## A Hand Across the Galaxy

Roger Zelazny

*I recall an occasion when I was in a nasty mood and simply sat down and began writing to see what would come of it. It turned out to be a short mood; something happened to break it. Ergo, the piece came to a halt, destined to remain brief It’s hardly even a story. Just a couple of letters. I sent it to a fanzine, where it duly appeared, and then I forgot about it. Subsequently, I was privileged to do a book in collaboration with the late Philip K Dick—having long admired his ability to run reality through a wringer, a paper shredder and a high-speed blender in rapid succession, and then to reassemble the results into things rare and strange. I was very surprised when he mentioned this little fanzine piece favorably. That he had seen it, remembered it and liked it made me want to unearth it recently. He often saw things I didn’t. Usually, even.*

Dear Earth Parents,

I do not know how to tell you of my joy that you continue to know my needs and that you have the Interstellar Foster Parents Foundation (A Hand Across the Galaxy) to send me packages every month. It is very kind of you, who have never seen me, and I am thankful of you. You treated me to a box of Sweet-o-Crax this month also; which must have cost you dearly; for this I am too thankful. Let me tell you of my place that you may share of the joy you have caused to happen here. My brother-mates and my sister-mates, there are seven, but three are nestlings and me who cannot work yet, leaving four. Of the four, my old sister-mate is with eggs and cannot work until the rains and she nests them. What a fine blessing, though. My two brother-mates work in the Earthshop where the big machines bang metal into pieces of things, and they have joy of their work sweeping the chips and wiping with oil the metal and putting it into place under the banger. My older brother-mate’s hand is grown back now, although it is not so big as the other one was, but he can use it like the other one only not so strong. We opened your box with piety and excitement and found the warm thror-sox and gleepers you were so thoughtful to think of, and we found the schoolbooks, for me now, but the nestlings will use them later, and we found the tackers and the tickets for food at the Earthstore, which we got and are just finished eating some of now. We were thankful and joyous, and we read of the Earth in the books and we decided it is like the Happy Lands where the Great One sends those who are good after their bodies have been burned. Is it not so? Please write if you ever have the time to tell us about it; and yourselves also; if you ever have time; for we are curious and humility; and we would be joyed to hear of the big trees and the highways they grow with, and your sunsets and big buildings and the sky that is blue. I read many times your card of three packages ago, where you said Having a wonderful time. Wish you were here. It was so kind of you to think of me then and indeed you must have been having a wonderful time with all those glorious roulette wheels it showed in the picture and named on the back, to play with. I still do not know what a roulette wheel is for certain, because they are not in my *Abridged Galactic English Dictionary.* It looks like part of a game though. Perhaps you will tell me of them too when you write? I do not understand your answer to my letter of two packages ago when you said you spill more in one night than you send me in a year. Do you use a liquid currency on Earth now? I thought dollars were of paper and I do not understand. Perhaps you would explain this also sometime? It is a very dry and hot afternoon outside and I must go to the well now, so it will be dark when I come back and I will finish your letter tomorrow. Goodbye for a while Earth parents.

Now I will tell you more of the joy you have caused. Since our father-mate was burned it has been very hard to keep warm the nest at night. Now we have got the fuel tickets you send so that almost every night we have warmth. My sister-mate with eggs sleeps closest to the heat place, except for my mother-mate, who is always cold and shaking with the new sickness that came at about the time your people arrived out of the sky. It is hard to think of all that space out there separating worlds without getting dizzy. There are no high places near here, so I get dizzy even thinking about them. To think that the Great One could build worlds so far apart and watch them all and not get dizzy is dearly good.

I am pleased to learn that your party was good and that my last letter caused your dear friends the joy of laughter. This is the longest letter I have ever written and I hope it also joys you. You are so kind.

Your foster child,

Phaun Ligg

Dear Phaun,

Your letters are priceless. My husband and I treasure them dearly. We are not too well just now, ourselves, but we will write you a long letter quite soon—just as soon as we are a bit more organized. It *has* been a very trying week, so you must forgive us this time. All right? Also, you must excuse my husband’s cryptic allusions. He is fond of riddles. Give our best wishes to your mother-mate and your brother-mate & sister-mates. We are thinking of you.

Affectionately,

 Edith Mason

P. S. Keep 'em coming, kid. They’re a riot.

Foster father-mate,

Sam Mason