



Dear Editor:

As one matures, he begins to realize that, just because somebody has said that something is true, it does not necessarily mean that this fact is true. The purpose of this letter is to point out why, in my opinion, Otis Adelbert Kline is a better adventure-story writer than Edgar Rice Burroughs.

This undoubtedly violates more than a couple taboos, and of course anyone who says a bad thing against ERB's writings is a blackguard and a scoundrel. Probably Pat Scott will start screaming about Mervyn Peake, and Billy Hulan will mumble something about how poor L. Sprague de Camp is, but I will continue, in the hope that somewhere some fan will not begin

twitching in the dust and screaming bloody murder.

For convenience, let's take an easily available ERB volume, and two recently published paperbacks of Kline's. The ERB is "Three Martian Novels," containing—supposedly—his three best Mars novels. The Klines' are "The Outlaws of Mars" and "The Swordsman of Mars."

After reading all five novels—four and a half, that is—I couldn't finish the last one in the ERB book, "Mastermind of Mars"—I can make this statement:

For the type of story which he writes, Burroughs' style is grotesquely misplaced. Using over-large words and long, complex sentences, he usually says in one page what Kline says in a paragraph. In some types of fiction, this would be all right; but in adventure stories, the object is to keep the story and the hero moving at all times. Let us take a hypothetical situation. Suppose our hero was cornered in the vaults underneath the deserts of Mars by some fierce trained beast. He has a choice between killing the beast or escaping down a side passage which he has never been in before. If he kills the beast it will raise an alarm and put the guards on the alert for him. Well, if ERB wrote it, it would probably come out something like this—

"Karter stood watching the

fearsome beast as indecision burned in his mind. He had two choices, and now, with death closing in on him by the second, he quickly turned them over in his mind, noting that the beast was of course waiting for him to finish his decision before jumping.

"He could kill the beast, but this was of course a bad idea, since it would raise an alarm, the beast being trained to hunt for dangerous-looking persons within the tunnels. Once raised, he would probably never be able to get out, and spend the rest of his life—not long, at that rate—in the catacombs. Never to see Sejah Doris again! Never . . ."

(500 words later)

"Or, he could leap into the tunnel at his right, where the beast could not follow. This seemed the best bet, so he quickly gathered his muscles and jumped. Unfortunately, his Earth-muscles responded only too gladly, and he sailed straight up, banging his head on the ceiling. . . ."

But you get the idea. All the time Burroughs is dissertating on the possible choices open, or the current situation, we are wondering if the action is frozen into still-life waiting for him to get through. Kline would probably just say, "Realizing that to kill the animal meant raising an

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... OR SO YOU SAY

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alarm, he leaped to his right into the strange tunnel."

Finally, Kline's heroes and heroines are a little more realistic than Burroughs', and his situations infinitely more exciting. This is why he is a better adventure-story writer than Burroughs ever was.

Charles Dixon
4578 Comanche Rd.
Gainesville, Ga.

● *Well, you've probably started something all right. ERB-ites, our lettercols are open. First come, first printed!*

Dear Editor:

Though I am normally accounted as being as phlegmatic as most, Mr. Cotts has pegged me as an "irate reader" (which I am not); therefore, I *am* feeling rather irate. First, I write a dissenting opinion on a book review. In return, I am told that I am entitled to my opinion—though I am clearly wrong, which is another opinion! Then, I receive rather special mention by Mr. Cotts wherein he still disagrees, but explains why. Also, I find that another reader likes *Stranger*, reasons not given, as your reasons are not. Now then, the only person I am now a trifle perturbed at is you, Miss Goldsmith; because only you of the printed opposition, have not stat-

ed your reasons for disagreement.

I would like to thank Cotts for his explanation to me why he disliked Heinlein's novel. It is seldom that a reviewer bothers with such dissenting opinions. I enjoy both magazines and am rather in awe of the competent staff which can select such a wide and varied range of material for presentation. However, I will continue to write dissenting opinions.

The July issue was very good, especially Stuart's story. I also liked N.L.'s editorial. After reading a story in one of your rival mags on the same subject, I found that its story line was much clearer to me due to N.L.'s editorial.

J. J. Tilton
Box 199, Ft. Clayton
Canal Zone

● *Cotts is in the Voltaireian tradition—disagreeing with what you say but defending to the death your right to say it. Cele is more in the tradition of the eternal female. She disagrees with you but won't say why. Perhaps she doesn't even know. We put up with these eccentricities of hers as long as the magazine gets out on time each month.*

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

I write this letter for one main purpose: to vent my dissatisfaction.

tion with S. E. Cotts as a book reviewer.

To elaborate: Cotts' reviews lack coherence and a definite opinion of the book in question. A case in point is his review of Damon Knight's anthology. He starts out by saying the anthology is excellent because of Knight's good taste; but then his tone alters slightly and he commences to complain of the placement of stories (saying that "Call Me Joe" could very well be placed in the "Other Worlds and People" section; but I'm sure if Knight had put the story in that section, Cotts would have wondered why it wasn't in the original "Superman" section), then whines about the omission of Theodore Sturgeon. Has Cotts ever tried to assemble an anthology? Did it ever occur to him that just possibly none of Sturgeon's stories fitted into the anthology; or possibly rights couldn't be secured for a possible story; or possibly the stories available were overly familiar, or overly long? I might just as well complain of the omission of stellar names like Jack Williamson, Henry Kuttner, Clifford Simak, Murray Leinster, A. E. van Vogt, Fritz Leiber, and many others, all certainly shapers of current science fiction. Then he complains of the absence of some science fiction. Then he complains of the absence of some

important science fiction novels; did it ever occur to him that anthologization of several novels, or even one novel, rather cramps things in a 350 page anthology? And then seems to think that Knight doesn't consider them science fiction because of their absence.

His reviews seem interminably long and murky, and after a while one wonders what the heck Cotts thinks of the book he's reviewing. If he says something complimentary, he seems to feel he has to drag out some insignificant criticism to counteract the praise. The reverse is also true. Occasionally he comes up with a perceptive comment, but not enough, unfortunately, to warrant further inclusion of his ramblings in your otherwise fine publication.

To wind up this letter on a more laudatory note, I would like to commend you on the sparkling stories you've had occasion to publish recently.

Larry Shellum
19227 Belshaw
Gardina, Calif.

● *Sorry we can't agree with you. The function of a reviewer is not to praise or damn, but to do both if he finds both are deserved. The final judgment is, ultimately, always up to each individual reader. However, do you feel better now that you've vented? Good!*