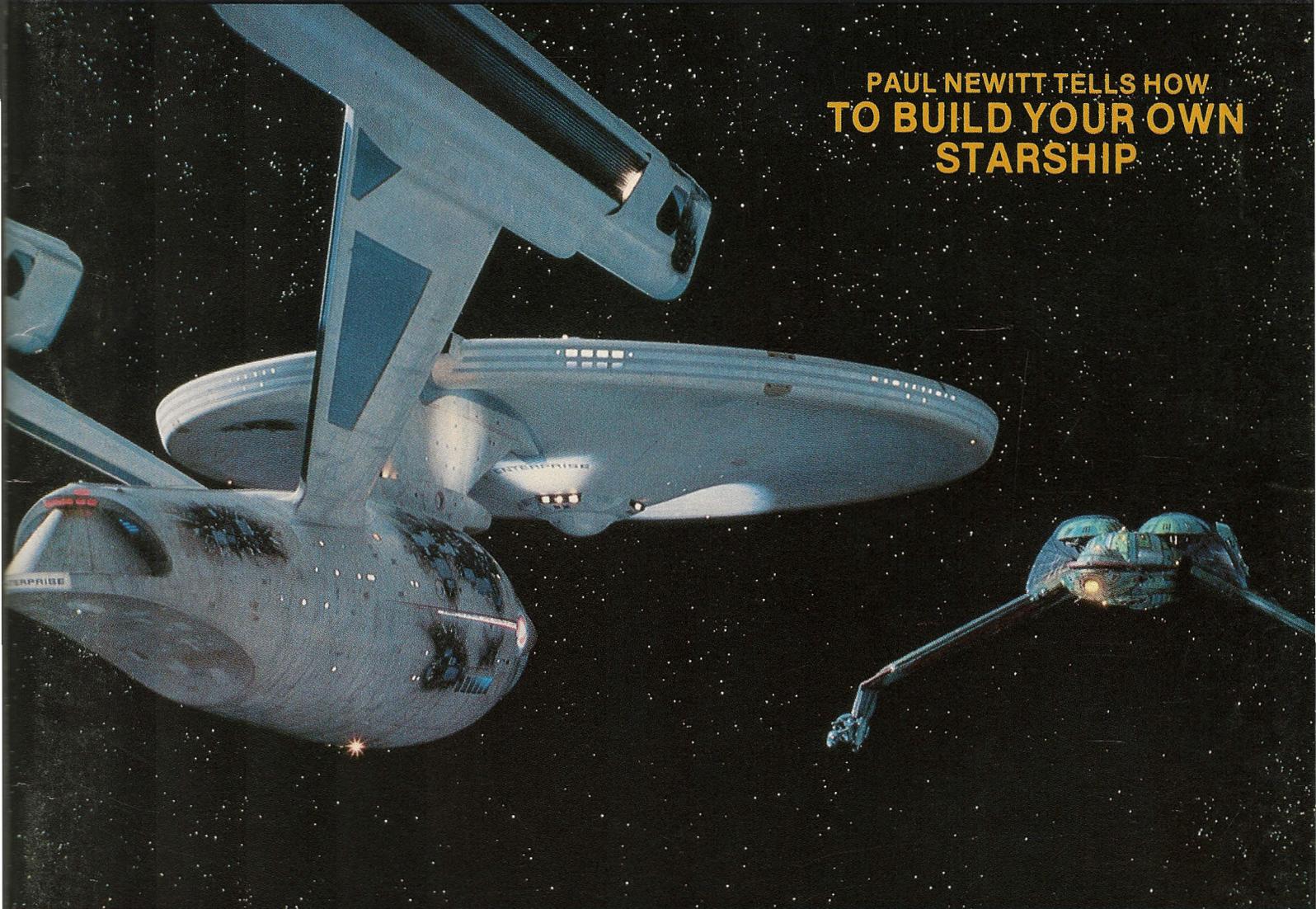


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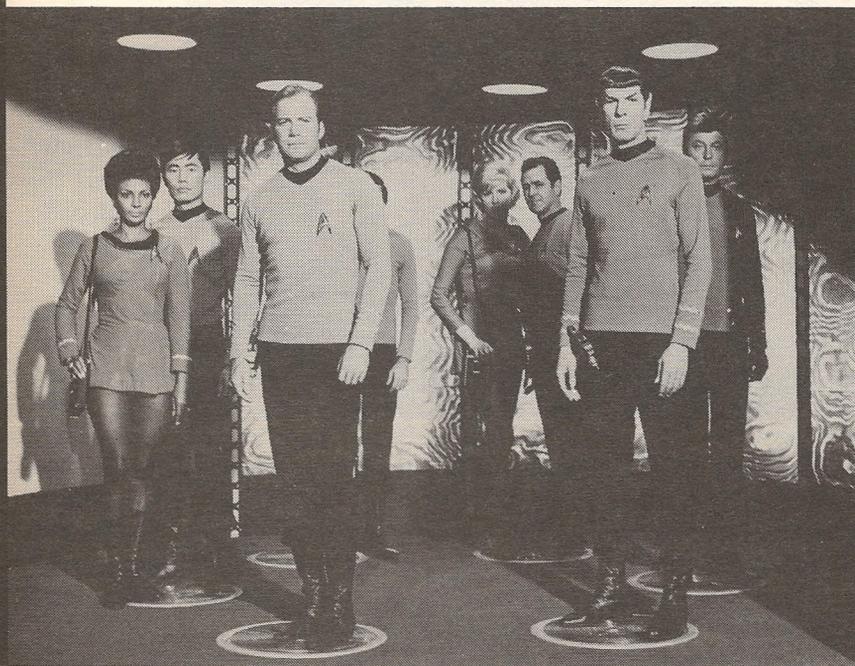
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An Interview With

Bill Rotsler

by James Van Hise

Bill Rotsler, at 57, has been a professional writer for twelve years, and yet his work seems to be appearing everywhere. His first novel, published in 1974, was the highly acclaimed *Patron Of The Arts*. More recently he did *The Far Frontier* for Playboy Press and *Nightmare*, a Dr. Strange novel for the brief run of Marvel novels a couple of years back. He has done hundreds, if not thousands, of cartoons for fanzines and friends, jotting down ideas that come to him off the top of his head. Some King Kong cartoons, which he does not consider some of his better or more representative work, have seemingly garnered eternal life in Harlan Ellison's anthology *Partners in Wonder*.

Writers often have to do all sorts of work in order to make a living in their chosen field. They often refer to such work as "creative typing", as it is sometimes highly paid work of little significance. Bill does some of this in-between more revered projects and

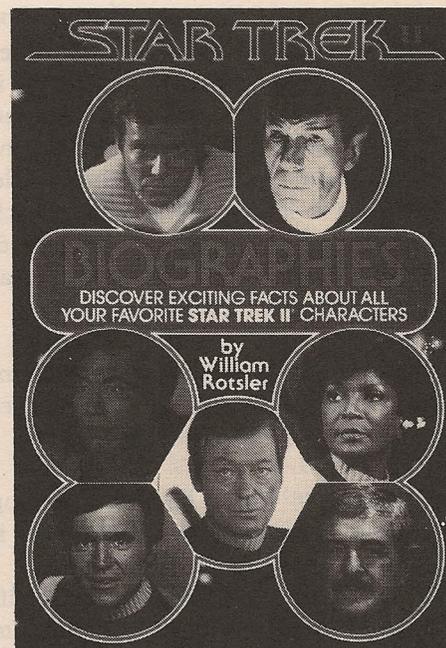
thus we've seen his credit on adaptations of *Mr. Merlin* TV scripts and a novelization of *The Pirate Movie*, as well as a *Staying Alive* plot-your-own-adventure book.

Some fans may recognize his name as the author of three *Star Trek* books published last fall by Simon & Shuster, if you can find them as they've received curiously bad distribution for a *Star Trek* tie-in item. Digest sized, they are nonetheless books, and are: *Star Trek II: Short Stories* (with an upside-down Enterprise on the front cover), *Star Trek II: Biographies*, and *Star Trek II: Distress Call--Plot Your-Own-Adventure Stories*.

EI: What is the story behind your *Star Trek* books? Including the fact that many people reading this won't have even heard about them?

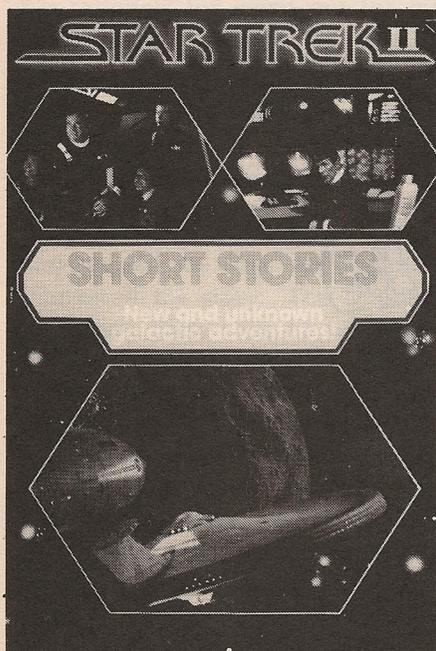
ROTSLER: Yes, they are the greatest unknown books in publishing history.

I've been doing a whole series of young adult books for the same publisher, Wanderer Books (a division of Simon & Shuster). Most of them have been television or motion picture tie-ins, so when this one came along it was just a natural for me to do it. I also had an interest in doing it; I like *Star Trek*, so it was fun to do in that sense. There are three of them, one of which is *Distress Call*, a plot-your-own-adventure book which is a strange, new juvenile genre. It's a choice tree, like a *Dungeons & Dragons* affair in a vague way by having to make a series of choices. The one that everyone seems to want if they hear about it is the official biographies of the characters, not of the actors, and that was one of the most fun books I've ever done.



I did not want to do, "and then Montgomery Scott did this, and then he did that," which seemed utterly dull. I figured that if I was a big-time Trekkie that I'd prefer to read about things that had only been hinted at, or that they didn't know, or that part of their life that hasn't been shown in any of the 79 episodes and two movies. What I did is figure that the people of the *Enterprise*, which has saved the Earth, the solar system, the galaxy and various and other sundry parts of the universe at some time would have a few books written about them, so I did quote from those books. I thought of about six or eight books and then wrote them down and I finished the day's work and I went off to watch television and sometime in the course of the evening I came up with the title *Klingon Cuisine*.

I thought that was funny, so about one o'clock in the morning, which is when I usually go to bed, I thought I'd better write that idea down. The next thing I know, it was five o'clock in the morning and I had just written 5,000



words of bibliography, putting in the names of all the writers who had written in the series. I used the device of, say an Admiral that would only have his last name ever mentioned, I would use the first name of the actor who had played the part. Then using characters that had been mentioned in the series, and others that are hinted at and so forth, I went on to using the names of friends, most of the members of the Los Angeles Fantasy Society and other reprobates that I know. And after it was all done they decided they wanted about half of that cut so I just went through and cut out things that would not truly be in the bibliography of such a book, such as *Turbolift Service & Repair*. I just left those books that would be the dramatic ones.

EI: Did you get any comments from Gene Roddenberry's office either before or after you turned it in?

ROTSLER: They have a licensing procedure that may be peculiar or it may be standard in the industry, I don't know. The series is licensed differently from film number 1 and film number 2 which are licensed differently from the series. Theoretically they licensed Wanderer Books *Star Trek II*, but if you're going to do the biographies you've got to mention all the other stuff, too. So what I think they did is just tactfully ignored that part of the contract. As far as I know, Roddenberry didn't have anything to do with it. That is, it's okayed by the licensing department of Paramount. Now as a matter of fact, when I came to the point of having to give some

people a first name, I gave Uhura a first name. I checked it out with Roddenberry's office (but he was out of town at the time), and his secretary checked with him and he said the name was fine. And then I called up Nichelle Nichols, whom I don't know and have never met. I explained who I was and what I was doing and she was very nice and very polite, and I said I've given you a first name and she said, "Oh, that's nice." I said "It's Nyota and it means star in Swahili," and she goes, "Oh, boy!" and got real excited about it.

But I didn't *have* to do any of those things. My responsibility is directly to my editor, but if you are sensible, what you try to do is connect with the power structure and save yourself a lot of work by getting things approved to begin with. I tried to phase in to what existed. I did not read all those *Star Trek* novels; I just wasn't going to. There's too many of them and I'm not interested. I'd read one of them by Joe Haldeman some time ago but I was not about to sit down and refresh my mind. The only thing I did which had to be changed was that Vonda McIntyre had given a different background to Sulu in one book (Note: *The Entropy Effect*), and they pointed that out to me and so I just adjusted it to what was there.

There is a book out of *Star Trek* ships and so I used those because I had to use some ship titles so why not phase in to what had already been done, in other words make as many connections as possible. And so I just used some of

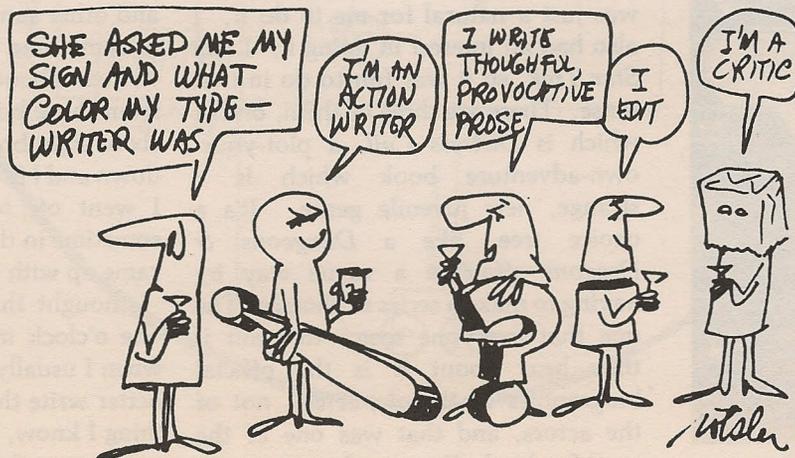
those and made up a few more. Steve Barnes (author of *Street Lethal*) becomes a spaceship in here, for example.

The format of the biographies is that the first part of it is what would be the Starfleet dossier on them listing their class and ratings, assignments, medals, honors and all of that sort of thing. Just for the hell of it I had Kirk born on the dark side of the moon and he went to my high school. One of them has my Army serial number and McCoy, as his serial number has my phone number. Most of the birthdays are there — my own, my sister's, my daughter's, my ex-wife's.

The hard part was working out some kind of rationale between stardates and Earth dates.

By the way, I could not have done this book, at all, and would not have attempted it, except for Bjo Trimble's *Star Trek Concordance*. Without that it just would have been too big a task. Then it would have been a marvelous fan task, I suppose, because fans do a lot of things for the love of it, as I have, but this was not one of them. I'm a professional writer and I'm not going to take something that's going to be more work than I'm getting paid for. So without Bjo's book, I couldn't have done this, and it is in fact dedicated to her.

I also did some other things in there I thought people would find interesting. These are five year missions, and you don't go out to space for five years or





out to sea for five years, for that matter, without some overriding reason. For some it simply could be that they're curious and want adventure and so forth, but I also plugged a little bit into emotions. For instance, in the biographies, one of the reasons Uhura is out there is that she fell in love with what would be a Special Forces captain, because if you remember, she comes from the United States of Africa. Her lover is killed and so that becomes her rationale for going out for more than one of these trips, but I pay her back in the short story by giving her a romance with a prince.

But it was fun to do.

I connected to the TV series in a slight way; an oblique way. For instance, if you recall the story "The Doomsday Machine", there were no survivors of the *Constellation* when the *Enterprise* found it, except for the Captain, Captain Decker. So I had Scotty write to a former engineer of that ship, knowing that engineers had a possessive feeling towards their ships, and he retells that story with a great deal of techno-patter as one engineer would writing to another engineer, but from a different viewpoint, saying, "Regardless of what

you've heard, this is what happened to that ship that you used to be on." So once in awhile I made a connection to the series, or to one of the movies, by doing that.

I also did a tip-of-the-hat to the animated series simply by mentioning one or two of the characters in the bibliography. But my license was really for just *Star Trek II*. But I did include the death of Spock in the biography. I even had Paramount send me a copy of the script, that is the post-filming script. What they do is, when they make a film, they will go through and remake the script to correspond to what people actually said or what is actually shown as opposed to what the script said originally. So just to make sure and not use an earlier script, but use the film, I got a copy of that script from Paramount, and so for Spock's death I have the exact dialogue that was spoken because I thought fans might appreciate that.

Strangely enough, my forty-first book was published this month (with four more due), and in all those books I've gotten more mail from that one book than from all the others put

together. Letters come from Germany, Japan, all over the place, and nobody even really *knows* about the book, so God knows what's going to happen when people find out about it.

EI: What kind of feedback have you gotten?

ROTSLER: Well, every letter says, "I just loved it, I thought it was great, it was needed, etc., etc., but..." and then they nitpick about something. In one case, and only one in all those letters, were they right. I made a mistake in the sequence of Spock's burial, and he was absolutely right. I did it wrong, I don't know why I did it wrong, but I did it wrong. All the rest had an idea that Uhura's name was something else, or that something else happened, and it all comes either from their own imagination or from all the fan fiction magazines. There have been innumerable articles and stories written and people come to believe them because they're in the fan press. My feeling is that, unless it was in the series or the two movies, it doesn't count because I cannot enclose all that stuff in my mind, so since this is the official biographies, *this* is the truth. What I have written is "true", not the fan magazines.

I did all three books, and attended two conventions as well, in six weeks because I was committed to these two conventions and to these books and so I had to do them in six weeks, which is one of the problems with all these film and television tie-ins. Everybody wants them yesterday and so you simply have to do them fast. You have to be right the first time. You don't have time to go and fiddle with it very much.

Of all the novelizations of films I have done, I've only seen one — a TV show — before I wrote the novelizations. Sometimes I'll see the stills and sometimes not, and you know that the difference that an actor does in his or her performance is going to be different than what you read on paper. It could be funny, it could be dramatic — same words, same actions. It depends on how they do it. And so

you have to try to anticipate. If you know who's playing the part, you know who directed, you have to try to figure out what they would do, and second-guessing is a real bitch. So you go straight ahead with it and hope that you're doing it right.

If it's a known subject, such as *Star Trek*, you pretty much know how they're going to handle something. But if it's a new film that you don't know anything about, you don't really know how they're going to handle it.

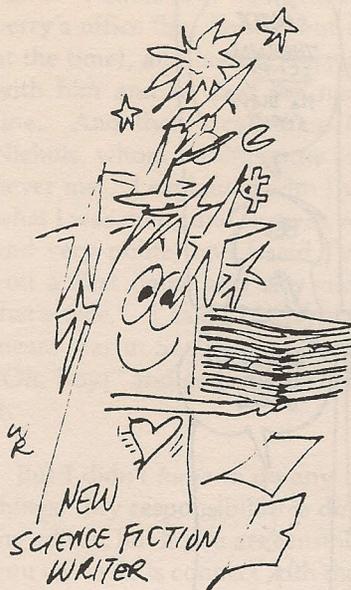
EI: Did Wanderer Books contract for only these three, or are there going to be others?

ROTSLER: Well, this was all a bit of a surprise to Pocket Books, which is another division of Simon & Shuster, that my editor had gotten *Star Trek II* because they thought that they had the overall contract, and they didn't. She also has rights to do something on *Star Trek III* and I will be doing four books on that, but it won't be the novelization of the script. They will be one of these choose your own adventure books, more short stories, and quiz and trivia books. These are all "young adult" books.

These things are interesting enough to do, they're challenging enough to do, but they're basically creative typing. They are not *real* writing. But I found them challenging enough. It's very highly paid creative typing, but I have no illusions about it. They're interesting to do, especially when it's something like *Star Trek* which you've seen for so long and everybody's got their own idea of this and that about it.

EI: Besides these you've done a lot of other kinds of books, such as science fiction novels, books in the Marvel Comics novel series...

ROTSLER: Well, I also think of that as creative typing. I did *Dr. Strange*, I did *Iron Man*, *Silver Surfer* and recently a *Blackhawk* novel. The *Silver Surfer* novel was never published because the series was cancelled before they got that far, but it may see light one day. People who are in the business think that if they ever do a *Silver Surfer*



movie that someone will say, "Hey, we already have a book here, let's put it out." And I think it's a pretty good little book. I think it captures the spirit pretty well. But those things are sort of one ding higher than a novelization.

When you take another character, a franchised character, everybody already has an idea of what it's like, and you try to maintain and deepen that idea. If you're doing a comic book character, you lose the action and the visual part, so what you have to do is substitute more mental images, deepen the character by their thoughts, which they don't do very much in comics and fill in all the holes.

For instance, in the *Blackhawk* book and in all of them, I've gone back to the origins — the first origin story, and as you know there is more than one origin story in comic books. I went back to the first one, and in the *Blackhawk*, he decides to fight the Nazis when his brother is killed in Poland. There is a caption which runs across the whole page that's about five lines long and it took me fifty pages to adapt that caption into the novel because on the panels immediately below that caption, he has a secret island base, all these guys helping him out, he has airplanes, money, ground crews, support systems, an intelligence agency, all this

stuff. Where did it come from? I feel that in a novel you just can't do it that way. You've got to explain. You can't make those jumps. It took me fifty pages of work, manuscript work, to support that little five line caption. So I had him find a sympathizer with money, and I had to decide where the island was because if you've read *Blackhawk* you find that the island seems to just magically appear wherever they want it to be. I had to do a rationale for it and I got out an atlas and figured out what would be proper and did it that way. Those are some of the things you have to do when I refer to filling in the holes. You have to make things logical.

EI: What do you think you've done in science fiction that stands up as some of your more serious work?

ROTSLER: My first book was *Patron of the Arts* and I think it's probably my best book. On the other hand I've written *Shiva Descending* with Greg Benford and that's real science fiction, but unfortunately it came along when everybody in the world was either writing a book or doing a movie about "great-rock-comes-to-hit-Earth." It would have done better than it did had there not been all these other ones at the same time.

EI: This came out after *Lucifer's Hammer* by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle?

ROTSLER: All the others came out after *Lucifer's Hammer*. They were all working on it at the same time. I was working on it when they were working on theirs, but they got theirs out first. As a matter of fact Larry Niven said something very funny to me. I didn't know what their book was about. I just knew the title. Greg Benford then came to me with this idea that he'd been toying with, and it sounded like a good movie bet to me, and so I went to work on the book and I developed the characters and he supplied a great deal of the science and wrote some of the sequences and so forth, so it was about a 60/40 collaboration. Strangely enough, everybody thinks that he did the science and I did the sex scenes, and it's almost totally the other way

around.

Anyway, one day Larry Niven asked me if I'd read *Lucifer's Hammer*, and I said no because by then I'd found out what it was about and I thought it might influence me. And he said a great line. He said, "You mean you thought it over from every angle and made the wrong decision." After I stopped laughing I decided that I had better go and read their book.

EI: In case you accidentally duplicated it in some way?

ROTSLER: We both had used exactly the same scientific references, or almost the same ones, simply because there's very little information around about what happens when a big something comes to hit Earth. But what we did was, we took basically the same premise and went in diametrically opposed directions with it. So except for the fact that those two books and a couple of movies are about what happens when a big rock or comet or ball of ice or whatever comes to hit Earth, it was just that season. There will be a season of certain kinds of films, in books there'll suddenly be two or three biographies out within six months on the same star; that kind of thing. It was one of those kind of things.

My other books have been like *The Far Frontier*, the two books in the Zandra series, have been fun adventure type of things. My second novel, which was *To the Land of the Electric Angel*, was a kind of companion piece to *Patron of the Arts*, in that it's set a few years later in the same world.

EI: You started writing very late compared to many other writers, didn't you?

ROTSLER: I started about a dozen years ago. I was into my forties when I started writing.

Sometimes you'll meet somebody and they'll say: What are you? What do you do? My first reaction was always to say Artist, because I have a very broad definition of that. Most people think of an artist as someone who paints



or sculpts, and I've done that, but to me an artist is someone who creates and this is one of the reasons I like to do different things. I've been a sculptor — I've been in major shows and travelling exhibits. I cartoon, write, photograph, make movies. All those things to me are just one facet of it, so when people ask me what I do, I have a tendency to say artist, but I usually modify that to say writer because that's what I'm doing the most of at the moment. But in my secret heart of hearts, I think of myself as an artist. The idea of doing one thing drives me crazy. I couldn't stand to go to a job every day and I've been lucky in that I have been supporting myself for over thirty years by thinking up something, doing it and having someone give me money for it. I've taken assignments to make a film or I created a magazine one time, or I did sculpture where it was an assignment and I basically knew there was an end to it. It would not be on-going, and that's fine because every job in the world has some kind of shitwork attached to it.

I love making movies and I've made hundreds of hours of features, training films, industrial films and so forth and I like doing it, but every job has its shit detail. It's just that if the job in the balance is more good than bad, then that's fine. But knowing going in that

you have these long hours or hard work or whatever it might be, you have to balance that against your desire to do it and how much enjoyment it gives you.

I do pretty much what I want, within certain limits, I guess.

EI: When was your art first published?

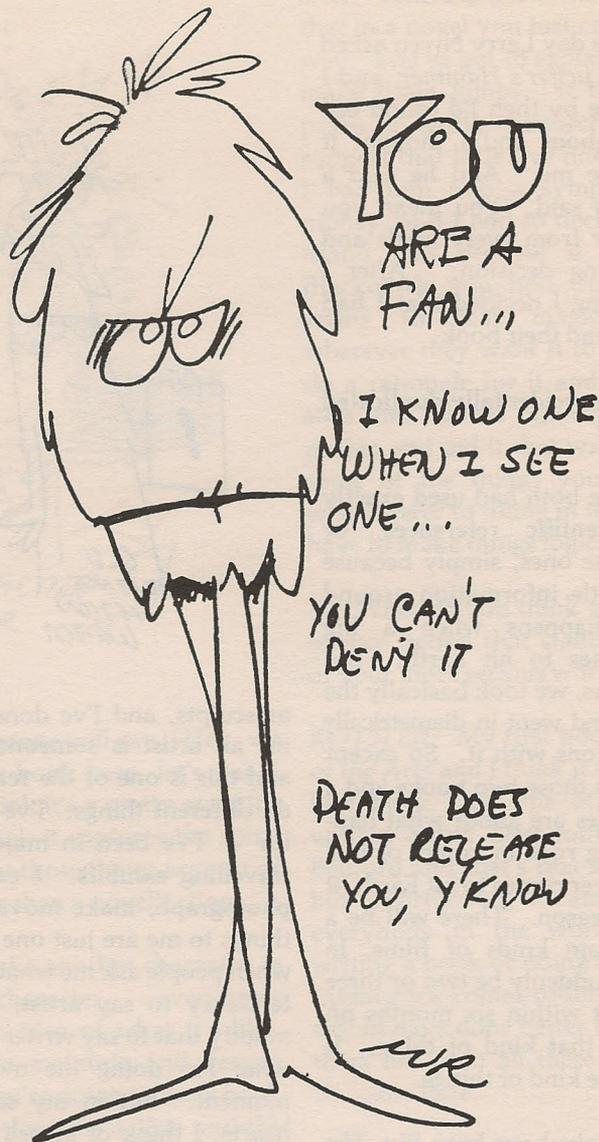
ROTSLER: About 1944 in some fan publication. I got my Draft notice and my first fanzine in the same mail, and I'm 57 years old and I've spent most of my life playing. I mean, I work hard. I work every single day some hours, but like Travis McGee, I take my retirement a little bit every day. I work every day, seven days a week, but I may only work four or five hours, or I may even work ten or twelve if I'm in the mood. But I work everyday. It's not like going to a job I hate. I'm not doing anything I dislike. I'm only doing the things I want to do, so the only things that get to me are physical.

For instance, twenty months ago, some guy in a pickup truck decided to try to move into my lane on the freeway at about sixty miles an hour and knocked me across two lanes of freeway and wrenched the hell out of my neck, shoulder and back and I've spent the last twenty months going to therapy. I feel like I got stomped yesterday, so for almost two years now, it's made me physically very stiff.

EI: I heard a story once about you getting arrested and Harlan Ellison bailing you out?

ROTSLER: Yes. The way I got arrested was, there were two hookers I knew — they were figure models — and I knew one of them had had a baby and that it was being taken care of by a woman who takes care of children for the County. Anyway, she was paying this woman to take care of her child and she'd go and pick up the child on weekends. So she went over to pick up this kid, and the woman said, "No, that kid's mine, now." sort of on the basis that if you leave it over thirty days it belongs to them? Since she was

a hooker, and the woman knew it and said she would call the cops, she left and didn't know what to do, she wanted to get her child back. So they asked me if I would go over with them and, like a dope, I went along and another friend of mine went along too. There were two women and two of us and so we just figured we'd walk in, pick up the kid and walk out. We go in the room, the door is opened by one of the children, and the next thing I know a fight is going on in the hallway. In the hallway I find the foster mother bracing herself against a bedroom door, wearing nothing but curlers and panties, and she's sending off the older children to call the cops. So I reach through this tangle of writhing arms and I shove the door open. I didn't realize there was some twelve or fourteen year old kid holding the door shut on the other side, and when you're in those circumstances you're stronger than you think, so I inadvertently knocked this child across the room. I didn't hurt him. As I go in the foster mother grabs this year and a half old baby and she grabs the child and the real mother grabs the child and they're about to do a Solomon on this kid — pulling it apart. I pointed this out to the mother who then releases her child, because she doesn't want to hurt it and the foster mother rolls over on top of the child. Now all I could think of at this time is, "She's going to smother this kid." There's screaming of children and women going on to a tremendous degree, so I just reached over and peeled the foster mother off of the child. The real mother grabs the child and runs like hell. I am now left in a room with an hysterically angry, out of her gourd woman who takes a swing at me, knocks off my brand new glasses into the corner behind a bed, and then tries to kick me in the groin. Now I was not about to go over and get those glasses. I try to leave and she sinks her teeth into my wrist, which somewhat hurts. The door was being blockaded by all these children. Now I could have just punched out everybody and walked out, but I don't want to hurt anybody. I'm the innocent bystander who's getting hurt. So as I wedged my way through the



children, who were also trying to punch me in the groin, I ripped my wrist out of her mouth, and she seized on the fleshy party of my forearm. I just let her chew on it because that didn't hurt as much as the wrist, until I got through the kids, and then I pulled my arm out of her mouth and I left.

Now she ran out naked, on to the balcony, and screams her head off for the cops. The people in this apartment complex didn't know that this wasn't kidnapping. By the time I got to the van, the parking lot entrance had been cut off by a mob of outraged citizens, and I'm thinking, "Oh, boy, I am in deep trouble." So I just drove to the other entrance and some very smart lady tries to stop passing cars so that they'll block the exit, but she doesn't

get there in time. But some stalwart eighteen or nineteen year old guy folded his arms and stood right in front of the van and I just pointed, told him to move and I kept going and got out of there. I dropped the women off, dropped my friend off and I went home to wait for the cops because obviously someone would have gotten my license number. The cops came in through the front and the back door and I was taken off. I was not arrested at this point but was taken off for child-stealing.

I was put in jail with a biker gang that was thrown in there too. That's a lot of fun. The people who were supposed to interrogate me had gone home! It was a holiday. I was going to get to spend three days there. So I phoned

home to get my friends to go and get a lawyer to come and get me out.

By the way, I went through the whole strip-search scene the best way I could, which is as a writer. I now know how to write about having a strip-search done. Just be a third person observer and you get through these things.

I put 15 cents in the phone to call home and there's nobody there, and only a dime comes back. The only person within a dime call was Harlan Ellison, so I called Harlan just to tell him to call my friends at home. Well, Harlan was ready to marshal the forces of good and storm the San Fernando Valley jail and get me out.

I said "No, no, no, no, no. Just tell my friends and they'll take care of it." I was then sent off to sleep with the biker gang. There were no particular problems there. But nobody comes. It was late at night so I went to sleep. I was awakened at five o'clock in the

morning, taken out, and there waiting for me was my best friend Paul Turner, Harlan Ellison (who had just put up his house to bail me out) and Don Pfiel (who then was the editor of *Vertex* magazine and used to be in Hell's Angels). They had all come to rescue me.

It never came to trial. I went to the time and place and they had never even filed an arrest form because they had by then investigated and found that the child was not the child of the woman who claimed it was her child, that it was the child of the person I knew and so they just dropped the whole thing. It cost me seven hundred dollars for new glasses and an attorney.

That's how Harlan Ellison bailed me out of jail.

EI: Those kinds of things happen to you very often?

ROTSLER: No, not very often. In fact nothing like that ever again. But it's a

great help to be able to look at something as a writer. But other things happen.

EI: Was there any one thing that steered you into writing as opposed to what you had been doing up until that time?

ROTSLER: Yes, Harlan Ellison, again.

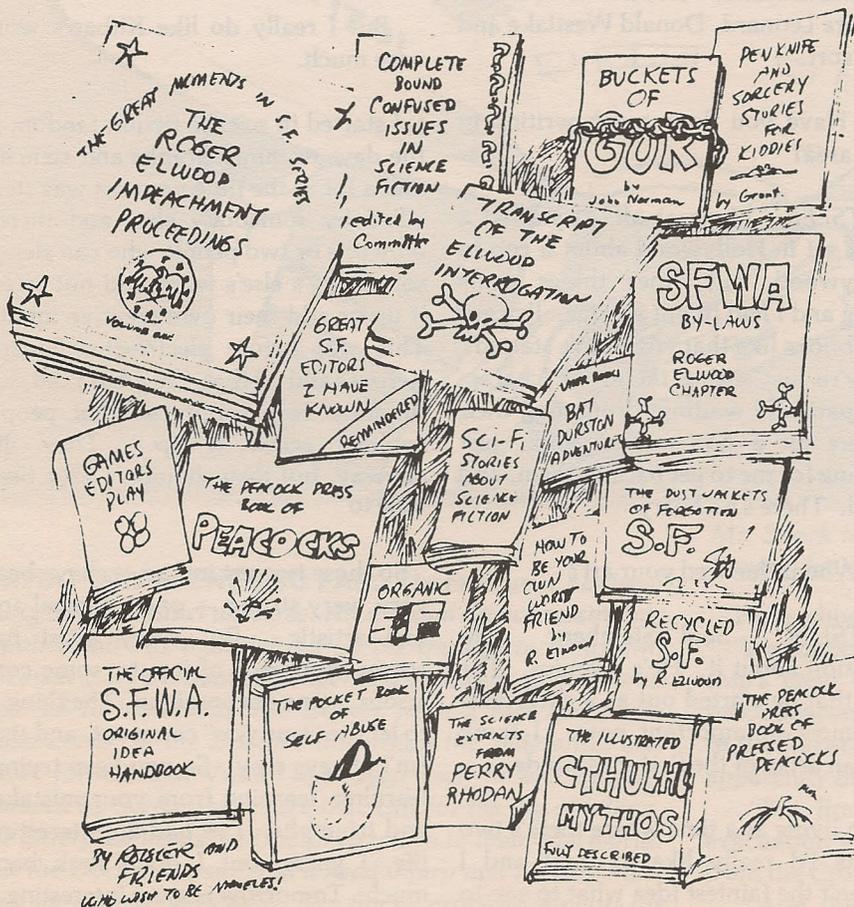
I had written a number of things. I'd been doing stills on a lot of the early simulated-sex films and magazines would ask me to write an article and I wrote one and they'd say to write another one and another. I was writing a lot of these things, but I didn't think of myself as a writer. That was just fun.

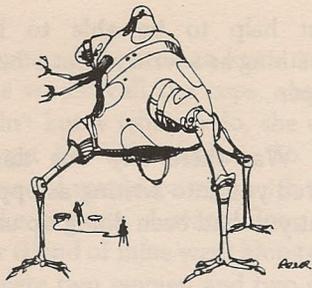
Then once I was at Harlan's house and there was a blank sheet of paper in his typewriter, and I don't know why because we never said a word to each other through this whole thing, but I sat down and wrote a paragraph, got up and he sat down and wrote a paragraph, and we wrote alternate paragraphs for a page or a page and a half, then looked at it, tore it up and threw it away. Then we went about our business.

When I went home I thought, "That was fun. Maybe if it wasn't such a short thing; if I wrote a bigger chunk." So I sat down and wrote something and used Harlan's name and wrote about three pages, and thought that Harlan could take it over from there if he felt like it. But then I realized that the story was really done. It was over with.

This shows how dumb I was at the time. I looked at it and thought, this is a story. What do you do with a story? You send it to a magazine. What magazine? Well, Jack Gaughn is a friend of mine and he's the art editor of *Galaxy* so I'll send it there. So I crossed out Harlan's name and wrote George in it and sent it off to *Galaxy*.

A week or so later I came home and they told me that the editor of *Galaxy* had called and I didn't think of the editor of *Galaxy*, I thought Jack





Gaughn, the Art Editor, and I wondered what the hell he was calling me about? About that time Harlan calls and he said that the editor of *Galaxy*, Ejler Jakobsson, had called and said that it was unusual for a writer to use another writer in a story and was it all right if they used his name, and Harlan said, "Sure, Bill's a friend of mine." Then the editor of *Galaxy* called me and he was so enthusiastic about this thing which I had literally forgotten. You must understand that I do a lot of things and then I don't remember them later, so I didn't even remember this story. This guy was so enthusiastic, he wanted first look at everything I wrote and so on that I thought I was being put-on. He asked me what I wanted for it and I thought, hell, I don't know. He said, "How about fifty dollars," and I said fine. Eventually he sent me an advance copy of the magazine and I had no idea what the story was about, and so I sat down and read it just like you'd sit down and read it with no idea what's going to happen next. It's a bizarre feeling.

But in the time between writing that story and getting the advance copy, I wrote a hundred thousand words, including *Patron of the Arts*, and had launched myself on a writing career.

So once again Harlan Ellison scampers through the scenes of my life. Our lives have crossed a number of times, in various ways, and I like him.

EI: Have you ever illustrated something you've written?

ROTSLER: No. People ask that a lot. I have no real interest in doing that. I don't write like I cartoon. They're two different fountains.

I could see doing it with photographs. But it requires a big production to get

it together.

EI: What science fiction works do you admire?

ROTSLER: Well, classically, of course, Heinlein, except for a couple of his books. I think he writes marvelously, especially if you can handle the political aspects of it. There's a lot of people I like very much. I find Clarke very dry and I find his people unreal, but his ideas are magnificent. I'm reading Steve Barnes new book, *Street Lethal*, and I like it a lot. It's well written science fiction adventure.

It's hard to say, though. A lot of people have written one or two good books and then a lot of crap, just like me. And a lot of people have written a good deal of "high middle", but still there'll be some good stuff in there.

I don't like fantasy very much, but I do like good science fiction.

There's a lot of different people that I read, although mostly I read mystery/adventure type books — John D MacDonald, Robert B Parker, Elmore Leonard, Donald Westlake and that sort.

EI: Have you done much writing in that area?

ROTSLER: None at all. I started a book set in Hollywood about a cop in Hollywood, but other things came along and I had to put it aside. I've got two books like that which I've started. They're just sitting there, the characters patiently waiting, drumming their fingers on a non-existent desk, just waiting for me to get back to them, and I will. There's no hurry.

EI: Who influenced your art?

ROTSLER: Saul Steinberg. No question about it. He's a genius. The fact that he started out as a cartoonist is almost unimportant now. I think he's an artist of the first magnitude.

I'm living at a time where there's two artists I'd really like to meet and I haven't the faintest idea what to say to them, and that's Henry Moore and

Saul Steinberg. In fact, a few years ago at the San Diego Comic-Con, we were called up one by one to draw on a wall covered with paper, and I went up and there had been such a crowd I could see and suddenly realized I'd been standing there watching other guys draw, so I drew something then went over and sat down and Kliban came over and sat down next to me. That was the first time I'd been near him and I wanted to say to him that really dumb thing, "Boy, I really like your work", but I thought, God, that's really a dumb remark. It's better than saying *Piss Off*, but it should be more than that, but I said it anyway. He nodded and was polite, and then I thought of something in that moment. I said, "There's a lot of cartoon books published, and you look at them, enjoy them and put them on the shelf or give them away and you never look at them again. But there's two peoples who's books I will pull out and look at again and again. You and Saul Steinberg." And Kliban goes, "Oh, Saul Steinberg, the father of us all!" and he was very enthusiastic.

But I really do like Kliban's work very much.

I started in science fiction fandom in the days of mimeographs and stencils, and a lot of the time your art was stencilled by somebody else, and there's only one or two people who can stencil somebody's else's work and not screw it up or add their own creative input. This was before electro-stencils and Xeroxes and all that. So what I did was to draw very simply so that people couldn't screw it up. They did anyway, but they shouldn't have been able to

So those two art influences have been very, very strong — one technical and one artistic. But every artist has scores, hundreds of inputs, some conscious, some unconscious. The thing is to let the "true you" come out, and that isn't always easy. So you keep trying, learning, learning from your mistakes and triumphs. I've had an interesting life, I guess, but I don't look back much. Tomorrow is more interesting.