

Sci-fi expands execs imaginations

SEATTLE (AP) — The science fiction world of time travel, space journeys and alien beings has moved into a new dimension — corporate planning.

Perhaps two dozen science fiction writers are being hired as consultants by companies that want to tap their futuristic insights and ways of thinking.

The authors are being asked to help envision markets of the next decades. They also are being asked to help corporate executives develop more imagination.

So far, the only results any company can cite are mental, not practical or produceable, though many products now in use first were gremlins in a sci-fi writer's mind.

But firms pay a good price — as much as \$2,500 an appearance or more — to be stimulated by men whose work world won't exist for centuries.

"The interesting thing is that corporations have recognized the need for aggressive speculation on future trends and technology," says David Hartwell, science fiction editor for Berkley Publishing Corp. in New York City.

"One science fiction story will give you some possibilities. A whole lot of science fiction stories will give you a spectrum of possibilities out of which the future will arise.

"That's the result industry is looking for — far off contingencies to be aware of. The goal is simply more sophisticated thinking."

"It's mind-expanding and worthwhile," says R.L. Jamison, director of energy management for the Weyerhaeuser Co., the nation's largest forest products firm, based in Federal Way, Wash.

"The value of consulting with science fiction writers is the exercise in applying speculation about the future to see where it leads you. It's the process that has value, not the conclusion you reach from it."

The roster of writer-consultants has included:

- Arthur Clarke, whose works of science fact and fiction fill library shelves. Clarke wrote a book in 1957 called "Profiles of the Future," which he considers a kind of text for scientific estimates of the future, but he has done little consulting in recent years because "they can't afford me."

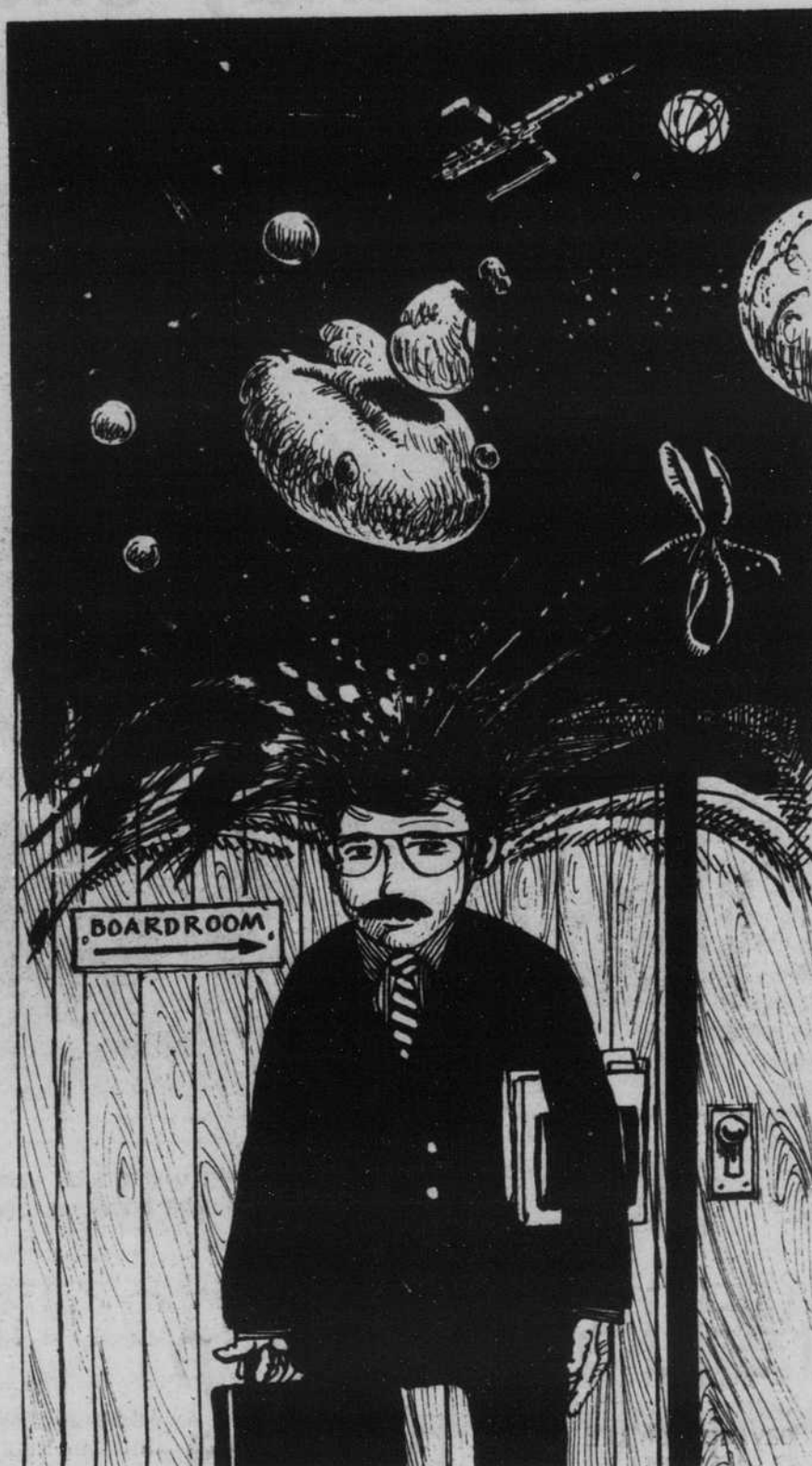
- Issac Asimov, who like Clarke is prolific in both fiction and fact but doesn't consider himself a consultant. But he's a frequent speaker to corporate groups, and he writes articles for companies such as American Airlines, IBM and U.S. Steel.

- Jerry Pournelle, an active fiction writer who operates a consulting service sideline in Los Angeles.

Pournelle says his work has helped one firm think of a new product "that everyone will want to have, that will seem obvious." He also says he helped one computer specialty firm discover new applications for its equipment. He won't identify either firm.

"Science fiction is a never-never land, except that if you pay attention to what's going on, you see how much of the never-never land is true.

"There are some 4,000 new products developed as a result of the moon program, and some people got rich off of that. But the only ones that do are the ones who think in terms of new markets



Drawing by Jim Payne

- Ben Bova, editor of Analog Magazine, has been a frequent speaker to firms such as IBM and Price Waterhouse, which took him on its staff for a time to lecture about energy.

"Most organizations are becoming keenly aware that the future is thundering down on them, and that it gets here before they expect it," said Bova, of New York. "They want to understand how to anticipate things, to at least open minds so that things aren't so much of a surprise."

Bova, whose editorial position gives him an overview of science fiction writing, said about two dozen of the 100 "hard core" members of the writing community are involved.

There are many others. G. Harry Stine, who wrote three science fiction novels as Lee Correy, has done so well as a "space industrialization and high technology marketing" consultant that it has become his fulltime business, along with non-fiction writing.

Greg Benford, a physics professor at the University of California-Irvine, once was asked by the Navy to envision new ways to make nuclear war — "unanticipated strategic alternatives."

He also advised the Irvine Co., which is developing the old Irving Ranch, on ways to design communities that will work well when oil costs too much for most people to buy.

Hartwell, the writers and corporate officials interviewed don't consider it odd for reality oriented businessmen to consult the men of science fiction. The reason — many products and scientific developments anticipated in science fiction have become true.

The rocket launcher, for instance, was written about in Buck Rogers stories, one of which was read by the man who used the idea eventually to build the bazooka. Mechanical limbs written about in a Robert Heinlein story eventually were invented to handle radioactive elements.

Clarke wrote in the 1940s about a communications satellite system — the same kind of system that eventually came into being. Ray guns seem like laser beams.

and products. What happens next year is what you pay me for."

- Frank Herbert, of Port Townsend, Wash., the author of the celebrated "Dune" trilogy and numerous other novels and stories.

Herbert has worked with Weyerhaeuser executives and with one other firm. He believes one of the companies has altered its energy research because of ideas he suggested.

"Any corporation which can be more accurate in its planning over a longer period will get an edge on its competitors," said Herbert. "The people in industry want us to help them know what kind of markets they'll have in 10 or 12 years, where they should put their research and development money."

- Frederik Pohl, a New Jersey writer who for a time was lecturer with the American Management Association (AMA). Pohl's list of

jobs for the AMA is vast, ranging from talks to life insurance groups to research for the soap and detergent industry.

He can't think of any tangible results of his work, only esoteric ones.

"I loosened up their thinking, and made them aware of some cross-cultural things that may affect what they're doing," said Pohl.

Pohl said his fee is \$1,500 plus expenses for a lecture.

Senate to vote on system

"The Modified Hare single transferrable vote system" goes before the University Senate for approval at 3:30 p.m. today in Room 229 Law.

The motion, presented by Music Prof. Robert Hurwitz will be explained in detail at the meeting. It affects current legislation concerning faculty voting procedure. Basically, it would allow faculty members to vote for as many candidates as they wish and rank them in order of preference.

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