



photo by Jay Kay Klein

When the Convention Committee approached me, I was incredulous.

"You mean you want me to write something about Jerry Pournelle?" I said.

"Why not?" they told me. "After all, you wrote about Norman Bates, didn't you?"

I bow to their logic, but it's not going to be easy. If you searched the wide world over you'd be hard-put to find two more dissimilar people than Jerry Pournelle and myself.

About the only way I can describe this uniquely-gifted writer is in terms of our differences.

Professionally, Pournelle has all the qualifications which I lack. To begin with, I never attended college, and he did. As a result I've won no honors. But Pournelle has more degrees than a rectal thermometer.

He was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1933, and just celebrated his birthday a few weeks ago. After a long and varied career during the most exciting years of the aerospace program, and a stint as a university professor, he began writing science fiction

EVERYTHING YOU WERE AFRAID TO KNOW ABOUT JERRY POURNELLE

AND DIDN'T WANT TO ASK

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comparatively late in life as a mature adult. I started my professional writing at the age of seventeen, and haven't matured yet.

Together with Pournelle's colleagues, Arthur Clarke, Robert Heinlein, and Isaac Asimov, he subscribes to the Cartesian paradigm of "hard science" and believes that the scientific discipline will inevitably be the key to our future salvation. My own belief is in the opposite extreme; I keep waiting for Great Cthulhu to rise again and end it all.

Both Pournelle and I have had personal experience in politics. He was a professor of Political Science and also put theory into practice as executive assistant to a former mayor of Los Angeles. In contrast, my political activity is confined to supporting Norman Thomas for President. It's true Thomas passed away a number of years ago, but I continue to vote for him because I believe the only good politician is a dead one.

Pournelle is inclined to be conservative in his leanings. Some people claim it's a damned good thing he never got into aircraft construction, because if he designed a plane it would only have a right wing.

But Jerry's political views clearly demonstrate a dedication to mankind rather than Mammon. Youthful science fiction fans are frequently among the have-nots of our society and often espouse philosophies ranging from the liberal to the outright radical. In such a climate of opinion Jerry has taken a lot of heat from the left. It's to his credit that he refuses to melt; instead he sweats out allegiance to his intellectual and moral convictions. And while a number of fans, steeped in their teen-age wisdom, assail him on philosophic grounds, it's significant that most of the pros recognize and respect his right to his opinions, both as a writer and as a man.

His writing achievement speaks for itself. Entering science fiction under his own name just a little over a dozen years ago, he promptly won the John Campbell Award as Best New Writer of 1972. Since then he has rocketed--often in the company of co-pilot collaborator Larry Niven--to stratospheric levels of success, and made frequent landings on the national best-seller lists. If you want to know why, I suggest you hurry to the huckster room and purchase a few Pournelle titles.

But it is as a man that I find Jerry Pournelle most admirable. True, he has his faults, as we all do (with the possible exception of myself). He stands up for his beliefs and does not suffer fools gladly. But many who find him a bit on the loud side in expressing those beliefs aren't aware that his decibel output is the natural result of partial hearing loss. And if he tends to come on strong, the strength is a measure of his sincerity.

That strength finds its greatest expression in his deeds. Actions speak louder than words, and in his case they are eloquent. There again is a marked discrepancy between his way of life and my own. Jerry

is an outdoorsman, a back-packer, a Scout-leader, a sailing buff, a staunch believer in physical fitness. As for me, I haven't been outdoors since we installed plumbing in the house.

While I am a born-again heathen, Jerry not only espouses but practices the best tenets of religion. Doing unto others, he has been a pillar of strength to those in need--a writer who helps other writers, a fan who has spent countless hours in the service of the LASFS. His term as President of the Science Fiction Writers of America was distinguished not only because of the honor it conferred on him but for the endless hard work he poured into his able leadership. During his fifteen years in the aerospace industry he made important contributions to planning and research, and today he continues to devote his energies and efforts in support of the Space Program.

Jerry is a doer, not a dreamer. On one occasion the two of us were together when a rotten kid fell into a hot-tub. Jerry was already on the phone calling the paramedics while I was still looking around for a soup-spoon.

He is a good father to four fine sons, and in an era when a "meaningful relationship" refers to anyone you pick up at a singles bar on Friday night and don't kick out until Sunday, he has remained happily married for twenty-five years. In this last instance alone we do reach agreement; I happen to love and admire Roberta Pournelle just as much as he--and my own wife--let me.

But above all I cherish Jerry Pournelle as that rare specimen of humanity, an honest man. An honest man, a truly talented man, a caring, decent, responsible man. Science fiction is the richer for his presence. And I am enriched to know him as a friend.

