ((the heresy Father Sanchez had fallen into --EBK)), except in the sense that He always seeks evil, and always does good. He cannot claim any of the credit for temporal science, nor imply truthfully that a success for temporal science is a failure for prayer. In this as in all other matters, He is compelled to lie. (p.178)

Blish has, in A Case Of Conscience, written a novel in which the science fiction is not overwhelmed by the theological questions, nor is the reverse true. The questions and the solution could not exist without the SF background, and Blish has accomplished a masterful interweaving of the two. It is not for nothing that he received a Hugo for this novel in 1959.

Inferno, by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, is a retelling of Dante from the SF viewpoint. For the most part, the novel is written to point up the vulgarities and inanities of modern life and SF fandom. But by the end of the novel, the topic has taken control, and the novel ultimately does concern itself with theology. This concern can be seen when, early in the novel, the protagonist, Allen Carpentier, is told that there are a great deal more people finding Hell as their final place of rest, for although society may have changed, the rules for achieving grace certainly haven't.

The most important point in the novel is that Hell is not inescapable, even though one finds oneself there. The trick to leaving Hell is to follow Dante's lead and go 'down' or inward to Hell's center. One must pass through all the circles of Hell, understanding something of what one experiences in order to leave. A form of redemption is possible, even in Hell, by the correct application of the intellect. One must understand the world in which one finds oneself and, equally important, one must understand the limits of that knowledge. The protagonist, Carpentier, manages, with the help of Benito Mussolini, his guide, manages to make it as far as the center of Hell. He can now escape. Lucifer manages to stop Carpentier from

leaving by asking him "what will you tell God when you see him? Will you tell Him that He could learn morality from Vlad the Impaler?"

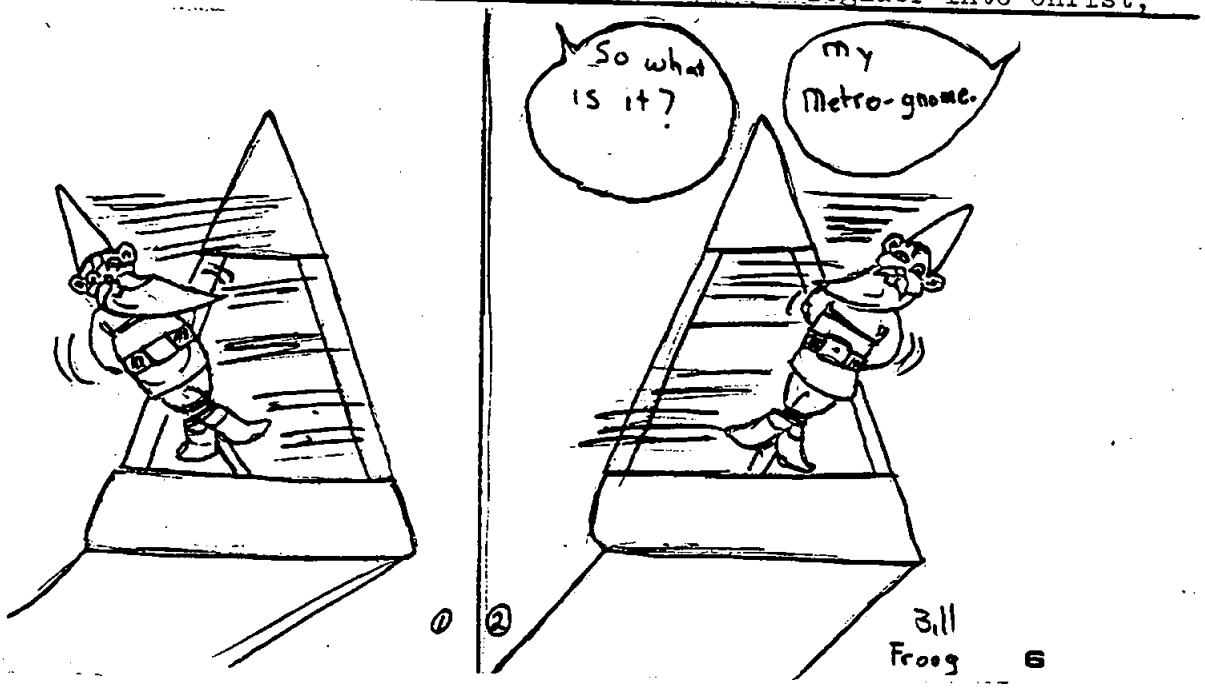
The point here is that when Vlad tortured people, the torture eventually stopped when the victim died. In Hell, the torture lasts forever.

Carpentier comes to the conclusion that Hell is the violent ward for the theologically insane. The everlasting torment is God's way of getting a damned soul's attention. Once the damned soul recognises its condition, it can begin to do something about it. Some of these Theologically insane can be cured (God is subtle, but He is not cruel). Carpentier sends his guide on his way, sacrificing his own escape to become the new 'psychiatrist' in Hell. Feeling that he does not yet know enough about Hell, Carpentier stays to learn enough to properly fomulate the question about Hell, life, sin, and damnation that he must eventually ask God.

When a writer takes a positive view of the role of religion, as do Blish and Miller, one begins to see a new strength infused into the resultant story. SF, in its role as modern mythography, fills a certain psychic need in the individual. Religion fills a very similar niche. When the two are welded together, there seems to be an addition of overtone to the mythic values of a work, while the religious facet benefits from the newly available mythic resonances.

Moorcock, Miller, and Blish all make use of this interface ability. For Blish, the case of conscience could not have existed without the SF world-building that was needed. From the natural-appearing world, the theological problem seemed to evolve naturally.

For Moorcock too, this applies. In order to turn Glogauer into Christ,



Moorcock needed a conventional SF device--the time machine. Once Moorcock has manipulated his character back into the right period, he can then make the story say what he wants it to. Once again, the writer's skill supports the "yoking by violence together" of the mythic and the metaphor. Moorcock does not have a particularly positive view of religion, but he does have a sharp perception of religion's role in the human psyche (and of religion's value as metaphor).

The three novels, Behold The Man, A Canticle For Liebowitz, and A Case Of Conscience, all tell their story from a viewpoint found within the religious component of the novel. The central characters are a monk, a priest,and 'Christ.' The concentration of the viewpoint in this manner allows the religion to permeate the story, taking the religion into the science fiction.

When this is tried by Pangborn, it fails. Pangborn's characters are almost anti-heroes. Jermyn Graz, the prophet Abraham, all the religious characters are seen as failures, their very humaness causing them to appear as fools. Abraham goes to an inescapable maryrization just as Moorcock's Glogauer does, but where Glogauer finds fullfillment, Abraham finds meaningless death.

In "The Children's Crusade," Abraham leads a group of children, including the central character's charge Jesse Lodson. Abraham is seen, when going to his death on the wheel, as being a fool, leading foolish children to their deaths. Unable, by the end, to hold on to any of his followers, Abraham dies a nothing.

Pangborn shows in this story an inability to understand the need for the Christ-figure, especially when one cannot find Christ. Pangborn prefers to laugh a sweet, smug, superior laugh at the poor deluded fool trying to save mankind from themselves. The works in Still I Persist In Wondering deny the future because they deny the value of the ineffable. All the characters must live in the present because they have no futures. Their emotional satisfaction must be equally immediate.

Religious martyrs exist so that one can see human strength--beilief when belief is dangerous. There is value to the stories of martyrs in that one can see in them the unquenchable nature of the human spirit (something I believe we all need now and again). A belief in God is a belief in tomorrow, and this belief in the future is of vital importance to the human psyche. To laugh at that, as Pangborn does, is to deny a story a great deal of the emotional identification that it needs from the reader in order to stand alone.

Inferno looks at religion from a slightly different angle than any of the previously cited works. Here the viewpoint is from a character who tries to believe in a rational, non-religious universe--even when he wakes up in Hell. The cahracter Carpentier continuously refers to Hell as "Infernoland," struggling to make some sort of rational sense of his surroundings that doesn't include the words "this is really Hell." And the further along that Carpentier goes, the more he is forced to believe that Hell, Heaven etc. does exist. For Allen Carpentier, seeing is not necessarily believing; but beat him over the head for a few months with the facts and he'll eventually figure it out.

Religion in SF is usually Western Christianity (although LeGuin was very influenced by Taoist philosophies when she wrote The Left Hand of Darkness). SF deals not only with the questions of religion, but also with the role of the church, the problems of faith, et al. It would be very unusual if SF did not do so. Ascribing possible solutions to legendary phenomena is normal in SF (the most apropos of these being "what if the star of Bethlehem was a nova?" Which, of course, became Arthur C. Clarke's "The Star."). Questions that have been asked for all the ages of man are not only fair game, but are naturally the subject matter for a literature which commonly deals with immensities. And the questions of God, and man's place in the scheme of things, questions that run from Chaucer, through Bunyan, and into Lewis, are part of our cultural heritage that is now being expressed through this, the newest form of literature.

WORKING THE FORMS; Reviewing Vulcan Mail no.'s 1 and 3

-- Edward Tarr

It feels rather awkward to be reviewing a zine when all I have to review are these two numbers. For instance, VM number 2 started a serial by Satuka (listed as the "resident alien") titled "Through An Open Door." I do not have a copy of no.2 with the first part of the serial in it. What, then, I am forced to do is to review what I have and hope to communicate what I think of the zine, letting you figure out what happened in between numbers.

Vulcan Mail is a fiction and review zine put out irregularly by the Gamesters of Triskelion, a SF group centered at Simon Frazer University in Vancouver. The sub fee is club membership ($15/yr for non-SFU students) or $2 per issue. The first ish has two stories by Rebecca Seaman ("There are stranger things in Heaven and Earth..." and "When No One Else Would Come...", of which, I preferred the second...but later)and as well,Rebecca has written a film review column.

In addition, a total of twenty-six books are reviewed (20 SF and 6 fantasy) by WCSAAL (William C. S. Affleck Asch Lowe), who has also written a very strange "Tale from the Omicron Galactic Clouds" the first installment of which is called "The Curse of the Vorpal Rabbit." Aselbart Istifix II (listed as the imaginary Club Historian) contributed the first installment of "Clubbed News," a history/update on the Gamesters.

Now that you know this, what does it all mean? Well, I enjoyed reading the first number. Rebecca Seaman's "Stranger Things..." is a story about a coven of witches on a starship, an ambitious piece which tries to weave together both fantasy and science fiction into the same narrative. Although I felt that the background of the witches was not clearly explained enough within the story, all in all a successful story.

Rebecca Seaman's second story is called "When No One Else Would Come..." (no, its not about a RHPS con)and revolves about a ten-year-old boy and his "imaginary" friend, Shilo. The question of who or what Shilo in fact is, is left open throughout the story; although she(?) has such talents as telepathy, nonetheless Shilo appears as a cat and does cat-like things. The story is, I think, slightly better written that the previous one (don't get me wrong, both are good), with the story under tighter authorial control.

WCSAAL's "Curse of the Vorpal Rabbit" is a satirical piece (the very first episode opens with the words "When last we left her...") that is simultaneously confusing,, funny, overblown, whimsical, and exhausting. That should about cover it.

Aselbart Istifix II's Clubbed News is a very amusing (and hip hip for Yorick and Lady Jane) column that eventually deals with the history of the club. Well written, fun, with a couple of inside jokes for leavening.

The remaining five pages of the first ish are devoted to reviews of film (Somewhere in Time) SF and fantasy.

VM number three seems to be a review issue, with reviews of Dragonslayer, Outland, Raiders, Superman II, Slaughterhouse Five, Excalibur,(TV's)Mr. Merlin, records and books by WCSAAL, and more book reviews by Rgc and Rebecca Seaman. Whew.

In addition there is chapter 2 of Satuka's "Through An Open Door" (no comment, I didn't read the first part), quite a good short story trivia quiz, Anne Marie Leduc's imperfect-but-facinating "As it was in the begining,...", an absolutely ghastly pun cartoon, the amusing "What was in that drink?" by Rebecca Seaman, and another installment of Clubbed News by Aselbart Istifix.

My major comments on issue 3 are that it's getting better and there's getting to be more people submitting. A very interesting zine, you can get it from;

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THE PEAK

--Book reviews by Edward Torr

Heinlein, Robert A. The Day After Tomorrow (original title; Sixth Column). Toronto: Signet (NAL Canada), 1970. 144 pp. Paperbound.

As anyone who has read Stranger in a Strange Land knows, Robert Heinlein has an overwhelming propensity for preaching opinionated moral essays. This is fine; in fact, it is why most people read his work. But most of the time Heinlein ties these essays into a society/existance that has some relationship with the real world--they reflect in some way the method by which human beings function as social animals. In order to get away with this type of writing, the writer needs to construct a setting in which the reader can see some connection to the world he lives in, and by seeing the connection, understand what the author is commenting on. In Day After Tomorrow, however, Heinlein goes too far in constructing the setting he needs in order for his moral essay to work in a novelistic manner.

The setting of The Day After Tomorrow is just after the takeover of the U.S. by Asia (read: the Chinese). The only free Americans left are a half dozen scientists who have holed up in the Citadel (a laboratory/fortress buried in a mountain). Naturally, the plot turns on these six men overthrowing the four hundred million Asiatics who hold the country.

Just before the the Citadel was cut off from the rest of the country, the scientists holed up there had discovered a whole new area of physics.

Yes, just as in real life, the first thing that anyone wants to know about the discovery is its weapons applications. Within a couple of months, the four scientists in the group have turned into engineers and show the rest of the group how they can now transmute matter, have tractor/pressor beams, and have created an energy field that releases the colloidal pressure found in cells (a piece of steak erupts like dynamite). Not only that, but this last can be fine tuned to explode/kill/render unconscious any particular race (like maybe the Chinese?).

In a strange foreshadowing of M. V. Smith some years later, the military minds in the Citadel decide that the way to recruit enough patriots to form an army is to form a new religion. The 'high priests' of this new cult of Mota (atoM) are, with the help of the new technology, able to perform seeming miracles (microbes fall like Mongolians to the mysterious new rays), with unlimited funds(turns out that it's easy to transmute granite or somedamnsuch into gold--which just happens to be the national currency again).

The teeming conquerers never once question the appearance of all this new gold being dumped into the economy (particularly when they are the ones who reinstated the gold standard), nor do they ever ask about the fact that for the first time in modern history there is a religion that can produce miracles on demand.

And that is the chief problem with this novel--no one ever asks questions. The setting of the novel demands such stretching to get from here to then, that the suspension of disbelief collapses under the strain. The heroes of the story never meet any other resistance fighters, the scientists do not meet any real obstacles while becoming engineers, and everything happens just a little to easily for my liking.

There is a fair bit of action in the novel, but it is mostly negative action, prefaced by Heinlein honing his rhetoric, rationalizing every act. When to of the characters dis-

cover a spy, one can almost hear the chuckles in the background as Heinlein prepares to justify the spy's cold-blooded murder. I am not particularly squeamish, but to kill the character with only the excuse that 'there's a war on' does not satisfy me. After incidents such as Mai Lai, there has to be a better reason. Again, I am not complaining that the spy is killed, but rather that there is such a lack of reasonable excuse.

I personally enjoyed Jubal Harshaw's tirades in Stranger, although I didn't always agree with the views presented. But the stridently militaristic tone of The Day After Tomorrow bothers me deeply. I recently read an article concerning Dungeons and Dragons which said that people who come to the game from a science fiction background tend to engage in collective action in pursuit of a grail, while those who come to the game from a war-gaming background tended to be a whole lot more bloodthirsty. At the time, I nodded and agreed, thinking to myself that that seemed to be a foregone conclusion. Most SF, I thought to myself, seems to involve a group of people working together towards a peaceful conclusion. Even in Doc Smith's stuff, or early Leinster one can see characters hoping for a peaceful solution, or at least not kicking an alien when he's down. But throughout this Heinlein novel runs an ugly note of vengeance, a joy in having someone so firmly by the throat that you can use due process and still do whatever you want to him. This is one book I cannot recommend.

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Leinster, Murray. The Greks Bring Gifts. New York: Macfadden, 1964.

How can I tell you how good this novel is? Particularly when it involves one man's attempt to prevent the coming of the millenium?

Let's start with the Greks. The Greks are an alien race which bring gifts to Earth (thus the title of the novel). The Greks show up one day, loaded down with some really neat stuff which they are just giving away. There is one immediately noticable thing about the Greks, however. When you see one of these grey, bald-headed aliens, you get this, well,"creepy" feeling. Not that you get to see the Greks very often. Most of the contact is through their students on this flight, the Aldarians (everybody likes the Aldarians). The only person who isn't completely snowed by the Greks is (of course) our hero--Jim Hackett. Jim, you see, availed himself of the opportunity (such opportunities naturally come to Nobel prize nominees in physics who are turned down because of their youth) to study physics under Grek instructors.

Jim Hackett is fired from his post at a university when he claims that Grekian physics make sense only up to a point, and then it turns into complete gibberish. Other physicists seem to be making further progress, so after some sympathy about people unable to change their way of thinking, Jim is washed up as far as teaching or research goes.

Of course, by the end of the novel, Jim has shown that the Greks are not really altruistic nice guys after all, that Grekian physics don't work (they are lying to us), and that the Aldarian students are in fact slaves of the evil, wicked, mean Greks. And naturally it all works out in the end. Yah-boo!!

From this plot outline, it might seem strange to acclaim the novel as other than SF-adventure fiction. But that the novel is more than that is in fact the case. The plot is handled well, though not brilliantly, being simple revelation, rather than as complex as, say, Dune. But for once the plot and ideas are not the most important aspect of an SF novel.

One of the more important facets of the novel is the auctorial voice, moralizing throughout the novel in an unsubtle, but unobstrusive manner. The voice in the novel is telling the story from an unnamed future time, explaining that all civilizations can and will act in a stupid manner when

given the correct stimulus. The auctorial voice is obviously speaking about his own time, but the words echo back to our own.

What the Greks have brought as a gift is the possibility of almost unlimited leisure and world-wide wealth. With the new technology that the Greks have to offer, the average man will only have to put in one shift of work per week, and that shift a soft one even by our standards.

Quite naturally, the people go mad for this future. The only problem is that they go mad too early. No one wants to work for present wages at their present job when in just a few short months, they will scarcely have to work at all. Factories cannot get enough people to work for long enough to tool up for the production of Grek technology. Absenteeism rises to better than eighty percent, factory after factory closes, the populace becomes restless when the promised millenium does not arrive, riots break out, demands for the Greks to take over the planet rise, and finally the call goes out. The Greks (who wisely left before the trouble broke out) are called back from their trip home and are asked to ensure the arrival of the millenium. This is, of course, what the Greks wanted. They hate taking over planets by force. They much prefer to have the inhabitants give the planet to them. With this end in mind, they have perfected this technique of lying to the people, and giving them technology without understanding.

But what has our hero been doing in the meantime? Why, saving the Earth, as all heroes must. The action of the novel is reserved for showing Jim pursuing this end.

It is here that Leinster pulls out of his hat the most important aspect to this novel--a brilliantly conceived character named Lucy Thale. Lucy is originally introduced simply as Jim's girlfriend, but she doesn't stay in that role for long. Having just finished her last year of interning, Lucy is a full-fledged M.D., and good at what she does.

Early in the novel, one of the Aldarian "students" is involved in a traffic accident and severely injured. Lucy is on the scene with Jim, and she takes charge of the injured alien while Jim barks useless and ignored orders. Lucy checks such things as the alien's pulse, finds one, and is smart enough to recognize the fact that she doesn't have the slightest idea if the speed of it is good or bad. She knows, in other words, the limits of her competency.

The alien entrusts Lucy with what later turns out to be an illegal device among the Aldarians--a hearing aid. The Greks routinely cut the auditory nerve in their slaves as a means of keeping them under control. The discovery that the Aldarians have proscribed technology would mean the death of many of their number. Lucy takes very responsible care of the device.

The novel develops Lucy Thale, showing that she takes a backseat to no one. When Jim takes his research into the operation of the hearing aid as far as he is able, Lucy has already grasped the problem he is facing and has effectively solved it. Yet Lucy will not directly give Jim the information he needs, trying instead to suggest the appropriate line of thought to him. Jim sees through her ploy however, and exclaims "Come on! You try to keep me from realizing how many brains you have, but you aren't smart enough... You were hinting at the answer then. You were trying to make me think of something that's all clear in your own mind." But Lucy is not certain (yet,at least) about Jim's ability to deal with her intellect. She knows that "a woman learns early that men prefer to be considered superior to women."

The point being developed is that Jim needs Lucy, without her he is not complete. Lucy as well needs Jim, but doesn't want him to feel that she is competing with him. Although Lucy recognizes the situation that they are in before Jim does, it is Jim that recognizes the importance of their relationship.

It is this relationship that lifts this novel out of the mundane, and into the realm of worthwhile-ness. More than Dreamsnake, more than Female Man, this is a novel of liberation and equality.