

THE LAST DEADLOSS VISIONS

An enquiry into the non-appearance of
Harlan Ellison's
THE LAST DANGEROUS VISIONS

written by Christopher Priest

with comments from:

Brian Aldiss
Michael Bishop
Graham Charnock
John Christopher
Harry Harrison
Barry Malzberg
George R.R. Martin
Charles Platt
Bob Shaw
Ian Watson
(...and many others)

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Introduction

by Christopher Priest

This is the full text of THE LAST DEADLOSS VISIONS, an essay I wrote in 1987 and published at my own expense in a fanzine called Deadloss. It was an attempt to bring journalistic techniques to a subject that from the point of view of anyone outside the sf world might seem an odd one for enquiry: the non-publication of a book.

Of course, the book was Harlan Ellison's anthology 'The Last Dangerous Visions', a title surrounded from the beginning by so much hype, exaggeration and persistent invisibility that it has been a subject of interest to a generation (literally) of sf writers and fans.

I approached the subject as an investigative journalist might, the intention being to find out whatever truth there was, and then report it. However, THE LAST DEADLOSS VISIONS is not "objective" in the way that much excellent American journalism is objective, but is from a different tradition. It is a polemical pamphlet, written to express a point of view and to persuade others of that view.

A pamphlet is not "balanced". For instance, the subject has no chance to defend himself, and indeed is quoted only so that he may condemn himself with his own words. Pamphlets are usually written by members of minorities who feel that there is a body of thought which has already had more than its share of air-time. In this case it can be easily shown that Harlan Ellison has had a great deal to say about 'The Last Dangerous Visions', and has said it publicly for almost a quarter of a century. By 1987 a pamphlet expressing the other view was long overdue.

However, with objectivity and balance out of the window, it might seem that the only thing left is personal attack. Mr Ellison and his followers are quick to point this out. In fact, calling it a feud is just about the only comfort Mr Ellison can take, because then he can try to ignore what people are saying about him.

This essay is not one side of a feud: my sole contact with Harlan Ellison is described later. I know few things about him (other than the fact that we are both professional writers working in or around the sf world) and I have read very little of his work. My interest in him was first aroused by his defensive braggadocio about 'The Last Dangerous Visions', which made me wonder what was going on and what he was trying to hide. After I had done some research I realized what a terrific story it was. In brief, I still feel uninterested in Mr Ellison himself, but the story is fascinating.

My general argument in the following essay is that Mr Ellison has spun a web of contradictions around the book. I argue that if he would face up to them, and not continually spin more, then there is a chance for him to escape. In other words, I depict him as a victim of his own actions, or inactions. This makes it sound as if I see what has happened as inadvertent. I'm sure there's an element of this (Mr Ellison is the first to complain about the sheer hell he has been suffering), but much of it has arisen through inattention to the needs, opinions or feelings of others.

One critic of an early edition of 'Deadloss' said that I had set out to embarrass Mr Ellison, as if this was an unacceptable motive. I was glad of the insight: Mr Ellison has a lot to be embarrassed about, and it was high time someone told him so. But there's a difference between pointing out unwelcome truths, and accusing him of wrongdoing.

With this essay written and published, I became identified as a

leading Ellisonian antagonist. Those with an axe to grind would write and tell me their frightful anecdotes about the great man, or try to tip me off to some other perceived outrage, while Mr Ellison's faithful fans either went to ground or bluntly accused me of jealousy. It would therefore be untrue to claim that I am now as impartial as I was when I wrote the main essay. In addition, it's pretty difficult to remain impartial about someone who threatens, in a fit of pique or exhibitionism, to have you killed. Mr Ellison did this soon after I published the pamphlet. The fact that I didn't take the threat too seriously, and also that Mr Ellison, when challenged on it by someone else, quibbled that he had intended it as a "joke", doesn't diminish the squalid reflex that the original threat revealed.

Finally, let me say that one of the main motives for writing a pamphlet is to try to influence events.

In the case of Harlan Ellison and 'The Last Dangerous Visions' it is perfectly clear how the events should be influenced, and as you read my essay you will see the process taking place: much of the idea is to spur Harlan Ellison into action. But not any old action.

By deliberately exposing his familiar gambits as muddle, boastfulness and procrastination, the idea is to encourage others to stand up to him. In the end he will be cornered by his own contradictions, and will finally have to do the right thing.

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A word about the format of the present edition.

In this era of flexible media it is possible for a text to be revised and expanded at short notice. Even in its printed version Deadloss went through many different editions. The main sequence was as follows:

The first 1987 edition consisted of the essay plus letters from writers who had seen the first draft, and an appendix of notes.

The second edition, also published in 1987 (between September and December), contained everything from the first edition, with minute corrections, plus the text of a diary I started to keep when the responses started pouring in. As the diary was being constantly updated copies were issued serially. Many different versions are in circulation, bearing different finishing dates.

At the end of 1987 I became bored with the whole exercise, and stopped adding to the diary. With the help of Andy Richards at Cold Tonnage Books I printed a "complete" third edition (everything from the first two editions brought up to date). This was distributed steadily for five years; it was first released in January 1988, with the last copy mailed in 1992.

This electronic text is an advance release of the fourth edition, which will be published in 1994. It consists of the following:

This new Introduction.

The main essay. I have made a few textual corrections, brought some of it up to date, and generally tightened the criticism of Mr Ellison.

Pre-publication letters.

Notes. These are various lists of named writers, known to have been involved with The Last Dangerous Visions at one time or another.

Post-publication letters. These letters made up much of the bulk of the original diary section. (I have deleted the other diary entries, as they had mainly topical interest.)

The Summing Up. This includes a section called The Remedy, which is addressed to any writer whose work is still being held by Mr Ellison. It is a practical guide.

The History of The Last Dangerous Visions

1. The Background

=====
 In 1967 Harlan Ellison published 'Dangerous Visions', a long anthology of short stories and novellas by contemporary science fiction writers. The book is a child of its time: the editorial concept was to encourage and allow writers to deal with certain themes then considered "taboo" by the mainstream of publishing, especially science fiction publishing.

The book owed its source primarily to the great social changes then taking place in the United States--caused by the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam war, drugs, rock music, student unrest, and so on--and to a lesser extent to the "New Wave" science fiction then being written (predominantly in Great Britain) and the apparent breakthroughs being achieved by 'New Worlds' and a few other outlets. The fact that Mr Ellison's perception of the "New Wave" seems to have been based on effects rather than causes is neither here nor there: the book was a major success, and had an undeniable influence on the way science fiction was latterly written and published, at least in the United States.

A follow-up anthology, 'Again, Dangerous Visions', appeared in 1972. By this time the need to flout "taboos" was less urgent. 'Again, Dangerous Visions' is longer than the first volume and contains more stories, but in spite of commercial success has not been as influential. The second book introduced a novelty that was to have a bearing on the third: no writer who had appeared in 'Dangerous Visions' was invited to contribute to the follow-up. The three volumes are therefore intended to be of a piece, presumably representing a cross-section of work from this period of science fiction's development.

What follows is a brief account of the early years in the life of the third book, from the time it was announced (1971) until the end of the 1970s. This is the most "public" period in the book's existence: it was widely seen as a live and exciting project, and many people eagerly anticipated its publication.

During this period, though, certain events took place that by repetition quickly established themselves as constants. An annotated description of this period will show how the pattern took shape.

[Throughout I use a shortened form of the book's title: "LAST". The abbreviation commonly used by Mr Ellison and many science fiction commentators is "TLDV" (some of the letter writers use it) but in my view this harmless abbreviation has become part of the iconography of the unfinished book. The familiarity of the term has come to imply acceptance of, and therefore a kind of tacit approval of, what has been going on.

[I prefer my own disjunctive abbreviation. Apart from anything else it implies non-acceptance of, and tacit disapproval of, whatever it is that has been going on.]

2. A Decade of Broken Promises

=====
 The first published reference to LAST that I have been able to trace is in the Introduction to the second paperback volume of 'Again, Dangerous Visions'. Mr Ellison said then:

"[LAST] will be published, God willing, approximately six months after this book."

This Introduction was dated 6 May 1971, and 'Again, Dangerous Visions' appeared in 1972. Was God willing, six months later? He was not.

In this same article Mr Ellison revealed that he already had stories

on hand from a total of 19 named writers (plus a "gaggle" of others), and added that stories had been promised from 12 other writers ("and a few more"). There are therefore at least 31 writers who have been waiting more than 20 years to see their stories in print, although to my knowledge some of those stories were written and sold to Mr Ellison in the 1960s. (See *Note 1*.)

1971 was the year in which 'The Lathe of Heaven', 'Tau Zero', 'A Time of Changes' and 'A Soldier Erect' were published. Richard Nixon was in his first term as President of the USA. Charles Manson went to prison. A first-class postage stamp in Britain cost 3p. Harlan Ellison was 37.

Of the writers named in this article, many have subsequently died. (See *Note 6*.)

#

23 June 1972

Announcement in 'Locus' 115:

"New American Library has purchased paperback rights for \$60,000 to all three Dangerous Visions books. They will publish 'Again, Dangerous Visions' late in 1973 in a boxed two-volume set and will publish 'Dangerous Visions' in a one-volume edition after Berkley's license to publish it has expired in 1974. The paperback of 'The Last Dangerous Visions' will be published by NAL sometime after the hardcover has been released."

Announcements in 'Locus' do not come out of the air, and this one will probably have come from Mr Ellison himself. Although it does not actually say so, the clear implication from this is that LAST has been completed. One could reasonably infer that LAST will be published soon after the other arrangements described, perhaps in 1974 or 1975.

#

18 August 1973

Announcement in 'Locus' 147:

"According to Harlan Ellison, LAST will be completed by September 15 and will be turned into the publisher."

This one is at least unambiguously attributed. (Presumably Mr Ellison himself didn't write this; his grammar is better.)

#

13 September 1973

Letter from Harlan Ellison in 'The Alien Critic', No. 7, November 1973:

"...here is a current (as of 13th September 1973) table of contents for [LAST], with word-lengths appended. The manuscript of the anthology is now in a file box, ready to go to New York, with the manuscripts standing on end. The box is three feet long, and it is jammed. Please bear in mind, as you read this Table of Contents, that this is not the order the stories will appear in the book, that the book is closed AND I DAMMIT TO HELL DON'T WANT TO SEE SUBMISSIONS FROM ANYONE EVER AGAIN IN THIS LIFE! and that I'm waiting on rewrites from [3 named writers], but that beyond those three, the book is complete. Save for the 60,000 words of introductions that I have yet to write, or the 50,000 words of Afterwords that are written but haven't been included in the total wordage indicated on the list.

"I think you'll all like this book. And thank God this

bloody ten-year-millstone has been removed from my aching neck!"

Mr Ellison goes on to list 68 authors and stories (plus the three promised rewrites), and estimates a total word-length of 445,250. That, plus the 110,000 words of introductions and afterwords he refers to in his letter, makes a book well in excess of half a million words. (See *Note 3*.)

Mr Ellison also reveals that the book will contain 75 full-page illustrations by Tim Kirk.

This letter is a significant document in the tortuous history of LAST, because for many people it was the first revelation of the sheer length of the projected book. I'll have more to say about the length of the project later, but it's instructive to try to imagine exactly what we are talking about.

'War and Peace', in its English translation, is about 600,000 words in length. Vikram Seth's novel 'A Suitable Boy' (1993), which at 1,350 well-packed pages is the longest novel written in English since Samuel Richardson's 'Clarissa', is probably bigger than that. Stephen Donaldson's 'The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever' (initial trilogy only) totals about 510,000 words. John Brunner's 'Stand on Zanzibar', one of the longest science fiction novels ever published, was about 215,000 words long.

But LAST is already so big (at least in prospect) that questions of scale have to be seriously considered. At 550,000 words it's the length of approximately seven normal-length novels, or two and a half copies of 'Stand on Zanzibar' bound together.

The rest of the letter is interesting, too. Taken together with the announcement in 'Locus' ("...completed and turned in by September 15"), and itself dated 13 September, it sounds plausible, even to sceptics.

We're told the manuscript is "ready to go", that no more submissions will be read, and so on.

But a shadow of doubt does remain, partly because of those three unreliable authors who are having to rewrite their stories (one of whom, interestingly, was one of those announced two years earlier in 'Again, Dangerous Visions' as being definite--see *Note 2*), and partly because of the small matter of the 60,000 words Mr Ellison himself is yet to write.

Things don't seem so certain after all. Working flat out, a fast writer could conceivably produce 60,000 words of publishable text in a week or so, but this letter was written only two days before the deadline!

It's also worth pointing out that this letter was clearly intended as a public announcement, not as a private letter. Richard Geis's 'The Alien Critic' (later 'SF Review') was a fanzine with a large circulation, and Mr Ellison must have known and intended that it would be read by many people, including the writers whose work he was sitting on. (At one point he says "you'll all like this book", and there is a general impression of an announcement being made.)

So why was Mr Ellison announcing in public that the book was complete, when not only was it self-evidently incomplete, it could not have been completed in the time remaining?

In 1973 President Nixon began his second term of office, and the Watergate scandal broke. The Arab oil embargo was imposed. The movies 'Last Tango in Paris', 'Godspell' and 'Soylent Green' were released. Harlan Ellison was 39.

#

February 1974

Letter from Harlan Ellison in 'The Alien Critic', No. 8, February 1974:

 "Since I haven't given out the complete table of contents to anyone else, I wanted to keep you up to the moment with additions. Though the book is closed, I could not pass up the following. Please add to the list you have."

Mr Ellison then lists seven more stories, and summarizes the whole book in

the following way:

"Total stories: 78. Total authors: 75. Total words: 491,375, with Preface, Forewords, Afterwords, Introduction, etc., yet to be added."

Assuming that the non-fiction matter still amounted to 110,000 words, the book has now reached over 600,000 words in prospect: equivalent to seven and a half normal-length novels. (See *Note 4*.)

Again, this is a psychologically interesting letter. For instance, there is no attempt to rationalize this letter with the previous one, in which finality and imminent delivery were so strongly featured, and no mention of what happened about that deadline, five months earlier. There is again a clear intention that anyone reading the letter should believe that the book is emphatically finished ("complete" table of contents, "the book is closed", etc.), yet at the same time Mr Ellison has neatly provided himself with a delaying tactic against expectations: his foot is generously still in the door, and it will stay there long enough for a few more stories to squeeze their way in.

Was LAST delivered to the publisher in February 1974? It was not.

#

14 June 1974

Letter from Harlan Ellison to Christopher Priest:

"Dear Mr Priest:

"The hour grows late, time grows short, and I'm chagrined that I was never able to buy the free moments to write you before this. [LAST] is closed, and I'm in the process of readying the massive final volume of the trilogy for Harper & Row. In taking stock of the important writers who haven't been represented in the previous volumes, your name looms very large. The past few years and your work during those years have placed you among the handful of serious writers of imaginative fiction who can simply be called sui generis. I cannot express in so brief a letter my admiration for 'Indoctrinaire', 'Darkening Island' and--most memorable of all, probably because I just finished reading it and marveling at it--'The Inverted World'.

"Though money is gone on the book, I'm prepared to pay as best I can out-of-pocket to have a new, unpublished anywhere Priest story, an important story for a milestone book. It was always my intention to write and ask you to do one for me. But time ... and circumstance....

"It would be a terrible omission were there not to be a story by you in this landmark trilogy, now being taught in over 200 colleges and universities. Please! If you can do something, or have something available ... any length, but extra-special, challenging, something you wouldn't be ashamed to have logged in the book of posterity ... please send it along posthaste.

"I'll hold open the book for you until I hear one way or the other. But please keep this invitation to yourself; as far as the rest of the world is concerned, the book is closed.

"With high expectation"

(signed) Harlan Ellison

With this letter began my brief personal involvement with Mr Ellison and his unpublished book.

Although I would normally keep professional correspondence confidential I have included this letter for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it reveals that four months after the letter to Richard Geis the anthology was still far from finished. If the door then had been jammed open with a foot, now it was locked and bolted, but one manuscript--mine--could still be slipped through the gap at the bottom.

Or so it would seem. In fact, the letter feels phony (as it did on the day it was received); it has the weird unreality of a computerized form letter from a mail order company. This unworthy suspicion was unexpectedly confirmed a couple of weeks later when another British writer confided to me that he had received an almost identically worded letter at the same time. (What he actually said was: "If you were to put my letter against yours and hold them up to the light, the only difference would be the titles of our books.") I suspect this was one of many letters sent out in the same period, trawling through the lists of writers Mr Ellison had not previously approached. (See *Note 5* for a list of some of the others!)

But assume for a moment that the letter is sincerely intended. An editor approaches a writer and offers to buy a story. What could be wrong with that?

Well, the use of flattery is excessive, and manipulative in intent. *Sui generis*, indeed! He says that I loom large as one writer who wasn't in earlier volumes. To speak of me looming at that time is nonsensical. When the first *Dangerous Visions* was published I had written and sold only a handful of fairly inept stories, published in Britain. He couldn't possibly have known of me or my work. In 1971, when he completed the second book, the only work of mine that had appeared in the USA was my first novel 'Indoctrinaire' (which vanished almost without trace), and my first short story 'The Run', published in the Judith Merrill anthology 'England Swings SF' (again, a volume of commendable obscurity).

And while seeming to flatter me he is actually using his letter as a chance to promote himself. Note the use of the words "milestone" and "landmark" to describe his own book. Of course, he is trying to sell someone on the idea of writing for him, but the way he brings in this self-congratulation is actually fairly repugnant. He says that someone writing for him should produce something "extra-special", something that can be "logged in the book of posterity". Most writers try to write something "extra-special" every time, and don't need flattery as a goad.

As for posterity: assuming that a writer cares a fig for posterity, why does Mr Ellison presume that only by writing for him will posterity's book be logged?

The reference to payment "out-of-pocket" is a disingenuous ploy, because it implies a favour. Even in 1974, struggling endlessly with a feeling of failure and a perpetual shortage of cash, I wanted no favours done me. A sale should be entered into professionally. Furthermore, most anthologies are paid for out of the editor's "pocket", because the usual arrangement is for the publisher to pay the editor an advance, out of which the contributors will then be paid. What Mr Ellison meant, but didn't say, was that he had over-spent his advance but was willing to over-spend a little more. He couldn't resist dropping this into the letter, thinking it would be an extra inducement, a heightening of my presumed importance to him.

And where does Mr Ellison think the recipient of this letter has been living? Already by 1974 the non-completion of *LAST* had become an open joke in fannish and professional circles. (It is perhaps difficult to realize, a quarter of a century later, that even from Mr Ellison's first announcement many people suspected he would never deliver the book.)

A letter like this is an intimate appeal. It cynically exploits vanity, goodwill and a desire for success. The writer of the letter asserts his sincerity, good taste and admiration, and pleads for confidentiality so that other writers might not grow jealous.

But because the appeal is actually written for self-serving purposes, the recipient would have to be pretty insensitive not to notice the insincerity dripping from it. He gets a queasy feeling in his stomach, but cannot easily phrase a refusal: it's nice to be asked to write something, no matter by whom. Flattery gets under your defences, however hypocritical it is. You want to avoid hassles, but you're cornered. Prevarication or excuses will only bring a more concentrated appeal, and so, feeling cornered, you agree reluctantly to send something along. The letter has manipulated you in exactly the way it was intended.

[I prevaricated and made excuses, and duly received a more

concentrated appeal. In August 1974 I reluctantly broke off from the novel I was writing, wrote a short story called 'An Infinite Summer', and sent it to Mr Ellison.

[A long silence followed. After four months without any reaction at all from Mr Ellison, I instructed my agent to get the story back from him.

[I have never regretted this, even though I was subjected to a stream of abuse and threats from Mr Ellison. This was peculiarly unpleasant, but I had one consolation he could do nothing about. I had promptly resold the story for real money, and by the time Mr Ellison was calling me names it was already in print. It was subsequently republished in a "best of the year" anthology, and since then has been regularly reprinted in books and magazines all over the world. Two decades after I wrote it, 'An Infinite Summer' is still being resold, and brings me a small but regular income.

[If I had left the story with Mr Ellison it would today be sitting in a cardboard box somewhere in his house. No one would be reading it. Because it escaped this fate, 'An Infinite Summer's' sojourn in Mr Ellison's hands is irrelevant to this essay. What is relevant, though, is the fact that if I hadn't whipped it away from him when I did my story would be in that joyless box with well over a hundred other stories, most of them written several years before mine.

[No one is reading them, most people don't even know they exist ... but this essay is about them.]

#

19 February 1976

Announcement in Locus 185:

"For those who keep asking, Ellison's anthology [LAST] still hasn't been turned in to Harper & Row and is still unscheduled."

#

7 July 1976

Interview with Christopher Fowler, in 'Vector' 75, July 1976:

(Ellison): "[LAST] is done, is closed ... I'm finished up writing the introductions now. It goes into Harper & Row--it will not be published by Doubleday. I pulled it away from them two years ago, three years ago. It's being published by Harper & Row. It will be in a two volume, boxed set, and it will sell for approximately \$26. It has over 100 stories ... it is over a million and a quarter words. That is the equivalent of 13 or 14 full-length novels. It's longer than 'War and Peace', and it's about three times as long as 'Gone With the Wind'. ... It goes in September 1st [1976]. ... It'll be on sale in America in the Spring of 1977. I think after ten, eleven, twelve years of this project, this book will be the final road-marker of a project that is now clearly indicative of where the field has been and is over ten years."

One of the features of being in Mr Ellison's company is that he frequently makes verbal claims about having finished and delivered LAST. These claims are invariably made in such an emphatic way, supported by plausible-seeming detail, that it's impossible to challenge them except by having to call Mr Ellison a liar.

These repeated claims have become part of the ritual, in which others seem content to connive. Few people are prepared to stand up to Mr Ellison in person, and no one believes the claims (or even knows anyone else who

believes them) so they vanish into the air. But every so often there's a tape recorder running, the words get transcribed and are eventually enshrined in print. This is one such case.

As Mr Ellison never publicly retracted or corrected this, we can take it that he was not misquoted.

So here is the latest untrue claim that the book is finished and about to be delivered. A million and a quarter words: 1,250,000 words. Using my own yardstick of "average" length, that's actually equivalent to nearly 16 novels. In pages? If the "average" novel runs to 250 pages in hardback, LAST would work out at more than 3,000 pages. (The London Telephone Directory, printed on A4 paper in three columns of tiny type, contains over 3,000 pages.)

This "road-marker" that indicates where the "field" has been for the last ten years is clear to read. The "field" has been in a box in Mr Ellison's house.

Incautiously, Mr Ellison adds a publication date. We all remember that Spring of 1977, just over a decade and a half ago, when 'The Last Dangerous Visions' was at last published, don't we?

1977 was the year President Jimmy Carter took office. New York experienced its first "brown-out". The space shuttle flew for the first time. Harlan Ellison was 43.

#

14 December 1977

Letter from Harlan Ellison, circulated to all LAST contributors:

This is far too long (and too tediously self-serving) to be reproduced in full, but here are salient extracts:

"We are now forthcoming from Harper & Row." [A new contract is enclosed, with alterations.] "The most significant [alteration] is a guarantee that the book will be published before Christmas 1978. Over the outraged howls of Harper & Row I have made it a 13-month guarantee. I did that to restore faith with those of you ... who have waited literally years to see the work in print, and despite delay after delay--justified or not--have stuck with me. As this will be a 3-volume boxed set, over 600,000 words, it will take Harper & Row a good nine months to send the book(s) through production. I know I'm cutting it close with you, but I felt I had to do it if I was to summon up the gall to ask you to re-sign with TLDV. It is incumbent on me to advise you once again that the stories have, in fact, reverted to you. Long since. You can refuse to sign, keep the advance payment you received, and sell the story elsewhere. Or you can trust me just one more time and stay with the project."

[Mr Ellison explains he and the publishers have retained Victoria Schochet as an outside consultant editor to complete the book. Ms Schochet is a well-known and highly respected New York editor.]

"[Victoria Schochet] came out here to Los Angeles from New York for ten days, to work on this deal exclusively. Her assistance has permitted me to plunge through to the final edge of the project, and because of her help the manuscript is now ready to go. I have some writing to do, but I'll have that done in January and the book will be sent to Harper & Row by February 1st for immediate pre-production layouts."

[Mr Ellison encloses a note from Victoria Schochet; see below.]

"Over the next few months I'll stay in touch to let you know what stage the production of the book has reached. Harper & Row will

be renegotiating the NAL paperback contract, which will mean more money almost immediately, and there will be, of course, continuing royalties, unto the 10th generation. With DV and A,DV having sold millions and millions of copies in hard and soft, translations and UK reprints, all you need do to reassure yourself that you're investing in an annuity, is to query anyone who appeared in the first two books."

(signed) Harlan Ellison

Here is the handwritten personal testimony from Victoria Schochet, enclosed with Mr Ellison's letter:

"_Please_ do be assured that this enormous project is in the final stages of completion. I say Please because it would truly be a tragedy to lose any of the pieces in the volume. Having spent the last week reading through all 600,000 words of it, I promise you that no claim for its significance, scope, and excellence could possibly be extravagant. I have never had the honor of working on as fine a project. I know it's been a long time coming for us all, but the waiting will have been worth it.

"The manuscript is now all together, in order, finished. All that remains is to integrate your (_immediate_) responses and it's off to the publisher. The book will be a 3-volume, large-sized (D), about 650 pages each. The illustrations are equal to the stories -- the set will be a beautiful, mind-boggling product. Harper & Row recognizes the importance of TLDV and is preparing to support its publication in force.

"The editors and publisher thank you for your patience and understanding and have faith that you'll be well pleased with the rewards."

(signed) Victoria Schochet

Thrust out of your mind the distracting hindsight knowledge that LAST did not actually appear in December 1978, and try to put yourself in the place of the writers who received this in 1977. It's a fine and convincing performance: open, frank, plausible, attested to by an independent witness.

You would be a distrustful churl indeed to question this full-frontal assault on your mind and heart, with its confession of fault, willingness to let old stories be released, optimism about the future ... and its promises of untold wealth.

The integrity of Victoria Schochet is not in question. An intriguing element in all this, though, is that Mr Ellison makes heavy weather of her fine reputation, and underlines the fact that she did not write her letter under duress. (At one point in his letter he says: "Vicky's credentials speak for themselves; and not even thumbscrews could get her to write those words if she didn't mean them." Why should he make such a meal of this? Why on earth should he think that anyone would suspect otherwise?)

What went wrong after these letters were sent? After all, here we have unambiguous statements concerning the book's completion. Mr Ellison says, "the manuscript is now ready to go." Victoria Schochet says, "The manuscript is now all together, in order, finished." If these statements are true, why was the book not published 15 years ago?

It wouldn't be anything to do with the single betraying flaw, would it? Mr Ellison says, "I have some writing to do."

Meanwhile, what's all this about "continuing royalties"?

"Continuing" implies there is a process that started in the past and will continue uninterrupted into the future. Is Mr Ellison suggesting that the writers have been receiving "royalties" even before the book is published? (A royalty is a payment made to a writer based on retail sales of a book.) Using the word "royalties" is an interesting semantic stratagem, because it implies that the book has somehow come into existence before it is published!

The reality of LAST payments to contributors is that anything paid is in the nature of a payment on account until publication. The source of this will be the original advance, contributions from Mr Ellison's

"pocket", and, most important of all, surpluses created by the payment of larger advances whenever the projected book is moved to a new publisher. The passage of time and price inflation allow replacement publishers to pay an advance which is sufficiently larger than the one immediately before. This enables the old publisher to be paid back, and the surplus distributed as "royalties" (see below).

Insofar as I have been able to trace actual payments of these "royalties", I understand one distribution was made ("out of pocket") in August 1973, and another was made in early 1984. More might have been paid since then. (My argument is with Mr Ellison's terminology--which creates misunderstandings--not with his honesty.)

By the way, did you notice how in 18 months the estimated word-count dropped mysteriously from 1,250,000 to 600,000 words?

#

29 January 1979

Letter from Ellison to contributors. ("SUBJECT: Impending Publication"):

"As the enclosed letter will inform you, there has been a major change in the status of [LAST] and, as a result, a major improvement in your position in the book.

"G.P. Putnam's Sons will be doing the book in a three-volume boxed set. They are advancing us \$50,000. After repayment of the monies owed to Harper & Row and New American Library, I will be dispersing most of the remaining thousands directly to you, as an additional advance payment for your work in the book.

"The entire month of February will be spent completing the prefatory material and the introductions; delivery is scheduled for 15 March and publication--if all goes as expected--will be Christmas of this year.

"It is a year later than my last communique with you indicated, and God knows most of you have waited far longer to see your work in print than I had any right to expect; but I think you'll agree this is a most salutary development.

"This is the third publisher to contract for [LAST]. We started with Doubleday a long time ago, then moved the book to Harper & Row, and now Putnam. A number of you have been (properly) annoyed at what seemed to be unnecessary delays in getting the book out. I've always tried to be candid with you about these delays; and with only a few exceptions you've all understood that I take my custodial responsibilities for your work very seriously. It is precisely that sense of responsibility that brings us to this point. Please understand: I've seen too many rotten examples of anthologists who've conned you into doing original stories that went into books that instantly vanished from view. And you never saw another cent of royalties.

"Everyone who has ever published a story in one of the Dangerous Visions books can attest to the large and regular royalties that keep on coming, year after year. I feel it is the most basic element of my obligation to you, to keep on making money for you. A story in a DV book has life, it will be an annuity. So as caretaker, I have to go with my instincts about marketing. Thus far I've been correct."

[Two rambling paragraphs follow, in which Mr Ellison explains why he keeps changing publishers.]

"Well, last year Vicky Schochet came out here from New York to help me finalize the book. She read it from front to back, and was more enthusiastic than I can say. Now she's the editor at Berkley/Putnam who has arranged for the buy-out with H&R. She wants to do the book, she knows how good the book is, and she has

fired up Putnam's so they want to do the book.

"The way it should be done.

"With major advertising. With special packaging. With heavy promotion. And with a \$50,000 advance payment.

"That's the story. I tell you all this, of course, to get you to hang in there for one more month. By March 15th the book will be in Vicky's hands and she'll circularize you confirming same. But before that time, we'll have an advance check of fifty grand. I'll pay back the advance we got from Harper, the money New American Library gave us, and the vast bulk of what's left will be divided into pro rata shares and sent off to you. Within a month you'll have a big schlug of money to cement your staying with the project so we can do it right.

"I've run out of ways to beg you to stay with me; you've long since run out of patience with me. TLDV has become one of the big myth-objects of our time. Like Atlantis or Reagan's intellect. But that very word-of-mouth advertising, that bated breath attitude on the part of the audience, serves you all in the extreme. When Putnam's releases TLDV for the Christmas season, it has a guaranteed trade sale waiting.

"And we're talking a very expensive package here. Three books, approximately 700,000 words, over 115 stories. And huge profits for all of you. The attached letter from Berkley will buttress all the foregoing. Be patient for another month and enjoy a second advance payment as a mark of good faith, as well as my way of saying thankyou for your patience up till now."

(signed) Harlan Ellison

This letter, like the one in 1977, was accompanied by one from a publisher. The writer this time was Rena Wolner, Vice President and Publisher at Berkley Publishing Corporation:

"To the contributors to The Last Dangerous Visions.

"Welcome to Berkley! Thanks to the involvement of Victoria Schochet, our new senior editor for science fiction, Berkley is now negotiating to take over the publishing of [LAST]. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you just how proud and excited we are to be the publisher of this final volume in the remarkable Dangerous Visions series.

"I would like to tell you something of our publishing plans for the project. We intend to bring out a hardcover edition, under our Berkley/Putnam imprint, on our winter 1979-1980 list. We recognize that publication of [LAST] will be an event of great importance in the science fiction field, one which has been awaited for some time. Although it is too early to be specific, I want to assure you that we are planning to promote the project with all due fanfare, and see that it receives the meticulous production attention and post-publication notice that it deserves. (This will involve publicity releases, posters, adequate review copies, and the like.) And of course we will be bringing out the paperback editions later in 1980, and have grand plans for selling and promoting the books again at that time.

"I hope that you are as pleased to have [LAST] published by Berkley as we here are to have it on our list, We know that the project will be a tremendous success for all of us."

(signed) Rena Wolner

This was another convincing performance, one which must have seemed plausible on that wintry day in 1979.

There is hardly any reference to Mr Ellison's broken promises in the past, except by implication. By concentrating on the change of publisher Mr Ellison also manages to imply that the further delay was caused by this, not by him. In a confident manner, Mr Ellison gives every impression of being back in control: publication is "impending", etc.

You will have noted Mr Ellison's ingenuous reference to anthologies

that "instantly vanished from view". This could not have been said accidentally (because if so it is insensitive to the point of crassness) so what on Earth could he have meant? No other book in modern publishing has "vanished" so publicly and over such a long period of time as LAST. Was he using verbal legerdemain, trying to persuade his writers that although they probably think the book has vanished, in fact it has not?

Mr Ellison of course contradicts himself on this. The amusing joke about Atlantis and Reagan's intellect is trying to make a virtue of the book's long period of non-appearance.

Later in 1979, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of the UK. In 1980, around the time the paperback was expected, Ronald Reagan was elected President of the USA. 'Star Trek - the Motion Picture' was released in Britain. Harlan Ellison was 46.

#

June 1979. Report in Locus 222:

'Locus' published a list of the contents of LAST, presumably obtained from Mr Ellison. The book was said "to be published next year by Putnam". A total of 113 stories were listed, amounting to just under 645,000 words. (See *Note 5*.)

"Next year" was of course 1980, and of course the book was not published then.

#

August 1980. An eye-witness account:

During a visit to New York I went to a party where Harlan Ellison was present. (This is one of the very few occasions when I have been in the same room with him, although we have never actually been introduced.) A large number of writers, including myself and Mr Ellison, were sitting around chatting about this and that. Suddenly one of the others said, "How are you getting on with TLDV, Harlan?"

"I just delivered it!" he cried. "I handed it in this afternoon! It's over!"

Amid squeals of delighted scepticism, raspberry noises and general hilarity, Mr Ellison managed to look hurt and indignant.

"Listen, you guys," he said. "This time I really did."

He launched into some complicated story about how he had had to get a cab to take him and the oversize box to the airport.

"It's OK, Harlan," somebody said. "We understand. But you don't have to bullshit us. We won't tell the fans."

Mr Ellison look chastened, but relaxed a little. He then explained that although he hadn't, you know, actually delivered the manuscript, the delay was a mere technicality. As soon as he got back to Los Angeles he would be setting aside a whole month to write the introductions, and ...

Everyone cheered up. The status quo had been restored.

A few days later, at the worldcon in Boston, I heard part of a long and colourful speech Mr Ellison gave about his life and works. During this, a question from the floor raised the same subject.

While the laughter rang out, Mr Ellison lowered his head in mock modesty. As the laughter died he raised a clenched fist and shook it in triumph.

"I was in New York last week," he declared. "And I handed it in! IT'S DONE!"

The whole place erupted with cheers. Mr Ellison trotted happily to and fro across the stage. People stood up: it became a standing ovation.

Then I noticed that some of the people who had been at the same party as me, and who had heard the reluctant truth from Mr Ellison's own lips, were also clapping and cheering ...

I left the auditorium, bemused by all this. As I went through the

doors I heard Mr Ellison begin his entertaining story about getting his oversized box into the cab.

3. The Next 13 Years

=====

Thus the history of LAST to 1980. It has been going on like that ever since, and simply because in that time the book still has not been finished, delivered or published, to go on detailing the saga would be pointless.

From the above it is possible to discern a wave pattern with a period of about two or three years.

The first phase is a sudden burst of activity from Mr Ellison: tables of contents are released, a new publisher is named, a glitzy advance is paid, publication dates are announced, consultant editors are flown out to Los Angeles at Mr Ellison's expense, Mr Ellison promises that writing the introductions will take no more than two or three weeks. Then there is a period of apparent retrenchment: more stories are acquired from new writers, old stories are rewritten, somewhere in the background another contributor or two drops dead. The third phase arrives insidiously: nothing much happens, Mr Ellison no longer tells everybody he is working on the introductions, the publisher waits, the contributors wait, the manuscripts sit in a box.

Then, out of the blue, another burst of activity ...

The ten-year history detailed above was drawn from the public record, or from sources that were easy to find. It is therefore documented, and can be checked by anyone who cares to do so.

#

The undocumented record is wider still; there can be few people who go to American conventions who have not heard Mr Ellison renew his claims and promises. For instance, three months after the worldcon in Boston, Mr Ellison took part in a three-way telephone link-up that was broadcast at another science fiction convention. In this conversation with Fritz Leiber and Arthur C. Clarke, Mr Ellison again repeated his claims:

"I'm getting ready for the final push [on LAST]. It's going to press. Berkley/Putnam is doing it. They're taking a year to publish it in three volumes. ...That's it then, that rock's off my back forever."

[Transcript in 'Science Fiction Review' 40, Fall 1981.]

Again the unambiguous assertions: the book is going to press, it's off his back forever (and never mind what he had said in public only three months earlier).

Any professional writer will know that when a book is "going to press" it has already been in the publisher's hands for some weeks or months. The implication is clear: the manuscript must have been delivered.

And that same writer will want to believe it, and will put aside the memory of the earlier qualification: "I'm getting ready for the final push."

#

Since 1980, of course, the book has still not been published, nor has it even been announced. As always, the exact situation is difficult to determine, but the book appears now to be under contract to Houghton Mifflin.

Mr Ellison has been widely criticized over his tardiness. Most of this is in private (he would probably be appalled to know what people say about LAST when they know he can't hear them ... fear of reprisal from

Harlan Ellison is a very real phenomenon, as some of the following letters will confirm), but some, inevitably, gets into print.

One such was by the American writer and critic, Gregory Feeley [published in 'Thrust', Spring/Summer 1984].

This made a point I had not seen before: that many of the longer stories in the first two Ellison anthologies had been expanded into novels, and that LAST contained a large number of long stories, many of which would seem likely candidates for the same expansion. Feeley pointed out that the writers of these--with one or two exceptions--were effectively barred from developing their work so long as Mr Ellison was sitting on them.

#

I realized while I was researching that to be one of Mr Ellison's friends is something to be avoided. Mr Ellison does not hesitate to recruit his friends to mouth his words for him.

In October 1983 yet another letter went around to LAST contributors, this one purportedly written by the science fiction writer Ed Bryant.

Writing on Mr Ellison's headed notepaper, Ed Bryant uses his first paragraph to go out of his way to establish his credentials as someone "not wont to hyperbole" or "unwarranted enthusiasm in regard to matters such as TLDV."

From the first moments, then, the weary LAST contributor is presented with another hypocritical performance. Why on Earth should Ed Bryant begin a letter with such a disclaimer?

Could it be explained by the fact that he is using Mr Ellison's headed notepaper paper in Mr Ellison's typewriter on Mr Ellison's desk in Mr Ellison's office, no doubt with Mr Ellison standing right behind him? If he had been at his own typewriter, in his own office, would he have launched into this degrading "Honest Ed" routine? Whatever the truth, all the signs are instantly up: truth is going to be a rare commodity, yet again.

Inevitably, familiar matters are raised:

Yes, Mr Ellison paid Honest Ed's air fare out to Los Angeles.

Yes, Mr Ellison is busy writing the introductions.

Yes, there's a new publisher (this one Houghton Mifflin).

Yes, there's a major promotional budget.

Yes, there's a new publication date (Spring 1984).

Yes, Mr Ellison has been busy litigating "out of his own pocket" on the contributors' behalf, this time against a bankrupt British publisher.

Yes, the previous publisher reneged on the deal, and the fact that Mr Ellison left them is nothing to do with the book not being delivered on time.

Yes, what Mr Ellison says about paying lots of money is EVER SO TRUE.

Yes, Mr Ellison has had health problems.

Yes, it is a letter disgracefully wont to hyperbole and unwarranted enthusiasm in regard to matters such as TLDV.

One cannot help feeling sorry for Ed Bryant, a pleasant man, and hope he was at least well paid.

#

A poignant glimpse of what it's like to be one of Mr Ellison's long-suffering contributors appeared in 'Science Fiction Review' 46, Spring 1983. In an article called "How Not to Write Science Fiction", Richard Wilson wrote:

"Another way not to write is to sell a story to Harlan Ellison and wait for it to be published in [LAST]. You sit and wait with visions of rave reviews, foreign and other subsidiary sales, a movie or television option, fame and money, money, money. You wait and wait. The story was at one time only a gleam in my eye, a fragment no one was interested in until Harlan saw 17,000 words

of it. He liked it and demanded more. It grew and grew and in 1969 it was 40,000 or 47,000 words long, depending on who was counting, and Harlan bought it. I heard the book will be out real soon now. It's only 13 years later, so I really shouldn't complain. You don't hear me complaining, do you?"

Mr Wilson died in 1987, without seeing his story published.

#

As the years slip by the macabre roster of dying contributors gets ever longer, and seems to acquire a ghastly relevance. (See *Note 6*.) It is of course fortuitous, but only an inexcusably delayed book as this is prone to so many reminders of human mortality. A scurrilous but amusing article in 'Patchin Review', by the pseudonymous "Jane Doe", did not shrink from the delicacy of this topic and made much wicked play with the mortality rate among LAST contributors.

She published a tabulated list of the contributors' known ages, noting which ones had died since selling to Mr Ellison, and estimating how many (on past record) were likely to die in the coming years. According to Doe, more than 50,000 words of LAST were written by writers now deceased, and that by 1991 a total of 210,000 words will be by writers then aged 60 or over. (Several of the writers who were alive in 1981, when this article appeared, have in fact died since.) Beneath the dark mischief of this article lay the serious if obvious question: how much longer will this go on?

#

It is now the winter of 1993/94.

Most of the books mentioned here as historical markers have come and gone; the films are now seen only on video, or as TV re-runs.

When LAST was announced Watergate and Irangate had not happened. The USA was still embroiled in the Vietnam war, and men were walking on the moon. Half the world was communist, or communist-dominated. The Berlin Wall stood, Yugoslavia was one country, the Ayatollah Khomeini was in obscure exile in Paris. No one would have credited that a second-rate Hollywood actor and a former research chemist would for a time become the two most powerful leaders in the West.

Satellite TV and home video recorders did not exist. CD records did not exist. Home computers were used only by enthusiasts. A pocket calculator or a digital watch cost several hundred dollars.

Kim Philby, Brook Benton, Raymond Carver, the Shah of Iran, Robert A. Heinlein, Art Blakey, Mao Zedung, Graham Greene, Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, Joel McCrea, Leonid Brezhnev and John Lennon were still alive.

Salman Rushdie had not yet published any novels.

No one had heard of Aids.

A baby born when Mr Ellison first started acquiring stories is now an adult.

Harlan Ellison, who was a young man when all this began, will be 60 in 1994.

4. Some Questions

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Why Does LAST Remain Unpublished?

Why Have So Many Promises Been Broken?

Will LAST Ever be Published?

How Will It End?

Over the next few pages these questions will be addressed directly, and some answers will be proposed.

Why Does LAST Remain Unpublished?

Anthologies have failed before. They have been started and not completed. They have been published late. They have been unsatisfactory to the publisher when delivered: over-long, or unsuitable in some other way. They have not lived up to expectations.

In the generality of things no blame attaches, only disappointment, and then only from a few in the know. One book that does not after all get published is neither here nor there; no one loses face, no one is too surprised or alarmed. The publishing of books is an uncertain business, and many projects fail.

'The Last Dangerous Visions' appears to be different, though, because of the interest that has been aroused in it. That interest has been created by Mr Ellison himself.

From the outset he has boasted about the brilliance of the stories, has made exaggerated claims about the importance of the project, has pointed to the reputation of his first anthology, has periodically raised hopes and expectations of seeing the book in print.

Interestingly, none of this has come from the writers themselves: certainly, the ones I have spoken to have been extremely modest about their work, and in many cases have been noticeably defensive about it, because they feel that what they sold to Mr Ellison no longer represents their best work.

Unlike other books in progress, insider knowledge of LAST is not confined to a few writers, a handful of people in the publisher's office, the editor. LAST is known around the world. There can hardly be a science fiction fan anywhere in the world who not only does not know about it, but who has not got an opinion about it. In this wider circle of insider expectation the book has become something of a sick joke, synonymous with a project that has never been completed and likely never will be.

All this cynicism, this defensiveness, all these anticipations, arise from one source alone.

Only Harlan Ellison still seems to believe that the book is viable, only he keeps bringing up the subject. He single-handedly stokes the fires of expectation.

Why can he not let the book go?

The problem seems, quite simply, to be one of fears about credibility.

So much has been put at stake: personal integrity, professional reliability, the regard of peers, the importance of not seeming to be a quitter ... all these have become part of the book's rationale. Too much boasting has been done in public, too many grand statements have been made, too many promises about annuities.

Behind this facade of bluster and strutting must lie a deep sense of insecurity.

Mr Ellison is the author of his own problems. We expect of him only what he has made us expect, and if he thinks the non-appearance of the book will represent indignity and failure, then so will we.

Any hint of disbelief in the project (e.g., when a writer tries to withdraw his story) is greeted with such a display of bad temper, wheedling, renewed promises, emotional blackmail, accusations, threats, and so on, that few will challenge him. Writers living both in the UK and in the USA have been on the receiving end of this kind of thing, but few will talk about it. (See Pre-Publication Letters.)

One of the immediate consequences of crossing Mr Ellison is a broad and enduring distaste for the whole subject, part of which is clearly the wish not to renew the trouble. Fear of reprisal: this has been mentioned

before, but it is surprisingly common. What should be a matter for free comment is rarely discussed, because people don't like being vilified.

The forcefulness of Mr Ellison's personality is obviously not in doubt, and there is no question but that should he channel his energies he probably could make the anthology succeed.

Then why has he not? Why has 'The Last Dangerous Visions' not so far been published?

#

At a very basic level, the problem of LAST is a classic example of someone biting off more than he can chew.

Yet it's easy to see how it happened:

A few stories held over from 'Again, Dangerous Visions', a perfectionist desire to crown a project with something even bigger and better. Past efforts have been successful, feedback is coming in from readers. The idea of the book is sound: a publisher leaps at it and puts up some money. Writers are approached, stories are written. The book gets bigger, the stories look good, but time is starting to pass. The publisher calls up to see how it's coming along. Meanwhile, five of the stories are being rewritten, three young and hitherto unknown writers are nominated for prizes (and the book won't be complete without stories from them), and there is the small matter of all those stories that were promised last year and haven't been delivered yet ...

The first publisher gets tired of waiting, but a second is only too eager to step in. More money is paid. The book goes on getting bigger, and time is still passing. A visit to France introduces a welcome touch of the exotic to the contents page, but raises an unwelcome thought: what about German writers, Swedish writers, Australian writers ...? Meanwhile, in the time it takes to go to France and back, five more young American writers have emerged who should be included. Letters go off. Then...the inspiration! The book must contain every writer of note who wasn't in either of the first two anthologies. After a hurried search through the SFWA Directory, more sycophantic letters are sent, more stories are promised, more stories are delivered. The book is getting bigger and bigger, and now represents a major investment of time and energy. Meanwhile, there are television scripts to write and lawsuits to pursue. The publisher changes again, writers begin to get restless. The fans are gossiping, speculating ... some coveted writers refuse to take part, others try to withdraw their stories, hassles are developing all around. Afterwords need to be rewritten, and introductory articles already written have drifted out of date. Contributors start to die; things don't look so good.

The larger the book grows the more unmanageable it becomes, not only physically but also creatively.

All books represent an idea, but now the idea of LAST extends over a huge period of time, with dozens of different writers working at different stages of their careers; young writers whose work was snapped up at workshops, old writers teased out of retirement. Even to try to think about it gives you a headache. And what about all those sui generis writers who won't have anything to do with the book? Doesn't their very absence imply something might be wrong?

Then another attempt to impose order: reassuring letters go out, but a large number of the contributors respond by asking if they can change the ending of their story, or suggesting that they send in something more recent instead, something a bit longer but more up to date. Meanwhile, word comes in that two more contributors have inconsiderately died.

The book is out of control.

Like a man who has to keep running to save himself from falling, Mr Ellison moves the book on and on, shouting to keep his spirits high.

This is undoubtedly what has happened, and what is still going on. It does not necessarily indicate what will happen in the future, but it does explain what went on in the past.

It's difficult not to feel some sympathy for the problem.

No one, not even Mr Ellison's worst detractor, has ever suggested that

his motives were not the highest. He undoubtedly intended to produce a worthwhile book, and probably still believes that that is possible. But Mr Ellison has become the victim of scale and the scale of his own ambition. It was too much. It is a book that is no longer possible.

Why Have So Many Promises Been Broken?

The record is plain: one promise after another has been broken.

LAST has been falsely announced more often than any other book in history. Many of these false predictions have been highly specific, almost incontestably so. The claims are so specific, so exact, so apparently binding, that people have been gulled by them again and again.

If Mr Ellison were ever confronted with this record, he would doubtless have a string of excuses to hand, most of them entirely plausible. Each promise would be documented with a note of its breach, a deft explanation of someone else's failure or betrayal, his own human error, an unwelcome attack of one of his famous incapacitating chronic ailments. Individually, each excuse might well be valid.

But taken as a whole, he has been crying wolf about this book since 1971.

Why? What is the real reason?

Theories are easy; the previous section contained one that was not hard to envisage. But the phenomenon of the multiple false claims about this unfinished book is extremely interesting. Clearly, things are more complicated than they seem, and any attempt to explain them must be equally as complex. The problem has to be approached indirectly.

#

Harlan Ellison is famous. It's likely that he is not as famous as he thinks, but for a writer whose work consists almost entirely of short stories he has done remarkably well. He has won awards, he has been anthologized all over the world, he goes on TV chat shows, he has been guest of honour at numerous science fiction conventions, he has fans and allies and friends. His writing is taken seriously in American universities, he has done unpublicized work to encourage young writers, his views and his presence are widely respected.

But all writers, famous or otherwise, have one thing in common. They see themselves as individuals, and that only by individual qualities will they prevail. The two qualities most prized by writers are ability and integrity. They stand or fall by these.

Mr Ellison's past ability with his anthologies has been demonstrated, and is not in doubt. He has nothing to prove.

Nor is his integrity in doubt ... yet here we approach the answer.

The appeal Mr Ellison makes is to his integrity. By his public announcements, his lurid claims on convention platforms, his answers to interviewers, his specific naming of dates and details, he is throwing down a challenge.

He is saying, in effect, "I, Harlan Ellison, say this is so. If you question what I say, you are not questioning the fact but casting suspicion on my integrity and professional reputation."

It is a curiously effective way of suppressing criticism, because his integrity is not an issue with anyone else.

His fame, his record, his word ... all these are accepted. It is Mr Ellison himself who makes integrity an issue; if he did not, no one else would be bothered about it.

The position of any anthology editor is one of trust: he is first trusted by the publisher, then by the writers who send him stories, and finally by the readers who buy the book. Trust is implicit in this kind of

work, and anthologies would not be possible without it.

Why then does Mr Ellison bring it in as an issue?

Why are doubters given such short shrift? Why are writers who withdraw their work treated as if they have betrayed a cause? Why are the periodic promises to his surviving contributors couched so emotionally? (In his circular letters Mr Ellison uses phrases like "your trust may be better placed this time", "appeal for solidarity", "imploring", "I've always tried to be candid with you", "hang in there for one more month", "I've run out of ways to beg you to stay with me", and so on.)

These appeals are obviously sincere, but they are equally obviously calculated ... and the effect is manipulative.

Mr Ellison sincerely believes in what he is doing, sincerely believes that he is worthy of trust ... but at the same time he does not shrink from using that trust as a weapon of challenge. Few will take up the challenge, because it is not at issue.

Only the reckless respond, try to get their stories back or point out that this is the umpteenth time the anthology has been promised ... and the fury of a man who feels his integrity impugned is turned full upon their hapless heads.

Will LAST Ever be Published?

It is always possible that everything will happen just as Mr Ellison has always claimed.

The Herculean labours will come to an end, the manuscript will be delivered, the publisher will accept it, the book will come out. It will be a two- or three-volume boxed set of handsome hardcovers in a fine edition, superbly designed and illustrated. It will of course be expensive (obviously much more than the \$26 mooted several years ago), but a reasonably priced paperback will follow. The book will be an instant collector's item, it will stay in print for years, universities will compete to be the first to put it on the syllabus ... and a group of slightly elderly writers will at last start receiving their annuities.

Can it happen?

When I first drafted this long essay in 1984 I found it difficult to suppress the nervy feeling that everything I was writing would be rendered invalid in an instant, if LAST suddenly appeared in the shops. It turns out I need not have worried: the intervening years have seen, if anything, a decline in the likelihood.

Even so, again, now in 1993, I cannot easily suppress the same feeling. So plausible is Mr Ellison's vehement belief in himself that even an unbeliever like myself is periodically beguiled.

Only when I think about the numbers do I feel certain.

#

The last published list of contents that I have been able to trace was in 1979, when there were 113 stories with a total length of 645,000 words. But that was nearly a decade and a half ago. How many stories have been added or withdrawn since, and what is the word count now?

On past performance it seems unlikely that the list has remained unchanged.

Between 1974 and 1979 (a period when the book was "closed") the number of stories increased from 78 to 113. Those 35 new stories represented a percentage increase of about 45%, or a straight-line increase of about 9% a year.

Have more been added since? If so, how many? In 1982 I was told by one of the contributors that the number had risen to 180, but this is of course hearsay. Discounting this and being conservative: let's assume that

in the last fourteen years Mr Ellison has not actively sought new stories.

Even so, irresistible new writers must have come to his attention. A glance at any Hugo or Nebula nomination list from the last ten years will reveal there are dozens of top-class writers not on his 1979 list.

If we assume that Mr Ellison's rate of acquisition has slowed in recent years, but that he has even so gone on buying stories, what would be a realistic estimate? That he has acquired, say, just four new stories a year?

That would produce a further 56 stories, bringing the total to 169. (Using the same basis, this means a percentage increase of about 50%, or a straight-line increase of about 3.5%. Both these figures are drastically lower than before.)

The average length of each individual story in 1979 was about 5,700 words, but we know that several of these are very long indeed--Richard Wilson's is 47,000 words--and that even Mr Ellison must by now be trimming his sail to suit the wind.

To stay on the conservative side, let's assume the average length of the new stories is 4,000 words.

The total length of the book then increases to 869,000 words. (That's the known 645,000 plus 56 stories x 4,000.) I suspect that this huge amount of wordage is none the less an underestimate.

#

The one thing we know for sure about the Dangerous Visions books is that they do not confine themselves to short stories.

There are the introductions to each story (written by Mr Ellison), the afterwords (written by the authors), and an overall introduction (Ellison).

On past form the introductions run to at least 2,000 words each, and the afterwords average out at about 1,000 words, and these have to be added to the overall total.

If we assume (against all likelihood) that the overall introduction is a minimalist 5,000 words, and that there is only one (and not one each for the separate volumes in the boxed set), we arrive at a grand total:

Introduction	5,000
Stories	869,000
Author introductions	338,000
Afterwords	169,000
Total	<u>1,381,000</u> =====

The closest estimate to this Mr Ellison has ever made is the one he gave to Christopher Fowler in 1976.

(If you prefer to believe that the 1979 contents list remains the final one, the same basis of calculation produces a total of 989,000 words.)

And while we're at it, let's not forget Tim Kirk's 75 full-page illustrations. Assuming there is one for each story, more must have been executed since: presumably there are now 169 of these, also to be included. 169 pages of a book take up roughly the same amount of space as 45,000 words of text, so these too should be added to the nominal total.

It seems likely that Mr Ellison, a writer who normally only produces short stories, cannot properly conceive what a book of this length actually means in physical terms.

If the publishers chose the normal large format of a hardcover, and used 8pt or 9pt type, they would still have to produce a total volume at least 4,000 pages long, perhaps closer to 5,000 pages.

(My small-type, war-economy 1941 edition of 'War and Peace', with which Mr Ellison compares his own book, has a mere 1,352 pages.)

#

Physically producing a book of this length would be a nightmare.

Length aside, remember that the text will consist of 169 (or 113) different manuscripts, each produced on a different typewriter or word processor, and each having its own ideas about spelling, punctuation, paragraph layout. The first thing any publisher would have to do is send the book away to be copy-edited; one publisher's editor I spoke to estimated that copy-editing alone could take up to four months, all of which will obviously have to be paid for.

Typesetting would take at least as long again ... and never mind the overheads which are accruing while all this is going on. Then there are the costs of purchasing the paper, making the plates, binding, warehousing, distribution ...

Is such a book practicable these days? How much would the book cost to print? How many copies would have to be printed to get the cover-price down to \$26? (Actually, millions and millions, which happens to be the numbers Mr Ellison unconvincingly claims the earlier books have sold.) Would the market exist to support such a print run?

Being sensible, and assuming a print-run of the same sort of size as a bestselling novel, the book would still have to be noticeably more expensive than the average hardcover. To pluck a figure out of the air: say \$75.00 for the 3-volume set.

The book would obviously sell well, even at that sort of price. But well enough?

Rich collectors would snap it up, of course, and those 200 universities would scramble for copies. Perhaps 1,000 copies could be counted on as certain sales ... maybe twice that if you feel generous.

But Mr Ellison's sights are clearly set higher than this: he imagines it will become a bestseller.

The book, in fact, must become a bestseller. There is no other way it could conceivably be published.

You start to sense the divine lunacy of the project at this point. Science fiction has become a bestselling category in recent years; surely LAST, one of the most heralded, talked-about books in years, surely this would slide into the bestsellers list with regal assurance?

Maybe it will.

#

The publisher does have other ways of saving money.

The print-run can be increased by doing a deal with a book club; this would bring down the unit cost of the book a little. Mr Ellison has always stoutly maintained that cheap editions will not be allowed; but suppose he were over-ruled ... how many copies would a book-club want? How would they release it? As a "choice" or an "alternate" for that month? Surely it would make an ideal premium title, the sort that is offered for a few dollars as an inducement to new members ...

Will it end up being practically given away?

Another option open to the publisher is to make co-production deals with other English language publishers. An American paperback house, say, or a British publisher.

Would the typography required for a massive hardcover be suitable for reproduction in paperback? Might it not have to be re-set?

And what about Britain? The only British deal Mr Ellison has ever mentioned was with Millington Books, back in 1976. But Millington went out of business years ago, and no other British publisher has announced it since.

Another possibility would be for someone to bring out the book using electronic media, such as CD-ROM. Even Mr Ellison's vastly over-sized text would fit comfortably on a 650Mb compact disc. Indeed, this is so close to an answer that one can all too easily imagine hearing from him in the near future about the upcoming CD-ROM edition. ("I've pulled it back from those tardy book publishers. There's this outfit in Santa Monica who can manufacture CDs for under \$1 a disc. There's room for _hundreds more stories_, and I'm reading manuscripts right now. I just have the introductions to write, and--")

But before anyone succumbs to waves of relief, take a calm look at two

significant facts:

Firstly, the current state of CD-ROM technology is not final. It is still in development. Although many great and wonderful things are promised for CD-ROM, the technology is expensive to buy, optimally requires a computer using at least a 486DX chip to drive it properly, and might yet turn out to be the Betamax format of the future. There is already a valid use for texts stored in CD-ROM, but the format is not yet a replacement for books. The CD-ROM revolution has begun, but people are advancing on the presidential palace _slowly_.

Secondly, where is the weak link in LAST? Where have we realized, time and time again, the delays are arising? The common link is Mr Ellison's apparent inability to finish his editorial work.

#

The odds are stacked against the book.

After more than 20 years of promises, Mr Ellison still appears not to have finished the necessary work.

The idea has gone out of control: too many stories are too old, too many contributors have died, too many good or recent writers are missing.

The book is far too long, and virtually impossible to publish with any realistic hope of a financial return.

But none of this reckons with Mr Ellison himself. He continues to insist that the book will appear. He WILL finish the work, he WILL deliver it. Not only WILL it be published, it WILL be a major success. A "roadmarker", a "milestone", a "landmark", an "annuity" for its writers.

This insistence is all that his writers have.

They have to set aside his quarter-century of non-completion. Set aside the string of broken promises. Set aside all their objective experience of practical publishing. Set aside the fact that they will be represented by work they wrote years ago. Set aside any fears they might have about the book's market potential.

In short, they have to set aside every justifiable doubt and worry they have entertained for years.

Against all this, Mr Ellison offers only his unchallengeable integrity, and expects of others the same faith he has in himself.

How will it end?

How Will It End?

We have to imagine what seems to Mr Ellison to be the unimaginable.

The book is never actually completed. Alternatively, it is completed and delivered in a form that turns out to be unpublishable. What then?

Three possibilities present themselves.

#

The Steady State Theory

The book will never be finished, it will never be published. 'The Last Dangerous Visions' will continue forever, an institution, a legend in its own right. It has after all been running for at least 22 years, so what is there to stop it now? The promises of impending publication will be repeated from time to time, publication dates will be regularly announced, the publisher will be changed at regular intervals, the advances will go up to keep pace with inflation.

More and more stories will be purchased, and these will replace the trickle of withdrawals: stability will probably be attained somewhere around the 200 mark. Young writers will replace the older ones, as they

die.

In the end, everyone will write for LAST, and everyone will die.

#

The White Dwarf Theory

Someone will present Mr Ellison with a face-saver.

Above all he is in a dilemma: he has put his integrity at stake, but everything is tied up in a project which even he must acknowledge is hopeless.

But given that he at last delivers something to a publisher, control of the book's destiny will pass out of his hands, at least temporarily. The publishers will do the sums, and after an appropriate pause could propose a solution to the dilemma.

They could offer to bring out a shortened version of the book. A "trial" first volume, say, to test the market ... or perhaps even a 'Best of Last Dangerous Visions'.

In spite of Mr Ellison's assertion that the book must be published whole or not at all, this might be a way out for all concerned. The book could be published economically, several of the writers would see their work in print, the others would have their stories returned, the book would probably sell well, and so on.

And Mr Ellison would come out of it in fine style. In public he could protest his best endeavours, tell his funny stories about treacherous publishers and shifty fans and moving large boxes about the country, receive his standing ovation ...

#

The Big Bang Theory

Finally, the book could be abandoned.

Harlan Ellison could abandon it at any time; his writers could make him abandon it if they really wanted him to.

Frankly, it seems improbable that Mr Ellison would ever abandon the book of his own free will. His dilemma is too entrenched, he has too often vested his integrity in completion. But he could do it easily, it's an achievable end.

It would not take long to write and photocopy a polite note of apology, attach it to each story, slip it in an envelope and mail it back to each of the writers.

It would be done, finished forever.

No one would mind, no one would complain, no one would accuse him of failure. On the contrary, I suspect most people would admire his pragmatism, and support him publicly.

But there are problems, not the least of which, of course, is the outstanding advance paid by the most recent publisher. Something would have to be done about that. But Mr Ellison is a popular writer with a large following, and he could surely supply an acceptable replacement title for the publisher.

Another problem for Mr Ellison would be having to come to terms with the momentum of the past: the vehement claims, and so on. This is almost certainly the major impediment to voluntary abandonment. He would interpret it in terms of failure, a defeat for integrity. But the opposite is the case: a dignified withdrawal from this impossible muddle would redound to his favour. His stature would increase, and he would receive much sympathy and respect.

The other kind of abandonment is also a possibility: his writers could force his hand. If they can't imagine how, the POSTSCRIPT to this provides an answer.

#

It seems a negative conclusion to reach, that the work of 22 years should

now be set aside, but when all is said and done what's the alternative?

By all objective criteria the project is out of control, and Harlan Ellison is in an untenable position. But any discussion of bringing LAST to an end inevitably has to take account of Mr Ellison himself: some writers have had unpleasant personal experiences (see Pre-Publication Letters).

Harlan Ellison is possibly unaware of the way his mercurial personality influences those around him, and how the darker side of that personality can intimidate and suppress comment. Knowing I have been intending to write this, and conceding that factual accuracy would be paramount throughout, colleagues have even so warned me against it. They speak of abuse, verbal violence, career threats ... even litigation. Such is the fear of Mr Ellison when his temper is tested! Yet aside from detailed attention to the record, there is little in this that hasn't been said by other people over the years.

Why does it matter?

A lot of creative energy has been expended, and a lot of time has been wasted. Much of that energy and time has been Mr Ellison's, but by no means all. Hundreds of thousands of words have been written for him. Uncountable letters have gone to and fro. Hopes have been raised, dashed, raised again, dashed again. Writers have been cajoled, flattered, traduced, bullied and misled.

Writers have wanted to see their work in print; they have had to wait. They have wanted to use their work in their own story collections; they have had to wait. They have wanted to turn their stories into novels; they have had to wait. They have tried to withdraw their stories; they have had to wait.

It is an inexcusable mess, inflicted by one writer who should know better on more than a hundred other writers who feel themselves helpless to act.

It surely speaks for itself why it matters.

Pre-Publication Letters

When I had completed the first draft of the preceding essay I sent it to a number of professional writers, all involved at one time or another with 'Dangerous Visions', and solicited their views. I mentally divided these writers into three groups of roughly equal size: those I thought were loyal to Mr Ellison and broadly supported his work on the anthology, those I knew were hostile to him or had suffered at his hands, and those whose attitude I simply did not know.

I offered all of them the same: I would publish anything they might write without interference.

The only responses I got were from the latter two groups. None of the people loyal to Harlan Ellison sent me anything I could print. Some of them simply ignored my request, others warned me sepulchrally of the danger in which they perceived I was putting myself, while the rest, most interestingly of all, egged me on to greater efforts by telling their own horror stories about working with Mr Ellison, then forbade me from quoting them or paraphrasing them or even hinting that they might have been in touch with me on this terrifying subject.

(I have always honoured these silences, and continue to do so now. The silence of Mr Ellison's lambs is a key factor in the story.)

#

Graham Charnock:

It was good to be around in nineteensixtyomph, contributing, however casually, to a body of literature one felt was certainly dangerous and visionary. I mean of course, what went on in and around the 'New Worlds'/ Moorcock/Platt/Harrison/Sallis/Hall axis. I even gave up my day job, not to become a writer, nothing so positive, but simply because it was contrary to the spirit, yes the dangerousness, of what was in the air at the time. (I was an advertising executive and deadlines for quarter-pages in the 'Sutton Advertiser' were definitely contra-indicated.) So I became a waiter in a summer holiday hotel in Norfolk (good for jacket blurbs--next step was to become a lumberjack, or sail around the Horn, or become a gun-runner).

That lasted three weeks, because Harlan accepted my story for LDV. He wanted rewrites and, under-producer that I am, it meant I needed time and clear horizons to do them.

It was nice being edited by Harlan, because for better or worse it was positive editing, the story went backwards and forwards about three times whilst one naff section was tightened up. In truth what this amounted to was the beefing up of a certain soft-edged exchange between hero and heroine by substituting macho sex and violence (he hits her) for angst-ridden soul-searching. It was Hollywood, it was Harlan Ellison, it surely wasn't me, but it worked in the context. Even my mother joined in, sending notes: "Harlan's right. This woman's been hurt and abused all her life-- she just wouldn't say that ..." Today I still tend to see editors as mother-figures wiping the snot from your nose, correcting your diction, making sure your shirt covers your arse....

However, it was a good feeling: something had been worked up, had grown, been praised eventually. Furthermore I was joining what I saw as a select group of peers (how many contributors to LDV now?); the Dangerous Visions series did have a reputation and this was my last chance to climb aboard the bus a lot of my drinking and writing buddies had already climbed aboard. I was writing for them, of course, not any faceless readership, not even for Harlan. That's how movements, schools, call them what you will, grow, isn't it...? A constant and quick exchange of ideas, themes, etc--you are influenced, or just plain steal, but you feed it back into the network. That was the process, of course, that 'New Worlds' then exemplified more than any other medium before or since in the sf field.

What happened to LDV in this respect is history, of course, but I suppose it represents my main sadness over the enterprise. Harlan took the cream (I modestly exclude myself from any inference in this metaphor--I was merely coat-tailing) and let it go stale. Perhaps one can take it further: he took the cream and goddamn ate it himself. Substitute blood for cream and vampiric analogies spring to mind ... I'll stop this before it gets too fanciful.

I'm sorry I never got the chance to read and feed off the work of my peers when it would have been an enriching experience, when it would have meant something.

Why didn't I withdraw my story and try to sell it elsewhere? Entropy rules OK. Things cool down.

Two years pass and maybe the markets are still there and maybe the story still glows a little in your heart, but Harlan's had it so long and it can't be much longer now ...

Five years pass and the reason you wrote the story is as historical as the story itself: the people you wrote it for don't particularly need it any more. You don't go to the bar to buy someone a drink and return with it five years later.

Ten years pass and ... poot. Frankie Goes To Hollywood are at number one this week ... that'll keep me going until the next sensation.

When LDV does appear I understand it may be in a box. Make it of good solid oak with finest brass fittings ...

Ian Watson:

I like Ellison's writing (see my review in 'Foundation' 24). I like his

public stances. But I don't like his behaviour as editor of LAST, least of all his conduct when you eventually withdraw a story: the bluster, the arm-twisting (often by proxy), the sense that you're on a shit-list. I escaped comparatively unscathed--but an author friend of mine was treated vilely. No one should have to put up with treatment such as this from a fellow writer. Ultimately this wipes out one's sense of the moral integrity of Ellison's other work. And that's a big shame. Ellison should realize this, and that he isn't defending his reputation by soldiering on with LAST using untruths and bullying and braggadocio. He's just damaging it.

Harry Harrison:

I look at this entire matter with a sigh of regret. I'm sorry that Harlan has let the anthology get away from him in the manner it has; sorry that you had to bring him up short. Since you are both friends of mine let me intervene on the side of the angels. Harlan, old chum, the facts that Chris has put on the record look like facts to me. His conclusions are his own, so let me stick to the facts, as the good sergeant used to say. The stories are gray with age, any value they might have had for the authors has long since been diminished to the vanishing point. I think we would all heave a sigh of relief--I know I would--if you simply returned the stories and called the whole thing a day. No one will consider this a failure on your part in any way. You know I have gone along with you all through the years--out of friendship and no other reason. You asked me not to pull back the story--and I didn't. I wouldn't have taken that for 5 minutes from a commercial editor. I'm still not pulling the story back. But I am asking you, please, to close the books and drop the entire matter. With all sincerity--Harry Harrison.

C.S. Youd (John Christopher):

I believe I am one of the very early contributors to LDV, and I would confirm, in general, your account of the happenings of the last twelve years.

[There follows a documented synopsis of a protracted correspondence with Mr Ellison concerning interim payments in 1983-1984. This has been cut with Mr Youd's consent. In April 1984 Houghton Mifflin wrote to Mr Youd saying that Mr Ellison had promised delivery of LDV within seventy days.

[Mr Youd also points out that several writers, himself included, accepted an initial lower rate because the money, according to Mr Ellison, had run out. Mr Ellison apparently said in 1971 that things would be equalized when the main money rolled in. When a renewal contract was offered to Mr Youd in 1977, he deleted a clause referring to this, since he felt it contradicted the promise of equalization.]

I feel that part of the problem is psychological. Harlan has so identified himself with the various Dangerous Visions that maybe he can't bear to turn in LAST. (A sort of psychical death.)

Michael Bishop:

First of all, your assessment of the TLDV situation strikes me as being spot-on and fair. Ellison would probably construe my saying so as an attempt at self-justification, however, because after I withdrew 'Dogs' Lives' (in the Fall of '83), he accused me of just about every conceivable personal failing from paranoia (he may have been right about that one) to betrayal to money-grubbing to self-righteous hypocrisy and concluded this page-and-a-half attack by saying that he wished to have "no further congress" with me. It's a long and complicated story, which I really don't want to try to summarize here, but one simple fact that remains with me is that Ellison purchased 'Dogs' Lives' from me in the spring of 1974 for \$100 and that is all the money I realized from the story until this past

November when, after pulling it from TLDV, I sold it to 'The Missouri Review' for a special SF issue.

Moreover, I was unable to use 'Dogs' Lives' in either of my two hardcover story collections, 'Blooded on Arachne' and 'One Winter in Eden', even though, by rights, it deserved a place in one or the other.

For almost ten years I stuck by Ellison, believing that, yes, finally, the anthology/anthologies itself/themselves would be coming out and that I would soon be receiving one of the auxiliary payments that Ellison periodically promised for hanging in there, usually upon the shifting of the project from one publishing house to another. But TLDV has still not appeared, and I never made a dime above the original \$100 (approximately two cents a word) that Ellison sent me in 1974. Until I pulled the story and got it into print a rapid six months after doing so, that is. I intend, further, to reprint it in an anthology of my own that, interesting to note, will also contain your would-be original for TLDV, 'An Infinite Summer'.

At this time, there is really nothing more I wish to say about the subject except that I hope TLDV does indeed appear soon, for Ellison's sake and the sake of those who have had the requisite trust in him to resist the impulse to withdraw. I hope that he and they all profit enormously. Meanwhile, I have no regret whatever about pulling my own story--although I do regret that the messy circumstances attending its withdrawal ended what had been a cordial, albeit pretty intermittent, relationship between us. I admire much of Ellison's work, and I derived a great deal of pleasure from the first two Dangerous Visions anthologies.

Bob Shaw:

I know it has all dragged on forever, but my feelings are a bit like those of a compulsive gambler caught in a losing streak--I have invested so much time in LDV that I can't bring myself to pull out now, admirable though that course might be.

[I understand Bob Shaw did subsequently withdraw his story. CP]

George R.R. Martin:

The 1978 volume of my own 'New Voices/Campbell Awards' anthology series will probably be published some time in 1985, so I don't think I'm the person to make pronouncements, stern or otherwise, about the lateness of TLDV. I know all too vividly how easily and how badly these things can get out of hand. Still, there's no doubt in my mind that the lengthy delay of TLDV has been a tragedy--a tragedy for readers like myself who have been looking forward to the book, a tragedy for the field that badly needs a shot of the sort of literary adrenaline the previous DV volumes have supplied, a particular tragedy for the writers involved, and especially a tragedy for Harlan himself. I can only hope that, somehow or other, this tragedy will turn out to have a happy ending. Despite everything, you know, I'd still like to read the book, and so would a lot of other people.

Charles Platt:

When 'Again, Dangerous Visions' grew too large, my story was one of the first to be held over to the projected 'Last Dangerous Visions'. "I had to keep some really dynamite stuff for the last book," was the way he justified it to me. "But don't worry, publication is scheduled for 1972." This mixture of hard-sell, flattery, and seemingly factual promises was to become wearily familiar over the next fifteen years. His style reminded me of a used-car salesman, the difference being that in his case he never actually delivered any merchandise.

Years passed, my uneasy friendship with Ellison continued, and the big cardboard box of LDV manuscripts remained undisturbed (so far as I could tell) except for a biannual ritual in which his secretary checked through them and issued grovelling form-letters and contract renewals to the contributors. I began to see the project as a source of amusement, but

Ellison's sense of humour didn't stretch that far. I once visited him with my friend Graham Hall, another 'Last Dangerous Visions' contributor, who made the mistake of openly poking fun at the project. Ellison's face turned grim, and he summoned us into his study, like a school principal disciplining two wayward children. "You probably don't realize how much extra money you're going to make after LDV appears," he lectured Graham. He located the royalty payment records for a story of comparable length that had appeared in the first 'Dangerous Visions' almost ten years previously. In a staccato voice, like that of an auctioneer, he rattled off a string of payments for miscellaneous subsidiary rights, mostly in the \$10 to \$30 range. "That's a total of nearly two hundred dollars," he finished up. "Not bad, eh, for a 3,000-word story?"

"Wow," Graham said dutifully, too embarrassed to mock Ellison's largesse any further.

The dialogue may not be verbatim, and I may have the total wrong by \$50 either way, but the essence of the account is factually correct, being transcribed from a diary that I kept at the time. Needless to say, not even \$200 of royalties ever materialized for Graham Hall. He died a few years later, while his manuscript remains now where it was then: in the big cardboard box with all the others. Personally, I doubt they will ever earn royalties for anyone.

Around the time when Richard Curtis became Ellison's literary agent and remarked that he was going to make Ellison's name "synonymous with honesty", Edward Bryant visited Sherman Oaks, ostensibly to assist Ellison in preparing the book for publication. A few days later, all 'Last Dangerous Visions' contributors, including myself, received a letter signed by Bryant, testifying that he had actually seen Ellison working on the book, writing story introductions. Bryant has a reputation for integrity that some would say exceeds that of Harlan Ellison, and it looked to me as if Ellison had purchased that reputation for the price of a plane ticket between Denver and Los Angeles. My suspicions increased when Bryant returned home after spending just a week or so in Sherman Oaks. Preparation of the book, of course, was still unfinished, but the letter had been issued to placate the contributors, as if that had been Ellison's only real concern. Yet even the letter seemed bogus; it had the same used-car salesman cadences I had come to know so well, and I doubted that Bryant had actually written it. When I asked him this a few days later he refused to answer the question, and wearily begged me to forget about the whole thing.

The current version of the contract with Ellison for my 'Last Dangerous Visions' story wisely sets no publication date. Thus, he has no further need to write every couple of years, crying "mea culpa", itemizing the traumas of his life, and begging my indulgence "just once more", in the hope that I will allow my work to languish still longer in anticipation of its eventual appearance. At this point I don't really care. The story was written almost twenty years ago, expressly for his editorial tastes, and would seem out of place if I withdrew it and sold it somewhere else. Thus I see it, in a way, as part of the albatross Ellison has created and hung around his own neck.

There are other contributors, however, who presumably still imagine that their work will see print, and have made greater sacrifices than mine by allowing their stories to reside in Ellisonian limbo. At the very least, these contributors should be told the facts.

[To explain an apparent duplication: Charles Platt wrote this letter to me after he had read a version of the essay which did not include my account of the Ed Bryant letter. However, I felt our two accounts dovetail, so both remain in this version. CP]

Notes

1. 'Again, Dangerous Visions', Introduction. The writers named in this as contributors (or said to have promised stories) are:

Russell Bates
 Doris Pitkin Buck
 Octavia Butler
 A. Bertram Chandler
 John Christopher
 Avram Davidson
 Chan Davis
 Gordon Dickson
 George Alec Effinger
 Howard Fast
 Franklin Fisher
 Ron Goulart
 Wyman Guin
 James Gunn
 Graham Hall
 Frank Herbert
 Steve Herbst
 John Jakes
 Daniel Keyes
 Anne McCaffrey
 Vonda McIntyre
 Michael Moorcock
 Charles Platt
 Mack Reynolds
 Fred Saberhagen
 Thomas Scortia
 Robert Sheckley
 Clifford Simak
 James Sutherland
 Richard Wilson
 Laurence Yep

#

2. Wyman Guin--announced in 'Again, Dangerous Visions' in 1971 as one of the authors with a story already purchased--was said in 1973 to be rewriting his story.

#

3. The 68 authors announced as contributors by Harlan Ellison in 1973 were as follows. Names marked with ## do not appear in the list for 1979, and presumably withdrew their stories:

Russell Bates
 Alfred Bester
 Michael Bishop
 Anthony Boucher
 S. Kye Boulton (pseud. for William E. Cochrane; see Note 5, below)
 Hamilton/Brackett
 Mildred Downey Broxon
 Edward Bryant
 Frank Bryning
 Doris Pitkin Buck
 Octavia Butler
 Grant Carrington
 Delbert Casada
 A. Bertram Chandler
 Graham Charnock
 John Christopher
 Gerard Conway

Arthur Byron Cover
Jack M. Dann
Avram Davidson
Chan Davis
Hank Davis
Gordon R. Dickson
Stan Dryer
Gordon Eklund
George Alec Effinger
Howard Fast
Leslie A. Fiedler
Franklin Fisher
Jacques Goudchaux ##
Ron Goulart
Joseph Green
James E. Gunn
Joe W. Haldeman
Graham Hall
Frank Herbert
Steve Herbst
Leonard Isaacs
John Jakes
Susan C. Lette
Robert Lilly
Janet May
Anne McCaffrey
Vonda N. McIntyre
Michael Moorcock
Ward Moore
John Morressy
Edgar Pangborn
Doris Piserchia
Charles Platt
Jerry Pournelle
Joseph F. Pumilia
Mack Reynolds
Fred Saberhagen
Thomas N. Scortia ##
Robert Sheckley
Clifford D. Simak
James Sutherland
The Firesign Theatre
Robert Thom
Robert Thurston
Lisa Tuttle
A.E. van Vogt
Daniel Walther
Richard Wilson
David Wise
Robert Wissner
Laurence Yep

Rewrites were in progress by:

Gardner Dozois
Wyman Guin
Charles L. Harness

#

4. The additional authors listed by Harlan Ellison in February 1974 were:

Michael G. Coney
Charles L. Harness
Harry Harrison
Richard E. Peck
Cordwainer Smith

Wallace West

Robert Wissner

[Note that Mr Ellison's count of authors is at this stage 75. As 68 had been previously announced, and 7 more are listed here, we can presume that at this date Gardner Dozois and Wyman Guin had not yet delivered their rewritten stories.]

#

5. The authors listed in 'Locus' 222, June 1979, were as follows. Those marked with ** were added since 1974 (when the book was announced as being "closed"). Gardner Dozois and Wyman Guin do not appear, and presumably had not delivered their rewritten stories at this date. They might have done since:

Russell Bates

Alfred Bester

Michael Bishop

Nelson S. Bond **

Anthony Boucher

Hamilton/Brackett

Mildred Downey Broxon

Edward Bryant

Frank Bryning

Doris Pitkin Buck

Algis Budrys **

Octavia Butler

Orson Scott Card **

Grant Carrington

Delbert Casada

A. Bertram Chandler

Graham Charnock

John Christopher

W. E. Cochrane (see 'S. Kye Boulton' in Note 3, above)

Michael G. Coney

Gerard Conway

Arthur Byron Cover

Philippe Curval **

Jack M. Dann

Avram Davidson

Chan Davis

Hank Davis

Gordon R. Dickson

Stan Dryer

G.C. Edmondson **

George Alec Effinger

Gordon Eklund

Howard Fast

Jonathan Fast **

Leslie A. Fiedler

Franklin Fisher

Felix C. Gotschalk **

Ron Goulart

Joseph Green

James E. Gunn

Joe W. Haldeman

Graham Hall

Charles L. Harness

Harry Harrison

Frank Herbert

Steve Herbst

Pat C. Hodgell **

Leonard Isaacs

John Jakes

Langdon Jones **

Raul Judson **
Daniel Keyes **
William Kotzwinkle **
Susan C. Lette
Robert Lilly
Janet May
Anne McCaffrey
Vonda M. McIntyre
Michael Moorcock
Raylyn Moore **
Ward Moore
John Morressy
Edgar Pangborn
Richard E. Peck
Doris Piserchia
Charles Platt
P.J. Plauger **
Jerry Pournelle
Joseph Pumilia
Tom Reamy **
Mack Reynolds
D.M. Rowles **
Fred Saberhagen
Bob Shaw **
Robert Sheckley
Clifford D. Simak
Cordwainer Smith
Bruce Sterling **
Craig Strete **
James Sutherland
The Firesign Theatre
Robert Thom
Robert Thurston
Wilson Tucker **
Lisa Tuttle
Steven Utley **
John Varley **
A.E. van Vogt
Daniel Walther
Ian Watson **
M. W. Wellman **
Wallace West
Jack Williamson **
Richard Wilson
David Wise
Robert Wissner
Laurence Yep
Pamela Zoline **

#

6. The following writers, said at one time or another to be contributors, are all known or thought to have died:

Alfred Bester
Anthony Boucher
Leigh Brackett
Frank Bryning
Doris Pitkin Buck
Bertram Chandler
Avram Davidson
Wyman Guin
Graham Hall
Edmond Hamilton
Charles L. Harness

Frank Herbert
Leonard Isaacs
Ward Moore
Edgar Pangborn
Tom Reamy
Mack Reynolds
Thomas Scortia
Clifford D. Simak
Cordwainer Smith
Robert Thom
Manly Wade Wellman
Wallace West
Richard Wilson

Post-Publication Letters

Michael Bishop:

I hope you're still alive when you receive this. I don't think it's likely that Ellison has hired a gunman, but if you're dead when you get this, or soon after, that will establish how little I've learned about Ellison over the years.

Brian Aldiss:

Talk about getting a bomb through the post from Harlan ... your yellow book, 'Deadloss', has a similar shattering effect. I dropped work immediately to read it.

The most unpleasant aspect of the whole matter of LAST is that various people, including yourself, think that you put yourself in danger by discussing this matter. I'm very divided about Harlan. He can be magnificently generous and caring and kind; he can be tremendously amusing; but on the other hand he is trailed by a sinister shadow which every so often overwhelms him. What was prankish becomes threatening.

To my mind, the seeds of destruction of LAST can be seen (if only by hindsight) in the first anthology (DV), where the stories are swamped by all the florid editorializing surrounding them. The habit of talking everything up brings disaster in its wake. Really, the whole business of LAST is tragic--and I mean not least for Harlan. LAST has been talked up to the point where it is impossible to let go without losing face.

['Deadloss'] is argued with an almost Swiftian restraint and I admired it.

R.I. Barycz:

... A most instructive two quids' worth of restraint under provocation at long distance. What makes it sad is that, by his own lights of perfection, Harlan Ellison saw and still sees nothing amiss in his actions. I'm sure there was many a pulp hack of the Thirties who could tell a more terrible tale of a MS accepted but sat upon by an editor not keen to pay for it on publication; but that was then and this is now, and there are no excuses.

Laurence M. Janifer:

As a writer who's been involved with Harlan off&on since The Earliest Days when he came whooping into NY--and one who was never asked, probably for good reason, to contribute to any Dangerous V. at all--I want to thank you for 'The Last Deadloss Visions'. It's a lovely job and all it lacks is an obit list, though most of its readers can probably write that up for themselves from the various lists of authors with stories in LAST. Perhaps

future editions, additions, and so on will carry the obits, updated as more and more writers die. And, as suggested in the Steady State, younger authors come along to fill the spaces.

Harlan is the original yes-but, a phenomenon about whom it is impossible to say anything not thoroughly mixed.

Barry Malzberg:

I'm very glad to have 'Deadloss' in hand; thank you. It is precise, cold, reasoned and utterly professional, as was your expressed intention.

I have long felt that the only real weapon freelance writers--isolated, lonely, vulnerable, unorganized--have is information, if it is not the truth that will set us free (actually, it is my latterday understanding that the truth entraps us) it is knowledge. Therefore, I am happy to add the following material to what is already on hand: 'Still-Life' which appeared in 'Again, Dangerous Visions', was sold on 11 August 1969 for \$120.00 (2 cents a word for 6,000 words) and was published in April 1972. Including pro-rata royalties subsequently paid, the story has earned \$519.00. The last royalty payment--for \$33.00--appeared on 20 November 1982 and despite the fact that 'Again, Dangerous Visions' was republished by Berkley in a large paperback trade edition in 1983, there have been no subsequent payments.

[Barry Malzberg's information about payments seems to support Michael Bishop's earlier letter. If any writers can confirm they have been receiving what Mr Ellison calls an annuity from their stories, I'd be pleased to incorporate what they say in future editions of this. CP]

Greg Feeley:

You acknowledge a willingness to see "the facts that embarrass [Ellison] collected in one place". I was consequently surprised that your chronology did not pay any more attention to Ellison's frequent announcements of never-to-appear novels and other books, but it occurs to me that the British editions may not include his revealingly optimistic listings of 'forthcoming' works. A quick romp through this Ellisonian apocrypha may prove edifying.

'Partners in Wonder' (Walker, 1971) lists twenty-one books by or edited by Ellison, plus ten noted as 'forthcoming'. Only the first four have ever appeared. The others include LAST, 'The Sound of a Scythe', 'The Prince of Sleep', 'The Harlan Ellison Hornbook', 'Dial 9 to Get Out', and 'Demon With a Glass Hand'.

[*NOTE: The Harlan Ellison Hornbook appeared in 1990. CP]

Of the four books that did ultimately appear, one of them, 'The Other Glass Teat', is mentioned on the dust-jacket as having already come out. In fact, 'The Other Glass Teat', although scheduled to appear soon after 'The Glass Teat' in 1970, was published only in 1975, with an introduction that claims that the book was essentially suppressed by the Vice President of the United States, a charge that would have made national headlines in that post-Watergate climate had anyone else credited it.

'The Sound of a Scythe' is identified as a revision of Ellison's 'The Man with Nine Lives' (1960), and was eventually sold to Pyramid as part of a uniform edition of his works in the mid-Seventies. In the October 1968 issue of Fantasy & Science Fiction, Ed Ferman describes Ellison as "completing two novels, 'Demon With a Glass Hand' and 'Dial 9 to Get Out'." Addressing the 1972 World Fantasy Convention in Los Angeles, Ellison described 'The Prince of Sleep' as being based on 'The Region Between' (novella, 1970). In 1972 this novel was announced as forthcoming from Ballantine. In the July 1977 Special Harlan Ellison Issue of F&SF, a full-page advertisement from Dell "salutes Harlan Ellison" and announces 'The Prince of Sleep', "his first new novel in over fifteen years, a major work of fantasy for 1978". In the early 1980s the 'New York Times' mentioned that Ellison had sold several books to Houghton Mifflin (presumably at the same time as LAST), including a new novel called 'Shrikes' and, yes, 'The Prince of Sleep'. 'The Harlan Ellison Hornbook' was to be another

collection of underground press columns.

That is the annotation for the "forthcoming" books listed in one Ellison title of the early 1970s. Would anyone sit still for a thorough listing of these ghostly titles? Most of these non-books continued to be listed as forthcoming in Ellison's front matter throughout the 1970s, with new ones added, until Ellison finally stopped listing 'forthcoming' titles around 1980.

What this rather wearying compilation shows is how very badly Ellison wants to write novels, as he once did early in his career. Even without counting the scuttled 'Dark Forces' (or a short novel involving elves and the Brooklyn Bridge, mentioned in an interview I don't have to hand, which Ellison said Ace would be publishing in an illustrated edition), the list includes seven novels, all but one known to have been sold to publishers, some repeatedly.

When you collate these announcements with the claims for LAST, the appalling dimensions of Ellison's last fifteen years begin to emerge. During this period, Ellison has also been late on delivering story collections, non-fiction collections, columns for a number of periodicals, introductions to other people's novels, and one other original anthology, 'Medea: Harlan's World' (which did appear, seven years late, in 1985).

The fact of the matter is that, aside from his short stories, Harlan Ellison has since the early 1970s given priority to his various television and film projects, and when one of these gets a go-ahead, earlier commitments are deferred.

Ellison gives eloquent if inadvertent testimony to this in the January 1988 issue of 'F&SF', where he defends the irregular appearance of his film column by noting that "although suchlike as Charles Platt and Christopher Priest may bend themselves into hyperbolic pretzels proving I'll never complete LAST, that and other matters of import command most of my attention most of the time". Yet just four pages later Ellison is alluding to the "June-to-September hell in which I lived while writing 'Cutter's World' for Corman and NBC".

In an article in the November 1987 'Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine', Ellison says, "From December 1977 through December 1978 I wrote nothing very much ... apart from the two hundred and thirty-five pages of screenplay entitled 'I, Robot'".

Robert Silverberg's memoir of Harlan Ellison's hungry days of trying to break into the professional SF world of the early 1950s (published in the special Ellison issue of 'F&SF') remains, for all its affection, a striking portrayal of the young Ellison, constantly claiming to have made professional sales he had only imagined.

Your assertion that Ellison's integrity "is not at issue" is true insofar as he does not intend to injure those writers and publishers who have trusted him; but what Silverberg calls "a hunger for literary success so powerful that it dissolves the fine but vital distinction between fact and fantasy" must by now be so clear to Ellison that his insistence upon making these assurances finally renders him--like the self-aware alcoholic who begins to drink although he must drive home on icy roads--as responsible for what he wreaks as if he had intended it.

Eddy C. Bertin:

'Deadloss' is everything I had hoped it to be: informative and rational-minded; as such an interesting piece of SF history. It also makes for absorbing reading, only a pity that it is such a sad story, else it would be highly amusing.

Taral Wayne:

Thanks to you I've been given a whole new perspective on LDV--a whole new issue to get steamed up over, and a few nasty laughs at Ellison's expense. I've no doubt your intentions were more honourable than inspiring the likes of me with malicious fun. When I put 'Deadloss' down, however, I found that reading your fanzine hadn't been the usual disposable experience that fanzines are. I didn't just put it down. I had ideas.

You and those who wrote in reply pitied the harm done to the writers, to the readers, and to Ellison himself. I think you left hints that harm was done to the field itself, but much was left unsaid. Ever unsubtle, I'll say it.

Ellison boasted that the stories for LDV were top-notch, cutting-edge, and, well, dangerous. You estimate he may have as many as a hundred and forty-five of them in his box--a hundred and forty-five stories that Ellison has denied the field for so long that even if they were to appear in publication tomorrow they would be old news, hardly dangerous. Taking Ellison at his word about those stories, the damage he's done to the very cause he espoused must be immense. Imagine that no LDV exists, nor any of the stories written for it. Imagine instead that a hundred and forty-five of the stories that have been published since 1972 vanish from view, sucked by Ellison's persuasion into the black hole under his desk. A hundred and forty-five stories would nicely fill [the following story collections]:

'Blooded on Arachne' by Michael Bishop
 'Particle Theory' by Ed Bryant
 'Burning Chrome' by William Gibson
 'Nine Hundred Grandmothers' by R.A. Lafferty
 'A Song for Lya' by George R.R. Martin
 'The Wind's Twelve Quarters' by Ursula Le Guin
 'Still I Persist in Wondering' by Edgar Pangborn
 'San Diego Lightfoot Sue' by Tom Reamy
 'The 57th Franz Kafka' by Rudy Rucker
 'Ten Thousand Light Years From Home' by James Tiptree Jr
 'The Persistence of Vision' by John Varley
 'The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories' by
 Gene Wolfe

and, appropriately, 'Deathbird Stories' by Harlan Ellison

This list is a pound of flesh. Torn out of the body of SF it would leave a large, bleeding hole, and just such a hole may exist without our awareness of it.

Steven Bryan Bieler:

 I've just this moment finished 'Deadloss'. I could not put it down.

Though I had seen the notices in 'Locus' and elsewhere regarding LAST's pending publication, they appeared over many years and gave me time to forget them. To see all the evidence together, to read it all at once, is startling, to say the least. One man has tied up the work of so many writers and the attention of so many more readers--and he has done it by doing nothing!

In rereading my first letter, I see I was incorrect in my statement that Houghton Mifflin intended to publish LAST in early 1985. The three volumes were to be published over six or eight months, beginning in late 1984. I actually believed that my story could appear in a matter of weeks!

Of the many things that struck me about 'Deadloss', I was especially taken with Mr Youd's information, regarding Harlan's promise to Houghton Mifflin in April 1984 that the book would be delivered to the publisher within 70 days. Harlan and I met for the first time near the end of that period; a little over a month later he bought my story. So perhaps I am responsible for that particular delay for game?

Well, Harlan is not an angry god, nor am I a sinner in his hands; having argued with him over the phone, he reminds me more of my parents. I appreciate, and treasure, the kindness he showed me in 1984. But holding my contribution all this time is a clear violation of our contract. (Incidentally, I have yet to receive a renewal contract, nor have I had any contact with Harlan since November 1984.) Your zine has shocked me out of my apathy. I still like my little story and I want people to read it, so with the new year I will write to Harlan and withdraw it from the book. I will keep you informed of developments, if there are any.

An enterprising publisher might be interested in an anthology of stories withdrawn from LAST. According to 'Deadloss', Ian Watson, Michael Bishop, Jacques Goodchaux, Thomas N. Scortia and yourself have all withdrawn stories. That's a good start on an interesting book.

Postscript

by Christopher Priest

THE SUMMING UP

The letters included here reveal something that cannot be emphasized forcefully enough. No one who has read *Deadloss*, not a single person, in the fannish world or the professional, has stepped forward to defend Mr Ellison.

True, a few correspondents did attack me. They said I was settling a personal score, or breaking ranks with a fellow professional, or deliberately misinterpreting Mr Ellison's mercurial personality ... but the funny thing was that they attacked me while making snide comments about him out of the corners of their mouths. I would publish these letters if I could, but in every case the writer begged me not to, even anonymously.

As far as I can tell (and I believe I did a reasonable job of seeking response from Mr Ellison's friends) he has no defenders. Everyone is sick to death of this non-existent book, and all that surrounds it.

Mr Ellison has no supporters. His constituency is nil.

#

The response taught me something I did not know; at the same time I appear to have informed others of things they did not know.

What I learned is that as recently as 1984 Mr Ellison was still acquiring stories for *LAST*; there are reports I can't verify that he has been buying stories since then.

In its turn, '*Deadloss*' appears to have revealed, at least to a substantial section of American fandom, that the reality of *LAST* is not the same as its myth.

In particular, it seems that Mr Ellison has managed to portray himself and his contributors as being united in their commitment to the project, arms locked together, heads down against the foe. For instance, until '*Deadloss*' pointed out the opposite it was widely believed that no writer had ever withdrawn a story.

Perhaps those people in American fandom who by acquiescence have given Mr Ellison tacit support will now be less gullible.

#

Until I started writing this essay I did not actually think very often about Mr Ellison and his anthology. After all, Mr Ellison is just one writer whose work I never read among so many others whose work I do ... and *LAST* is just one book that doesn't exist among so many others that do!

Writing the essay made me remember what I used to think about Mr Ellison and his anthology before I became inadvertently involved. In those days, most of what I knew about him was all the ridiculous literary/macho stuff found in the front of his books--those introductions that he became famous for. They interested me because they seemed defensive in some way, as if trying to cover up some imagined shortcoming. His posture on the '*Dangerous Visions*' anthologies seemed to be much the same. He kept reminding us how long they were ... just as his progress reports about *LAST* almost invariably include an awe-struck remark or two about size.

Unfortunately, promises of immense length do not legitimize what he has been doing for all these years. For all the bragging and sycophancy that has gone on, and all the threats that have been uttered, there is still nothing there.

To spell it out: 'The Last Dangerous Visions' does not exist. Good or bad, it does not exist. Long or short, it does not exist.

Bluff all he may, it will never exist until Mr Ellison finishes his work.

The only tangible evidence of LAST in existence is the story about it I have told here. It is ironical that this essay is in fact the only testament. Already, more people in the world have read these words than have read the manuscripts that make up the anthology, even when you count all the people flown out to Los Angeles to do so.

And this story, fascinating though it is for many people, is none the less a degrading one. It is a saga of bragging and sycophancy and threats.

Any morals to be drawn from all this? Two perhaps. That the short is as worthwhile as the long ... and that just as there is virtue in completing that which has been begun, so there is courage in knowing when to abandon that which cannot be finished.

THE REMEDY

You are one of the many remaining contributors to LAST. Ever since you sold your story to Harlan Ellison you have been holding on, waiting for the book to appear. In spite of your own private doubts (as well perhaps as extra doubts raised by THE LAST DEADLOSS VISIONS), you still hope and believe the book will actually appear with your story included.

However, the story was written several years ago, and although it was amongst your best work at the time, you have grown away from it and are now less than completely satisfied with it. You feel that if it doesn't appear in LAST within the next few months you'd like to have it back so you can revise and resell it.

You have always held back from asking Harlan Ellison to return the manuscript for fear of repercussions.

On the whole you have come to the conclusion it is better to lie low and get on with your work than to keep thinking about this ancient dilemma.

But you can't stop remembering how strongly you feel about the whole business. You wish he would either publish the book, or return your story. If only there was something you could do ...

There is.

Here is a plan in 8 easy stages:

Step 1: ESTABLISH THE FACTS

Brief yourself on all pertinent minor details concerning your story. For instance, establish the date on which you and Mr Ellison made first contact about contributing to his anthology. If Mr Ellison made any promises or guarantees then or later, make a note of what they were. Find out the date on which you actually submitted the story, and the date he responded. Other relevant dates would be those when he sent you the contract, or progress reports about completion, or made payments on account, or gave you estimated publication dates.

The point of this research is that when Mr Ellison raises these matters he is sometimes imaginative with his interpretation of facts. Ready yourself, so that you cannot be thrown off course by pettifogging side issues.

Step 2: DO YOU KNOW ANYONE ELSE IN THE BOOK?

THE LAST DEADLOSS VISIONS contains many names of writers who have at one time or another been involved with Mr Ellison's anthology. You might be

friendly with some of them. You might be in contact with others, through Internet, or through membership of a writers' organization like SFWA. Make contact, specifically on this subject. Compare notes, compare facts, compare promises. Most of all, compare feelings and opinions.

Tell people about THE LAST DEADLOSS VISIONS if they haven't read it.

Step 3: SET UP A SELF-HELP GROUP

By making contact with other contributors you are already halfway to this. How self-help groups organize themselves is entirely up to the members, but you should identify yourselves under a particular name so that there is a sense of cohesion. (A conference within Internet would be ideal.) When your self-help group members make up approximately one half of the surviving contributors to LAST, and there is a consensus of broad opinion, you are ready for the next step.

The purpose of this group is not to act on its own, but to coordinate a series of actions that will be taken by individuals.

NB: Group action is not recommended. Group action would be ineffective on Harlan Ellison: he would ignore such an ultimatum by simply refusing to recognize a newly formed body. However, he cannot ignore personal letters from individuals.

Make sure he receives these personal letters all on the same day (or given the vagaries of the U.S. Postal Service, within a week of each other).

You must put this in writing. Do not try to do this over the phone. (A fax message would be OK, though.)

Step 4: AGREE A DATE

The date to be agreed is the one on which all members of the self-help group will write and mail their individual letters to Harlan Ellison.

It is crucial to the success of this Remedy that a large number of people write to Mr Ellison at the same time.

For obvious reasons, avoid any date close to public holidays, worldcons, etc. Give the man a chance to read his mail, and consider his position.

Step 5: AGREE THE WORDING

It is crucial that the letter you send to Harlan Ellison should cover the same ground as everyone else's, without seeming like a form letter. Mr Ellison is not a fool, and even if he doesn't get wind of this Remedy in advance, it won't take him long to work out what's going on. You will want to be on speaking terms with him after all this is history, so respect his intelligence. Therefore, write him the sort of letter you would normally write him.

However, it is also crucial to the Remedy that no matter how each individual phrases it, all the letters that Mr Ellison receives on this momentous day should contain the same message.

The message I suggest is as follows. The wording should be as firm as possible.

You should say:

That you have run out of patience, and you no longer believe what he says about projected delivery and publication dates.

That you have come to the conclusion the only way your story will be published is if you take personal control of it again.

That you are therefore setting the following achievable conditions:

- a. That within 3 months of date of your letter he sends you unambiguous proof that the whole and final manuscript of 'The Last Dangerous Visions' has been sent in to the publisher, and that your story was included.
- b. That within 4 months of date of your letter you will receive a

letter on the headed notepaper of the publisher and signed by the Vice-President in charge of Publishing which confirms that:

the whole manuscript of 'The Last Dangerous Visions' has been received from Harlan Ellison;
it has been accepted for publication;
your story is included;
and a (specified) publication date has been set.

You then say that unless these conditions are fulfilled exactly, all rights to your story will automatically revert to you on the first stated deadline (3 months from the date on the letter). If the first condition is fulfilled but the second is not, then rights will revert on the second stated deadline (4 months from the date on the letter). In either case you will consider yourself to be free to revise the story in any way you feel necessary, and to sell it to another market.

This reversion will be absolute and is non-negotiable, now or later. (You could optionally add that if he feels the conditions are impossible to meet he could let you know straight away, whereupon the story will revert to you at once.)

Step 6: WRITE THE LETTER AND MAIL IT

This must be done. If you procrastinate, or decide to wait to see what results other writers might get first, then the Remedy will fail.

If your resolve starts to weaken, talk to your self-help group. Get people you know and respect to confirm personally that they too will be sending their letters on the agreed date.

Step 7: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

There are four possible outcomes, and here is what to do in each case:

i. Harlan Ellison replies, and accepts your conditions

This is the best outcome. Write back at once and say how pleased you are, but remind him that the conditions are real and non-negotiable, and that you have no intention of shifting. The whole manuscript must be delivered by the first stated deadline, you must be given the letter from the publisher by the second stated deadline.

If either of the conditions is subsequently breached, especially the first, pull the plug on Mr Ellison at once ... as in (iv) below.

The second deadline is harder to exercise, because a third party is involved. However, if the first deadline has been met but the second has passed, write to the publisher and ask the relevant questions. The reply will tell you what you have to do. See (iv) below, if necessary.

If you give way at this point, all the good work will be undone and the wretched situation will continue indefinitely.

ii. Harlan Ellison replies, but rejects your conditions

This is the worst outcome, and the hardest to deal with.

You will not need reminding that Mr Ellison is an effective demagogue, and that he writes emotional and provocative letters, and goes in for histrionic phonecalls. He will interpret the letter you sent him as having called into question his professionalism, his personal reliability and his integrity. He will also see it as a betrayal of past friendship or favours. Most editors, faced with a discontented contributor, would reply calmly and practically, but Mr Ellison will not. He is capable of almost anything: wheedling, bullying, flattery, self-pity, even threats.

The best advice is this: having come so far you should stick to your guns. To be discouraged now will mean a return to the status quo.

Reply (in your own words) to say this:

You have made up your mind, and will not be wheedled, bullied, etc.

You have allowed him a generous and adequate time in which to complete the

book. You point out that the more time he spends trying to persuade you to change your mind, the less time he will have in which to complete his editorial work. You remind him of his deadline dates, and your absolute determination to exercise them.

Wait for the first date, then pull the plug on him. See (iv) below.

iii. Harlan Ellison makes a counter-proposal

Another tough one. It is up to you to judge whether the counter-proposal is a real and reasonable one, or is just a delaying tactic. If you decide it is the latter, see (ii) above.

On the other hand, it might just be reasonable. Say that you first have to consult the other writers in your self-help group, and you'll contact him again. Tell him that until you do, the original deadlines remain in place.

If you and other members of your self-help group agree that his counter-proposal is not only genuine but reasonable, then agree to his terms. Again, write to him as individuals, not as a group. You should, though, maintain the unyielding attitude that this really is his last chance, and that if you accept his counter-proposal and he misses the revised deadline the rights to your story will revert, and you will pull the plug. See (iv) below.

If you reject his counter-proposal, remind him of his deadline then stand by to pull the plug.

iv. Harlan Ellison does not reply

Pull the plug.

On the first stated deadline day (or as soon as possible after) send a registered letter to Mr Ellison. Do not delay this. Do not think you should "give him a few more days". A deadline is a deadline.

Your letter should say that as the deadline has expired he is no longer permitted to use your story, and that you are now going to sell it elsewhere. Remind him that this is non-negotiable. Make no excuses, and give no ground. Be polite.

Send a copy of this letter to your agent, and to the publisher of 'The Last Dangerous Visions', and mark Mr Ellison's letter with the information that these copies have been sent.

Step 8: IS THAT IT?

Yes.

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[ENDS]