

## FANZINES 8

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By Ted White

NOVA EXPRESS (Lawrence Person, P.O. Box 27231, Austin, TX 78755-2231, e-mail to [lawrenceperson@jump.net](mailto:lawrenceperson@jump.net); available for \$5 a copy or \$12 for four issues – \$15 after September 15, 2001)

*Nova Express* is yet another type of fanzine: what is now called the “sercon fanzine.” “Sercon” stands for “serious and constructive,” and the term was originally coined (in the early ’50s) as a sarcastic put-down of overly earnest and humorless efforts, but by the late ’80s the term had been co-opted by the publishers of serious, science-fiction-oriented fanzines. This kind of fanzine owes its existence to the Richard Geis fanzines of the ’70s, variously titled but best known as *The Alien Critic*. The typical sercon fanzine runs an article or two on science fiction topics, at least one interview with an author, and many book reviews. Unfortunately, none of the editors of these fanzines has the deft touch of Geis, and consequently none of their fanzines are as lively.

Nonetheless, the 21st issue of *Nova Express* does have a lively feature interview with Tim Powers which takes up over a third of the (44 page) issue, followed by three reviews of two of Powers’ books. Powers talks about his friendship with Phil Dick (“Among other things, he was probably the best-read person I’ve ever met. And probably the only actual genius I’ll ever know well. And also the funniest guy I ever met.”), about selling his first two books to the absurd Roger Elwood’s Laser Books, and about his dealings with Lester del Rey as an editor (“When he would reject a book, he would send you a four-page, single-spaced rejection letter, and many of the points would be totally correct, so you’d think, ‘All right, thanks!’”) as well as discussing his own work at length.

There is one article in this issue, “The Falling Rate of Profit, Red Hordes and Green Slime: What the Fall Revolution Books are About” by Ken MacLeod. In it MacLeod responds to an editorial query to write about his four books, “why you wrote these four books, what you meant to say, and how they fit together.”

The rest of the issue is largely taken up with two “Featured Reviews” and twenty-five more book reviews – plus less than a page of letters (one of which is mine). The book reviews are generally intelligent and literate and written to what I consider a professional level. Indeed, the entire production is “professional” in appearance, with clean graphic design, boxed “pull quotes” in the interview and article, and a small cover banner that announces “One-Time Hugo Nominee!”

Small touches, however, deliberately belie the professional appearance: A larger cover headline proclaims “Winner of the Invisible City Good Citizenship Award! Really!;” a cover motto, “We go to Eleven;” calling the letters “Viewer Mail;” and crediting right-hand editorial staffer, book reviewer and interviewer Fiona Kelleghan in the extensive

masthead as “Sound Engineer.” In the letter column editor Person argues with me, as he did an issue earlier with E. B. Frohvet, that *Nova Express* is a *fanzine* and not a *semi-prozine*. And I guess these little touches are part of why he regards it as a fanzine. But he wants to sell it, and makes no mention of giving away issues for trades or letters of comment – two practices typical of most fanzines, so *Nova Express* lies in a gray area between the two types of publications. For what it is, it is very well-done and I recommend it to those of you looking for literate, intelligent commentary on current science fiction.

–Ted White