

Continued from page 9...

that if they insist loudly enough that conformation doesn't matter, people might start to believe them."

The air was starting to crackle a bit around the blond gent, but I pressed on. "Artists who are unwilling—or incapable?—of doing a well-conformed horse may be better off aiming their work for the equine art-buying public outside the hobby. There's a lot of really scarily-proportioned things being hawked as 'fine art' in the real horse world, so a well-proportioned remake that just has a few funky joints, a dislocated hip, or a broken shoulder should be quite attractive to the art-buying public, shouldn't it? They seem to be happy with anything horse-shaped, as long as it has a pretty face. But model horse hobbyists not only demand far more than a pretty face, we *require* more in order to compete!

"There *is* room for the model horse to be celebrated as an art form as well as be used as an educational tool, but it would be a real step backward to go with one concept and completely exclude the other," I said. "On the other hand, it would really expand the hobby's horizons to have separate competitions for each concept! You could either aim for realism, or display the horse for its artistic merits, or hey, even compete in *both* of the distinctly different disciplines!"

He sat in dour silence and I stood gleefully, thoroughly tickled at having sealed my soliloquy with an alliterative hat-trick. I rolled on to the finale. "A handful of artists and high-rolling collectors might be tickled to death with your 'new era,' but I just don't think most hobbyists will go for it," I concluded. "After all, remaking isn't the goal—remaking is the way the goal is *reached!*"

The visitor stood and nonchalantly smoothed the folds from his cape. "I think," he said coolly, "that owning that pinto pacer has affected your

sensibilities. Or it could be all that disgusting sushi you've ingested." There was an abrupt *paff!*, and his model of the future was gone. "At any rate, it's getting late, and I'd best be on my way."

As I showed him to the door, he suddenly turned and eyed me keenly. "You aren't feeling very well, are you?"

"Could be all that disgusting sushi I've ingested," I admitted.

"And the deadline for your *The Hobby Horse News* column is tomorrow, isn't it? Oh, don't look shocked—I know these things," he said in a tone turned kindly once more. "You have a long night ahead, staring at a computer screen and trying to write something that's entertaining, enlightening, and, hopefully, coherent.

"Well," he offered gallantly, "since I can't leave my model horse with you, and you've been so candid and courteous with me, why don't you let me do you a favor? I'd be honored to package our conversation tonight as an 'Inside Straight' column for you. In fact"—he whisked a hand from beneath his cape, to reveal a computer disk held between two fingers—"it's already on here, and I'll just pop this in the mail to Florida for you tomorrow morning. I recorded our whole conversation, your thoughts included, for my own future reference...but it's clear that you could really use a good night's sleep, and the best lullaby for you, I'd think, is to have a column in the can."

"Thanks," I nodded gratefully, and more than a little wearily. "You've got a point."

"My cape hides it, though," he grinned back, and strode out the door. The darkness swallowed him up, but his parting remark was loud and clear: "By the way, I thought a catchy title for your column would be 'More Stylization, Less Conformation'—hope you like it!"

Uh-oh...!