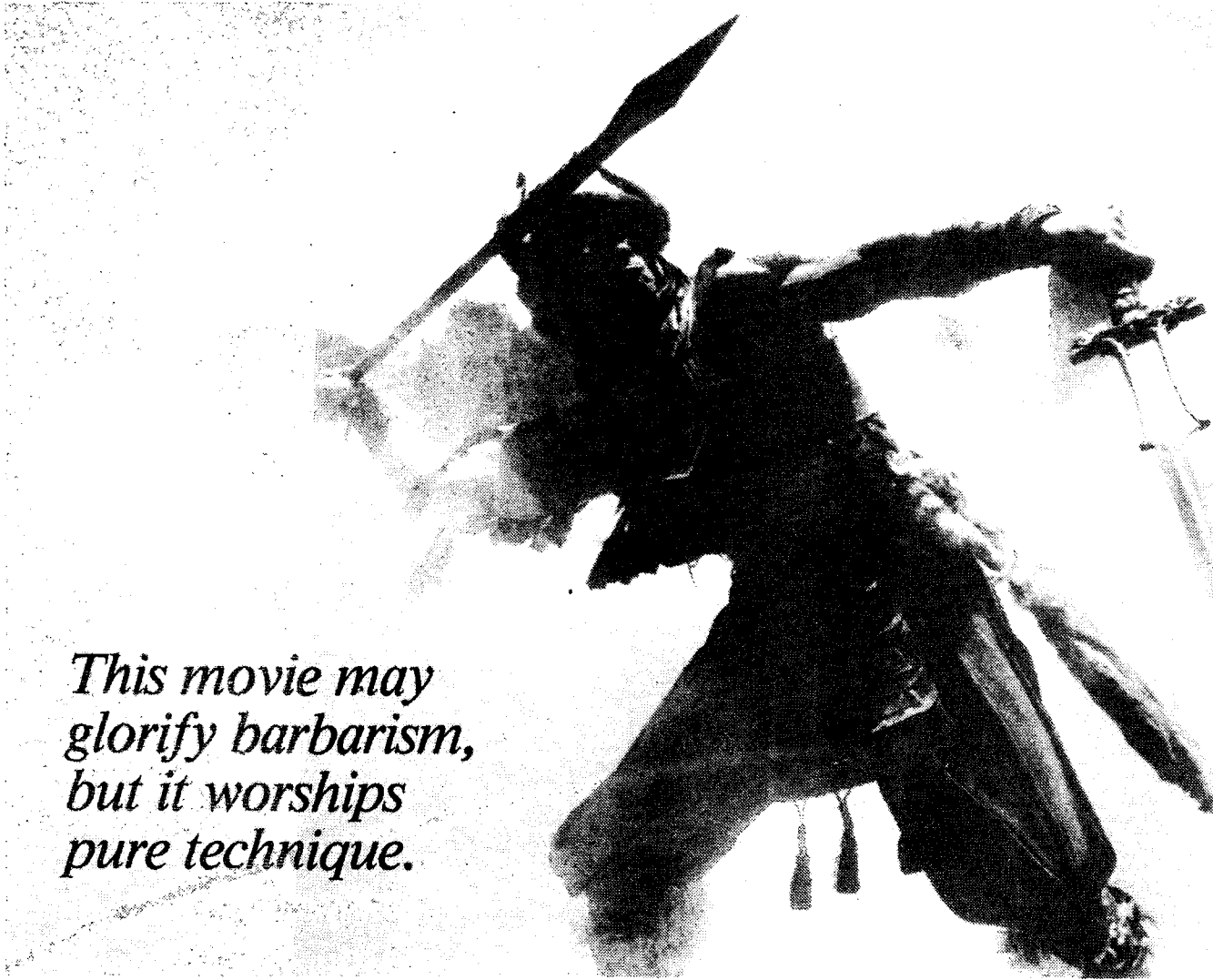


MOVIES

Mr. Machismo and the boys



This movie may glorify barbarism, but it worships pure technique.

Arnold Schwarzenegger is a living special effect as the barbarian.

By Pat Aufderheide

Conan the Barbarian, amply satisfying Universal Studios' happiest dreams for summer box office, is big and dumb. It's also entertaining, in an elephantine way.

What it isn't is offensive. Director and co-writer John Milius, self-dubbed "Zen Fascist," would be so pissed off if he knew.

The film stars Arnold Schwarzenegger, one of the world's best-known, best-developed narcissists. Young Conan belongs to a tribe that worships steel, emblematic of brute force. Cleverness triumphs temporarily—the tribe is wiped out by one with a more elaborate religious organization led by Thulsa Doom (James Earl Jones). Over the years, having enslaved Conan and toughened him up by making him a stud and fighter among still-barbarous steppes people, Doom uses a diabolical snake-cult to enslave hordes of decadent youth in the encroaching cities.

With a supremely athletic Nordic-looking girlfriend (Sandahl Bergman) and a Mongol sidekick (Gerry Lopez), Conan slogs through a series of physical adventures to revenge his parents' death and sets the city simsps free. The adventures are less thrilling than vicariously exhausting, and the special effects are less brilliant than ponderously impressive. There's a huge snake, a gigantic cult-temple (the biggest free-standing set ever, torched for the finale) and heavy-as-life broadswords. There's Conan's triumph over a deathly-seductive cat-woman and a fight with the gods for Conan's spirit after he has been pecked nearly to death on a crucifix (really).

The film does move along though, sometimes muddily and sometimes funny. If *Personal*

Best drove you to the Y with new resolve, *Conan* will take you straight to the local tap to recover from your exertions.

Milius has built a reputation in Hollywood as the thuggish dark side of the all-American macho that George Lucas and Steven Spielberg act out with charm. His script for *Jeremiah Johnson*, for instance, had large quantities of brutal and sometimes anti-Indian gore (director

humored as the surfer representative among the "Movie Brat" boys who came out of film school and screening rooms into the studios in the '70s.

Artist Ron Cobb, a key designer for *Conan* who has worked in the alternative press, put Milius' political posturing this way in *American Film*: "If you can't see through it, you deserve to believe it all."

Still, sometimes you get the

through outsize repetition.

But what we have in *Conan* is probably more familiar—an exercise in male adolescent fantasy, a heroic world that provides nothing more than temporary relief from the boredom of everyday adult responsibility—without pretending to alter that tedious reality. That attitude may register social distress, but it's a different problem from the one Milius pre-



James Earl Jones plays the over-civilized cult-schemer.

Sydney Pollack struck it out). Milius wrote into *Dirty Harry*—without script credit—its final violent touches. His original script for *Apocalypse Now* was too pro-war for his old friend Francis Coppola to stomach.

But it's not so much what he has done as his pronouncements that give him his cachet. The man has found his hype, and declares that for the media "I'm the Hermann Goering of my generation."

Well, maybe. It's true, *Esquire* dubbed him "Mr. Macho," and his pique-the-liberal remarks such as, "There's something unspeakably attractive about war" get freely quoted. But mostly Milius gets

feeling that Milius wants to be taken seriously—like at the beginning of *Conan*, where we are treated to a little snippet from Nietzsche: "Whatever does not kill you makes you strong." (If you have another attribution for this statement, don't be surprised—it's become apocryphal.)

Milius' claims to a nativist fascism are upheld in certain aspects of *Conan* as well. He might even have studied Susan Sontag's essay "Fascinating Fascism," where she defines fascist aesthetics as preoccupied with dominance and submission, extravagant effort and the endurance of pain, an art in which people turn into things and things become grandiose

tends to pose with his raunchy celebration of rudeness.

Thrill technicians.

Conan ought to be socially and politically offensive. Milius certainly had good material, in the twisted and turgid writings of Robert E. Howard. (The creator of the *Conan* book series was a pulp writer from a small Texas town who lived with his mother and his fantasies, rarely even leaving the house until he blew his brains out at the age of 30 when she died.)

The movie, though, lacks Howard's malevolent passion. This is not a movie about good and evil, or men and women, or civilization and barbarism. It's

about technique, from the moment we learn that the central myth of Conan's tribe is the celebration of tempered metal.

Take the question of the film's violence. *Conan* must set some sort of record for deaths by direct combat—beheadings, splatting, thumping and gorings. But you stand in more danger of being deafened by the clanging of broadswords than you do of being sickened (or appalled or entranced, depending on your taste) by the violence.

The fighting isn't really a violent form of interaction between people—something that might give you a stake in the loss of limb and life—but the mere execution of tricky maneuvers. That's why Schwarzenegger is perfect for the role but also works against the movie as a movie. His singleminded love-affair with his own abilities lends him a certain dependable sweetness, here as in *Pumping Iron*, at the same time that it robs the audience of any lingering chance of getting involved with the characters. The special effects—and Schwarzenegger is himself such a walking effect that the screen can seem empty of human life at times—have the same advantages and drawbacks. They divert and impress. They provide action. They just don't create human drama.

The film's stress on male heroics could offend more if Bergman (a trained athlete and dancer) and Schwarzenegger were not on terms of rough equality. They are both supremely well-defined bodies in mechanized play—the Barbie and Ken of Conanland, not a Valkyrie and *Übermensch*.

Oddly, it may be the "good guys" among the movie brats who have the ideological impact that Milius seems so hungry for. Traditionalist assumptions are more deeply imbedded in their entertainment. For instance, Lucas' *Star Wars* movies construct a good guy-bad guy world of empires in collision that has disturbing parallels to the way '50s kids learned to think about the Cold War. Casting James Earl Jones as Darth Vader made a much subtler connection between black imagery, black people and evil than the gaudy Thulsa Doom character does.

The audience has been steam-rollered—left without a moment to consider the implications or assumptions of the action—more effectively in other films from the same generation of filmmakers. *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, like *Conan*, used pop culture clichés and dazzled the audience with special effects. But *Raiders* is a fast train to fun—it assaults you with thrills. *Conan's* clumsiness instead makes for ironic distance.

Spielberg's summer releases, *E.T.* and *Poltergeist*, make a much more seductive case for the flight from adulthood than *Conan* does. In both films sober adults—not the aliens—are the real enemy, and childhood is romanticized. "I'm still a kid," Spielberg told the *New York Times*. "I'm still waiting to get out of my Peter Pan shoes and into my loafers...I'm probably socially irresponsible and way down deep I don't want to look the world in the eye."

Lucas and Spielberg, with movies that cast middle-American macho, frozen in adolescence, as normal healthy fun may be more potent ideologues for a willful American innocence than Milius, who exercises his doctrines of social irresponsibility in grotesque fantasy. ■

FREEZE

Continued from page 13

the troops were already there, waiting if not active, veterans of church social action groups, antiwar protests, draft resistance, protests against nuclear power and other causes.

It is hard to say what all 800,000 would have agreed on, but they seemed anxious to move beyond the freeze toward dramatic reduction and eventually abolition of nuclear weapons as well as drastic reductions in military spending. Nearly all, but especially the black, Hispanic and labor marchers, stressed shifting military funds to peaceful, civilian needs. Few had any illusions about the Soviet missiles as "peace weapons," but they were all ready to press the U.S. government to take bold initiatives to halt the arms race that it has led.

"Cut Nuclear Weapons, Not Health Care," read placards from District 1199, representing hospital workers. "Rebuild America/Destroy Nuclear Weapons," read a Machinist banner. But the dominant theme in the signs was the threat of war, especially nuclear war, and the tone ranged from angry to plaintive, thought-provoking to ironic: "No Nukes—We Want Our Children to Grow, Not Glow"; "Students Against Militarism"; "Dancing for Disarmament"; "Take the Toys Away from the Boys"; or—carried on the side of a large, inflated blue whale—"Save the Humans."

The whole idea of nuclear war is so ludicrous and insane that many people were inspired to ridicule, mockery and a gallows humor. One kazoo-accompanied band sang the "Duck and Cover" song, a '50s-era ditty performed by Bert the Turtle in a civil defense movie for school kids in which Bert tells young Johnny how to jump off his bicycle and get into a kneeling position against the street curb with his hands over his head if the A-bomb exploded. Others mocked civil defense with paper Citizens Survival Bags perched on their heads. Then there was the Ground Zero Club.

In two years, John Breitbart, 29, a production manager and fabric cutter at a factory in Brooklyn, has pulled together several hundred club members for occasional social mixers—or MX'ers—and demonstrations. The idea is that there is no escape from the bomb, and even if there were, the survivors would envy the dead. So in the event of nuclear war, don't flee the city; rush to ground zero. The New York Ground Zero Club made its point earlier this year with a die-in at Fifth Avenue and 34th Street, Manhattan ground zero.

But despite the festive spirit, the touches of comedy, and the ebullient hopes, there was a literal life-and-death earnestness shared by a spectacular diversity of human beings. A retired Ames, Iowa, couple carried a sign, "Save Farms/Disarm." A schoolteacher from Nagasaki displayed samples of roof tiles students had recently excavated showing the blisters formed on the ceramic from the intense heat of the bomb. A group of several dozen yellow-robed Buddhist monks from Japan stood out boldly at all the week's events, beating on their paddle-like drums, carrying their purple prayer flags, chanting "praise to the mystery of all creation" and communicating an awesome, spinetingling statement with their presence. The power of their message was doubled by seeing among them, smiling from his wheelchair, their 98-year-old abbot, the Most Venerable Nichitatsu Fujii. (Some people were not so moved, however. A U.S. official at the UN muttered as he passed the monks chanting in the Ralph J. Bunche peace park, "Won't those shits go away from here? They're a goddamn nuisance.")

There were two brothers from New York's fire department, walking with their 75-year-old father who brought them up on Jack London writings so they'd be class-conscious. ("The one fire we can't put out is an atomic blast," Thomas Gates said.)

There was Parthenia Wilkerson, 63, a retired black hospital worker from New York who wanted Reagan "to take the money he's going to spend on arms and spend it on the unemployed, schools and the elderly."

There was Mike Lyczak, 30, who traveled from Chicago with five fellow electrical workers: "If you got a choice between helping the world for the better or sitting around on a Saturday night drinking beer, what do you do? After all, it's our butts that get fired."

Religious organizations probably contributed more than any to the diversity of the march. On Friday before the big demonstration, an impressively ecumenical gathering of religious leaders—Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Native Americans, Society of Friends—conducted a stirring service for 10,000 in the huge Cathedral of St. John the Divine that evoked a spirituality broad enough for not only all religious but also the non-religious. The particular rationales varied, but the conclusion was the same.

Bob Menard, an engineering student from Blacksburg, Va., was there because "I've felt frustrated at our government using money for arms as opposed to social needs. I felt I had to do something about it. We're talking about survivability of humankind. Electrical engineering and physics are great—and I'm in awe of them—but we could annihilate everything on earth."

Like so many others, Menard was also moved by a sense of fragility of peace demonstrated by the wars in Lebanon and the Falklands. But it was the emergence of a protest movement in the past couple of years and particularly the leadership from his Catholic bishop that gave him courage to act on what he'd been thinking for years.

"When I started thinking this way, I felt pretty much alone," he said. "So I've been very much encouraged by the demonstrations over the last year and by the bishop in my area speaking out. I don't feel like some sort of weirdo out in left field, when people like that speak out. I'm not crazy."

Corky Peavy, 25, said he would have been in favor of "nuking" Vietnam during the American war there. Now an electronics technician in Austin, Texas, he spends part of his spare time trying to raise money to support nuclear weapons assemblers who quit their jobs at the Pantex plant in Amarillo ("where the end of the world begins").

"My entire reason for being in the peace movement is because I'm a Christian and Christ was clear on peace," Peavy said. About five years ago, he found Jesus through a small fundamentalist evangelical church in Austin. Reading the Bible he not only came to oppose militarism but also to conclude that "if it weren't for economic injustice in the world, then there wouldn't be an arms race. The nuclear issue is secondary to the economic issue." But Peavy doesn't find much support from his fellow believers: "The church I attend doesn't agree with anything I believe on this issue," he says. "It's a burden."

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Such deep convictions from the heartland of America are making disarmament a potent political issue in this election year. Although there is still resistance from some quarters of the peace movement to involvement in electoral politics, there is a growing sentiment that politicians running this year must be submitted to some "peace test." Groups such as SANE or Council for a Liveable World are endorsing candidates and raising funds in key races. But there is another strain within the peace movement that calls for "escalation of tactics," such as more civil disobedience on the order of the "blockade the bombmakers" action on the morning of June 14, which resulted in 1,548 orderly arrests of sit-down demonstrators at the UN missions of the five nuclear powers. One week later, 1,332 sit-in demonstrators at the Livermore Laboratories in California—birthplace of the neutron bomb—were arrested in another large-scale civil disobedience action.

Political dynamite.

The protests over the past year have already wrought results. Four years ago, Arms Control Association president Herbert Scoville says, Jimmy Carter did not appear before the UN disarmament sessions "because it would be political dynamite if he did. Reagan felt it would be political dynamite if he didn't."

Although some fear that Reagan will "co-opt" the disarmament movement, the people who were demonstrating on June 12 distrust Reagan and have goals for disarmament that go far beyond what he is likely to propose. They will not take "the Soviet threat" as an excuse for backpedaling.

At this point, the disarmament movement could consolidate a powerful majority political force, but as rally organizer Patrick Lacefield argues, "there is no moral center in the U.S. peace movement and no operational center. Anyone with \$25,000, enough advance planning and a rally site can lead the peace movement." The weaknesses—the lack of central coordination and of clearly worked out demands or focus—can also be seen as a strength of the movement: It is diverse and has tremendous grassroots organizational vitality.

The infighting within the coalition was so incessant that for once the organizers of a demonstration are not trying to perpetuate themselves in a new organization. Yet the tensions of the coalition persist in the peace movement. Some individuals, including those with links to the Communist Party, want to focus on the U.S. alone, excluding criticism of the Soviet Union, whereas the majority are critical of all nuclear or heavily armed governments. There is also a continuing division over how many issues to include. Some groups seek to make the peace movement the vehicle for all worthy causes and others recognize the strategic importance of

a specific focus.

Inevitably disarmament forces will head off in many directions. Sidney Peck, who worked as liaison with international groups for the rally, predicts a continuation of the freeze campaign, an expansion of the new Jobs With Peace referendum (asking cities to go on record in favor of increasing employment through civilian rather than military spending), declarations of cities and states as nuclear free zones, increases in both electoral and civil disobedience activity and more demonstrations, at first local then probably culminating next spring or fall in Washington.

Citizens Party leader Barry Commoner argues for a peace test for politicians (are they for the freeze, ending civil defense, real disarmament and sharp cuts in the military budget), and for the withdrawal of cities from the civil defense program. Already various cities, from Boulder, Colo., and Cambridge, Mass., to Philadelphia and New York have pulled out. "The one part of the military program we have some control over is civil defense," Commoner argues. "The Pentagon can launch missiles but they can't launch an evacuation. Withdrawal from civil defense is real—more real than the freeze."

The unions, as well as the churches, may help to keep the fragile coalition together. Organized labor played a more important role than in any peace demonstration of recent decades, and strongly encouraged coalition work, Peck says. Going well beyond the official AFL-CIO position on disarmament, the biggest unions in the federation (UAW, AFSCME, public workers, Food and Commercial Workers, Machinists) co-sponsored the rally, with vigorous support locally from District 1199 and the Clothing and Textile Workers. However, the uneven efforts to turn out members depended on the personal commitment of key staff officers, in the absence of massive institutional support. But the presence of even a few unions, argued Dutch disarmament leader Wim Bartels, gave the New York rally more of an air of connection with social institutions and issues than the European marches, which tend to mobilize people more as individual concerned citizens.

The potential if a real coalition developed is staggering: Imagine the political force represented by the June 12 rally and by last year's Solidarity Day linked together.

Inevitably, in confronting whether or not the earth has a future, the fate of children, the innocent victims of adult folly, crops up. Nancy Winkler, 25, one of the rally flock, works with five-year-olds in Boston. Last year she asked them to draw pictures of peace and war. The results shocked her: "They all knew how to draw war—buildings exploding—but they had no idea of what to draw when you said 'peace'."

Continued on facing page

CALENDAR

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NEW YORK, NY

June 28-July 30

America, as seen through the eyes of French photo-journalist Lionel Delevigne (a frequent contributor to *In These Times*) will be on view at the Gallery of the French Institute/Alliance Francaise, 22 E. 60th St., in an exhibit of 74 black and white photographs. "Glory, Glory," at the French Institute/Alliance Francaise, is divided into three themes—the parades and civic events that show "America in her Glory," the social protests that work under the same flag to make this America a better place, and portraits of people famous and unknown, participants and spectators, young, old, Indian, Spanish, black and white. Call (212)355-6100 for more information.

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CHICAGO, IL

August 6-8

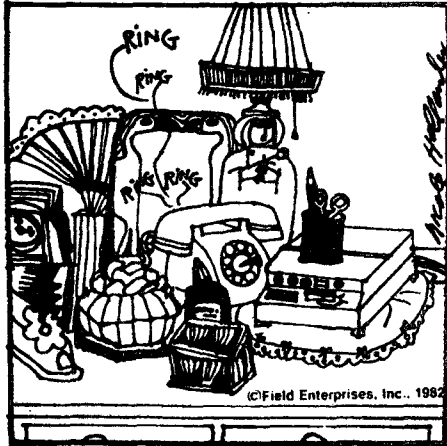
No more Hiroshimas, end the arms race, save the human race. Big memorial weekend now planned for August 6-8, including tag day, vigils, religious services, memorial rally. If your organization has plans and wants to participate, call (312)663-0879 or 0918.

But young people are not simply objects of solicitude by adults. There are at least two organizations—Future Generations and Children's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—formed by children to act on their own behalf. A couple of years ago, Nessa and Hanna Rabin, now 13 and 16, got together with some friends in Vermont to form the Children's Campaign. They began collecting letters to President Reagan—now numbering nearly 3,000—asking for an end to nuclear weapons.

Nobody in the White House would meet with them when they first went to Washington. "I think President Reagan doesn't know what to say to us," Hannah commented. It is our future he's making decisions about. Maybe he doesn't want to realize that."

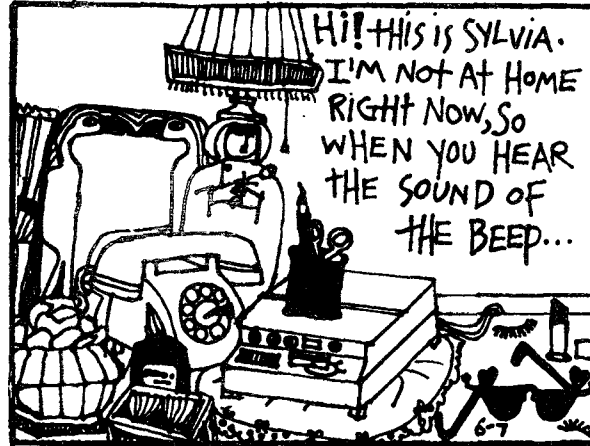
Children realize far more about war than we often imagine—far more than they should have to confront. At an art exhibit in conjunction with the rally, there

Sylvia



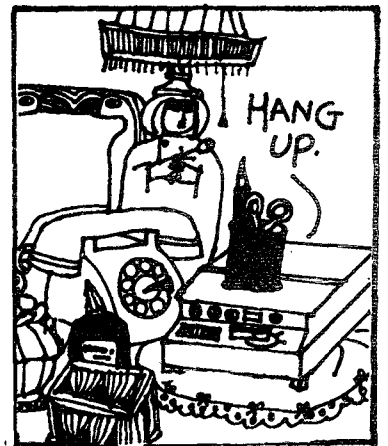
was a collection of drawings by kids from the South Bronx about nuclear war. Here are a few of their titles:

- I'm shaking until blood comes out everywhere. Eddie Barrett.
- My guts squish out of my stomach



right through my new T-shirt. I try to hold them in. Malloy Nesmith.

- I look at my arms. My skin burned off. Felix Cepera.
- All the burned-out buildings glow. Bleeding people glow, too. Kelvin Rob-



- My uncles turn into monsters. Juan Soto.
- It's helpless. Michael Gonzalez. That's enough to make some adults want to protest.

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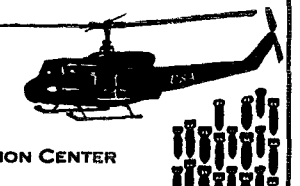
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By Lester Rodney

RECOLLECTIONS OF LEROY "SATCHEL" Paige, who died in early June, portrayed a gently philosophical man with a droll sense of humor and little rancor in him. He was that. But the characterization is incomplete, and it lets America off the hook a little easy for its sins.

In the long years when baseball players with dark skin were barred from our "national pastime," Satchel Paige, who knew exactly how good he was, did not shrug off racism with a philosophical quip. In September 1937, I chatted with the 30-year-old Paige in Harlem's old Hotel Olga. In those days, after the big league season ended Satch would round up a team of black ball stars and play a team of white big leaguers in exhibition games on the Pacific coasts. In years of trying, the big leaguers never beat Paige.

The young Joe DiMaggio once said, "When I hit a double off Paige, I knew I was ready for the big leagues." Fear-some veteran hitters such as Rogers Hornsby, Babe Herman and Charley Gehringer had no better luck.

That day in Harlem, the thin-faced Paige, long legs dangling over the edge of his bed, said, "Let the winners of the World Series play us just one game in Yankee Stadium. If we don't beat them, and if it isn't a full house, they don't have to pay us."

He threw out two more challenges to American sportsmanship. He would go to any big league team's training camp the following spring at his own expense, and if he didn't prove conclusively that he belonged, he would forget the whole thing. Also, he said, "Let there be a vote by everybody going into big league games, yes or no, if they want us in baseball or not." He believed the fans' vote would be yes by a margin of 100 to one.

Remember that the man who said these things in the very prime of his athletic life had to wait 11 more years before he was allowed to pitch in the big leagues and you may have the edge of an inkling of

what being Satchel Paige was about, besides the funny proverbs.

Paige's dares were not accepted. They were not even reported by the other New York daily newspapers—which undoubtedly wrote eloquent obituary tributes to him this June.

The best example.

How good was Satchel Paige really? Nobody can say for sure. One can only conjecture how he would have changed baseball history, the record books and pitching standards. Hall of Famer Dizzy Dean's cheerful admission that he never was or would be in Satch's class is fairly well-known. Those who ask Casey Stengel got a convoluted reply, which boiled down to having seen Paige in the early '30s strike out 15 or more of the better big league hitters every darn time in the west coast exhibitions, "so that should give you some idea." Paige himself estimated he could have won from 30 to 35 games every season for at least 15 years. In 1939, Bill McKechnie, veteran manager of the Cincinnati Reds, said, "You have to rate him up there with Crispy Mathewson and Walter Johnson." There were none better in baseball history.

Paige did share one unusual trait with Walter Johnson. Possessive of the most formidable fast balls of their times, both

scorned intimidation of batters through fear, and went years without ever hitting a batter with a pitch.

Another not-too-well-known aspect of Paige was his willingness and ability to teach his craft. After Yankee pitcher John Larsen made baseball history with a perfect game in the 1956 World Series, he told a reporter from the Pittsburgh Courier, a black weekly, that it was Satch who showed him how. When Larsen reported to the St. Louis Browns as a rookie in 1953, Paige told him he could

be one of the best if he worked on it. "You got to bury that curve ball, kid," he used to say, Larsen recalled. "And he'd show me how. In the perfect game I kept reminding myself of how Satch told me it had to be done."

During his years outside the pale-faced leagues Paige derived some satisfaction from his drawing power, unassisted by big-time publicity. One Sunday in 1941 he brought his black all-stars into Chicago for a single game against a pick-up team led by Dizzy Dean, who was then out of the big leagues. On the same day the Chicago White Sox hosted a regular American League double-header against the Detroit Tigers. The Paige game drew an overflow crowd of 55,000 into Wrigley Field. The White Sox-Tiger double-header drew 22,000 at Comiskey Park.

As an overaged "rookie" joining Cleveland in mid-season in 1948, Paige rewarded magnate Bill Veeck with a 6-1 record, including two shutouts, helping the Indians win it all. The year before, Veeck had made the important move of hiring Larry Doby, the big league's second black player, and the American League's first. It was no secret that some of his fellow magnates were hoping to seal off the introduction of blacks with Jackie Robinson and the other league. "Some people may give me hell," Veeck said, "but I'm working on the assumption that the war advanced our ideas a little." (Veeck lost the lower part of his left leg at Bougainville.)

It was of course great and better than nothing that Paige, at whatever age, finally pitched in the big leagues. But deep down the Satchel Paige story is one of tragic waste.

During that 1937 interview in Harlem, I reminded him that Dazzy Vance, one of the all-time great pitchers, first emerged as a winner with Brooklyn at age 31 and his peak at 34.

"Hope I hit my peak at 34," Paige said. "I don't think they can keep us out that long."

Lester Rodney is the ex-sports writer for the Daily Worker.



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Satchel Paige's quips can't hide the scandal of big league racism.