



# Sci-fi girls get the hero in the end

By ROBIN ROWLAND

Science fiction began by exploiting women. It doesn't do it too much today, but in that supposedly far seeing genre where all things are probable, women have remained stereotyped. In fact, it is only in the past three years that the role of women in the future has been examined with the idea that women are actually human beings.

Margaret Mead has always looked critically at science fiction and said in 1970, "I think it's worth mentioning . . . that on the whole women have never been able to bear science fiction and that it's mostly written by 15-year-old boys who had extraordinary technological imaginations and didn't know a human being from a lamb, a goat or a pig."

Science fiction can be divided by World War I. Before that time it was written for the popular gaslight magazines by many of the leading authors of the day. Canada's only major science fiction writer, Robert Barr, who died in 1912, presented women as human beings as much as was judged reasonable in the period. One of his short stories "The Revolt of The —" described how a group of women out did the robber barons to become leading capitalists. H.G. Wells, however, ignored women in his science fiction although he did write about suffragettes in several other works.

After World War I, science fiction became part of the pulp industry. Scantly clad but well-shaped young girls graced the covers in the grips of nefarious villains or slobbery bug-eyed monsters. Inside, the girl was usually the daughter of a scientist, mad or sane, who rewarded the hero with marriage, or at least a date.

When things got better for science fiction, it didn't get better for women. A woman had her place in the social science fiction of the 40's and 50's and that place was home, minding the dome. The role of the woman was to reward the hero for whatever he did — as long as it wasn't in bed, sex was taboo. Isaac Asimov, today a leader in the field wrote in 1939; "Women, when handled in moderation and with extreme decency, fit nicely in science fiction at times. However . . . good stories can be written with the total absence of the weaker sex."

Some stories did look at the role of women but usually any woman was the stereotyped supermasculine type — if she got into space at

all. For the hero a woman usually played a twofold role; she was either a minor love interest or her hysterics and weakness were another problem he had to cope with.

(This idea still exists. A Soviet report on women cosmonauts said that women have better suited metabolisms to survive in hostile environments but their emotional instability rules them out in most cases).

Occasionally, male writers wrote of female dominated societies but without any degree of credibility. Sword and Sorcery fiction was no better. In that form of fantasy women were nothing but sexy sex objects. One sci-fi fan who is also a supporter of women's liberation told me recently, "Conan (a popular super-hero) is the biggest male chauvinist in the history of literature."

The first breaks appeared in the early 60's with some writers taking a more sensible approach; since sex exists now, it will in the future so why not write about it? At the same time Andre Norton, a woman writer of adventure science fiction wrote one of the first stories from a woman's point of view. It's the story of a girl who is sold as a slave and survives after she escapes on a planet where the local alien culture is dominated by a matriarchy.

Norton continued to write women oriented stories during the 60's, from the viewpoint of the (brand-new) role of the sorceress and her role in the male dominated barbarian world of the Sword and Sorcery fantasy. Not one of these women can be said to be stereotyped, they have their own fears, hopes and ideas and have as a well rounded personality as is possible in adventure fiction.

The women's liberation movement has had some effect on science fiction, as the scope of women and sex in sci-fi have expanded quickly in the last few years. Some have simply brought the stereotype liberated women into the picture — for example what does a woman's libber do when transported to a controlled 1984-like society of the next century?

Other novels, however, have asked deeper questions. Ursula K. LeGuin's award winning *The Left Hand of Darkness* is the first novel to examine sex roles. On the planet Gethen, the race is functionally bisexual, that is they are

in a neuter state until a time analgous to the menstrual period. Then, as the situation warrants, they can take on either a male or female role. Either member of a married couple may have a child. But this is not the main point of the novel, simply the cultural context of the story.

Another woman writer who goes beyond the standard liberated future woman of sci-fi is Marion Zimmer Bradley. Her novels take place on a planet called Darkover where ESP power is high. Women who have high ESP power, like men, have high status. Bradley goes further by applying, for the first time, telepathy to sex. During intercourse, there is not only a joining of two bodies, but of two minds. Between telepaths there can be no falsehood, or dishonesty. Only true emotions, compatibility and true love, if you will, can exist between the telepaths of Darkover.

Bradley's latest novel, *Darkover Landfall* issued in January by DAW Books, is the first critical science fiction examination of the woman's liberation movement. In it Camilla Del Rey is the highly efficient first officer of a space colony liner. It crashes and almost all supplies, including contraceptives, are destroyed and half the passengers and crew are killed. The story is about Del Rey and a man with whom she becomes involved. The dilemma confronting Camilla is that her role as an astrograter and computer expert disappeared when the ship crashed. Other women — doctors, nurses, biologists and zoologists all have roles in the fight for survival, Camilla does not. Yet, she doesn't want to become a "walking baby machine." She solves her problem partially by the heightened telepathic power inherent in the planets flora.

Farfetched you might say? But what happens if our technology collapses through the energy crisis or a nuclear war? Will women be forced to return to the role they have occupied for centuries? And what will be the role of women in a future society in space or earth?

*Darkover Landfall* has taken the first steps to ask those questions. Both men and women writers of science fiction should ask a lot more in the future about the roles of both sexes, no matter what may occur.



## Good Eats

### Pseudo-Savoy

By HARRY STINSON

dressed up by using croutons (dress and toss at the last moment; then the breadcrumbs just absorb enough of the dressing etc, without going soggy, and the tableside tossing ritual is an important part). Bits of crumbled, grated, or shredded cheese are nice, as are anchovies, slices of hard-boiled egg, cottage cheese, scraps of meat, or fish (shrimp anyone?). Or if you want to be different, just whip up one of those simple jelly molds and heap cottage cheese, yogurt or something in the centre and/or around it . . . sprinkle with paprika, chopped green onions, mint, or some other herb: serve on union picked lettuce leaves.

It is of course nice to serve an impressive main course too. Many items can be given unwarranted distinction by simply sprinkling with breadcrumbs, and/or cheese, and broiling briefly. A garnish of parsley always seems

to impress people and make them feel that whatever is beneath must be of grand origin, and required considerable skill in preparation. If the dish is covered in a sauce, then sprinkle the sauce with a sharply contrasting garnish (old favourite tomato-spaghetti-sauce gets whitish cheese of course, or hard-boiled egg slices, etc., while lighter cream concoctions might go well with parsley, paprika, cheddar, or herbs).

One thing to keep in mind is what to do about vegetables . . . if you can get the knack of catching and serving them when they're just crisp and simply and unusually seasoned, you will become justly famous. It might be smarter to stick to a vegetable casserole, and do the old topping routine.

When it comes to dessert, if you can surmount the increasingly rampant trend to skipping this traditionally nutritionally superfluous and calorically fatal course, it's hard to beat the appeal of simple 'home cooking' stuff like apple pie, home-made ice cream, cake or other baking: Nobody really gives a damn about your superb Peach Melba (neither do I) but they'll really respect someone who can turn out a quality apple crisp, pie, or really rich brownies.

Despite this last little truism, next time a cram course in that preposterous culinary fraud . . . the old flambe routine, from appetizer to dessert, plus a note on fondues, a table touch that can also be adapted to any course, and is probably a sure-fire kit to include in a geared-to-impress menu at some point . . . they're also really good and quite filling.

Note . . . a pie fight is also a sure-fire hit and certainly at least unconventional if not dignified . . . . .

In this week's triumphant return to the hallowed pages of wisdom that doth Excalibur make, we address ourselves to that age-old predicament which is that food is expensive, and good food is really dear.

How, then, to impress great Aunt Gertrude, the billionaire widow-relative from Chicago, in town to evaluate her fawning assorted heirs, hangers-on and erstwhile favourites, what is obviously needed is some magic with those crucial touches and garnishes that can make or break a dish.

Instead of starting the meal with some of those hideous floury little dinner rolls or doughy Wondergoo, slather any type of bread (if possible big chunks of dark rye, pumpernickel, or the like, with garlic butter, sprinkle with grated cheese and broil. Or serve hot banana bread, corn bread, or date bread, or even French bread (wrap it in foil, and warm in oven).

The next crucial step is to forget about hor d'oeuvres, unless you know some really good original ones. And everything I've ever experienced or observed in catering leads to the conclusion that celery and carrot sticks are the unquestionable favourite.

But next, the soup, which need not be super-fancy, at all, but serve it with a crust (or at least croutons, which is a sophisticated way of getting rid of old stale bread — butter, season, and toast it): just float some bread or toast on the surface, grate or slice a melty cheese over top, season (pepper, paprika, garlic, onion salt) and broil . . . the gooier the crust . . . the greater the snob appeal . . . (and taste). Don't feel confined to onion soup for this touch either.

After soup comes salad. A simple tossed salad can be