

# DAGON

#412, APA-Q DISTRIBUTION #319

4 August 1990

## TWIN GAPS - IV

(External shot, dawn. A tall neon sign, proclaiming "Twin Gaps Motel", towers over the buildings of that local institution, where according to the pastor of the local Muggleonian congregation 58% of the virginities in the county were lost. The camera pans in on a lit window, and then into what at first seems to be an empty room. But, near the ceiling, we see a taut vertical rope hanging from a pipe. As the camera pans down the rope, we see that it is looped around the neck of REVEREND AGENT D. B. COOPER of the United Network for Christian Law Enforcement, who is dangling there.)

(However, the light of intelligence is in COOPER's eyes, and he does not seem to be inconvenienced as he takes a tape recorder out of a hip pocket and begins speaking into it.)

COOPER: Fawn, these neck aerobics are the greatest innovation in physical fitness since the side-straddle-hop. Nobody whose work involves a lot of craning to peer through windows should neglect them. (Pauses.) Fawn, this case in Twin Gaps has all the earmarks of a Wizards & Lizards outbreak. As you know, there are four major categories of adventurers in that demonically inspired game. The first victim, Buck Board, was dressed as a Magician. The second, Julie August, was dressed as a Warrior - yes, I know, the very idea of women fighting battles is contrary to everything that Christianity stands for. And now Marcie Anderson was apparently dressed as a Thief. The only category left is Priest.

I'm going to begin today with breakfast here at the motel, which makes the best pancakes I ever had. This place is owned by Bert Corne, who seems to be the local magnate - he also owns the local feed and seed store, and is chairman of the board of First Protestant Savings & Loan. Then I'll go over this Wizards & Lizards aspect of the case with Sheriff Nixon and his deputies, and then I think I'm going to talk with the dead girl's psychiatric counselor. (COOPER takes out a bolo knife from a sheath at his hip, and cuts the rope. Landing, he does two handsprings into the bathroom.)

(We next see him, clad soberly in one of his eighteen black suits, seated in the dining room of the Twin Gaps Motel, speaking with a waitress.)

WAITRESS: Good morning. I'm your waitress today. I don't have a name.

COOPER: That's a relief. I'll have a stack of corn pancakes and a pot of black coffee.

WAITRESS: Very good, sir. (Leaves. As soon as she is gone, ODDREY CORNE takes the seat opposite COOPER's.)

ODDREY: Reverend Agent Cooper, I'm Oddrey Corne. I am so broken up that my dear, dear friend Marcie Anderson was so exactly murdered. I will do anything that you want to help you solve this case. Anything.

COOPER: How well did you know Marcie?

ODDREY: We were just the bestest friends ever. We went everywhere and did everything together.

COOPER: What were her hobbies? Did she enjoy playing any games?

ODDREY: Well, when we were younger, we both collected Barbie dolls. She liked to act out little plays with them. (COOPER raises an eyebrow.) But then - well, I really can't tell you what she did last school year. I wasn't here then. Daddy - er - sent me to a girls' finishing school in Cherokee - a fine big place, just

west of town, a lot older and nicer and - er - more refined than Senator James Wilson Grimes High School. So when I came back last fall, Marcie was involved in other things. We - er - kind of grew apart. And then there was this icky guidance counsellor at high school (she makes a face) - Dr. Vagary. She and Debbie and some of the other kids were seeing him in what they called group therapy sessions. I may be just an old-fashioned girl, but there are some things I don't believe should be done in groups. (Pauses.) Not in groups.

COOPER (as his order is delivered to the table): Would you like some breakfast, Oddrey?

ODDREY: No thanks, Reverend Agent Cooper. But please, please get in touch with me if there's any way at all I can help you.

COOPER: Of course, Oddrey. (She leaves. Fade.)

(The next scene is back in the combination sheriff's office, general store, post office, and filling station. COOPER is talking with SHERIFF RICHARD M. NIXON, his deputy CHESTER, and CHESTER's wife GRACIE, who is handing out corn muffins and coffee.)

COOPER: Where's Deputy Toronto? I'd really like to talk with him, too.

NIXON: He's attending to his religious duties today. He's presiding over services in a sweatbath of the Fakakta tribe.

COOPER (shocked): You mean that Toronto isn't a Christian?

NIXON: No, D. B., but it's not as bad as it looks. You see, Toronto is here to help us keep those meddling Equal Opportunity people in Washington off our necks. When all those laws about Civil Rights got passed, we made a deal with the Ojibway Nation in Canada. They would provide us with non-whites who we could show to those Washington bureaucrats. And these Indians are foreign-born - that's why we call him 'Toronto' - so that's another point in his favor. And a lot of them are heathen, like Toronto, so we can point to him if they ask us if all our employees are Christian. We even carry Gracie on the books as a deputy, as a woman -

GRACIE: Why not? I am, you know.

NIXON: - even though she hasn't so much as ticketed a parked car. If we didn't have Toronto, you can just guess who we'd be forced to hire -

COOPER: I see. So it's worth letting him spend a little time at the Fakakta Reservation.

NIXON: Oh, it's not a reservation, D. B. When we became a state, those sneaky redskins incorporated their tribe, with their tribal lands as corporate property. Then it turned out that some of the best bottom land in the state is on their corporation land, and there may be a deposit of high-grade gypsum under it. So for years the best lawyers in this end of the state have been trying to break those articles of incorporation in court. And the public is behind them, too. Have you seen "Bottom Beer" for sale locally?

COOPER: No - I never touch the stuff.

NIXON: Er - no - neither do I, of course - ah - but it's very popular among a lot of local people. It's short for "Get those blanket-bottoms off our bottom land".

(As they are speaking, GRACIE hurriedly goes to the cooler, unloads several six-packs of Bottom Beer, and puts them into a dusty and hitherto empty safe labeled "Evidence".)

COOPER: Have you got any useful information from the murdered girl's family?

NIXON: Marcie's father was so broken up about her death that he can't handle a big real estate deal for Bert Horne that was in the works. A bunch of Russian investors wanted to buy the old Walton place and turn it into an experimental farm. You may have seen them at the motel.

COOPER: Fat ugly guys in badly fitting suits? Yes, I have.

NIXON: No, D. B. - I think that is a convention of ministers of the Church of Jesus Christ, the Censor. The Russians look more like Yuppies in Savile Row tailoring.

GRACE: More coffee, guys?

((Continued in the next issue, despite bomb threats and interesting offers from former Playmates now on the ABC payroll.))

## GETTING CAUGHT UP

And so the Big Weekend is upon us. Today, beginning at about 2 PM, we are putting together APA-Q #319, APA-Filk #47, and the 580th issue of my postal war-gaming 'zine GRAUSTARK. DAGON is published by John Boardman, 234 East 19th Street, Brooklyn, New York 11226-5302, and circulates through APA-Q, an amateur press association also run from these premises. Beginning with the 321st Distribution on 15 September, APA-Q and DAGON will be published on every fourth Saturday. (See schedule to the right.) The copy count for APA-Q remains at 35. In addition to circulating through APA-Q, DAGON also goes to people who subscribe to it (12 issues for \$10), or whom I thought might be interested in getting it.

If you would like to get APA-Q, and cannot pick it up here, send me a few dollars for postage and the envelope (25¢) and I'll keep you posted on the state of your account. If you would also like to APA-Filk, the quarterly filksingers' amateur press association, let me know. You can establish a separate account for the apa you want, or an account for both. If you'd like to contribute to APA-Filk, the copy count is 60 and the schedule is given above. My APA-Filk contribution, ANAKREON, goes also to everyone who receives DAGON.

APA-Q and APA-Filk accounts which fall into arrears will be suspended. With the cost of mailing out this present 319th Distribution, the state of your APA-Q account is given to the right. Accounts which fall into arrears will be suspended. Presently suspended accounts are:

## APA-Q Distributions

#320	25 August 1990
#321	15 September 1990
#322	13 October 1990
#323	10 November 1990
#324	8 December 1990

## APA-Filk Mailing

#48	1 November 1990
#49	1 February 1991
#50	1 May 1991

Robert J. Baker	-\$1.10	Liz Ensley	-37¢	Ted Pauls	-39¢
Vinnie Bartilucci	-76¢	Harold Feld	-19¢	Lana Raymond	12¢
Andre Bridget	-72¢	John Hartzell	-79¢	Judy Rosenblatt	-10¢
Shelby Bush	-\$5.98	Daniel Holzman	-\$1.05	Joyce Scrivner	-75¢
Tom & Barbara Byro	-85¢	Mark Keller	-86¢	Peter G. Trei	-73¢
John Colton	-88¢	Barbara Koksall	-20¢	Gary Tesser	-90¢
John Desmond	-39¢				

APA-Qover #318 (Blackman): And the qover, of course, refers to the line party the following Tuesday for the Delacorte Theater production of The Taming of the Shrew. However, the "shrew's" line "Look in the Qronicles; we came in with Jerry Kaufman" missed fire, because Papp left out the famous Prologue from which this line was parodized.

Blancmange #238 (Blackman): I quite agree with your comments on Ward Moore's Bring the Jubilee. All the speculations on "If the rebels had won..." rely on totally implausible assumptions.

Now that the Great Red Menace delusion has collapsed, the U. S. may be less willing to support dictatorships in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The notion that the Soviet Union threatens the United States was never plausible, but now for the first time it is publicly seen to be implausible. This punctures the argument about "He may be an iron-fisted dictator, but we need him there to keep the Communists out..." Such comments recently came to light concerning the decaying regime of Samuel Doe in Liberia. When Doe first seized power in a bloody military coup about ten years ago, the U. S. not only recognized him before the blood was dry, but also sent him substantial financial help for his anti-Communism. Now the U. S. government is quite properly refusing to do anything about his impending collapse and very probable death.

The composer Felix Mendelssohn was not Jewish. His father, the son of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, was converted to Christianity, and Felix was raised in

that faith.

I think I may have confused a brother and a son of Vaughn Bode, both of whom are cartoonists.

Poor Kevin Phillips seems to be trying to find another bandwagon on which to leap. Fifteen years ago it looked as if financial and political conservatism, and an unrestricted expansion of private greed, were the wave of the future. He rode that wave all through the Reagan Administration, as the prophet who foretold the coming of the cowboy messiah. Now all the political, economic, and social policies for which the name of Ronald Reagan stands are trickling down the drain, and Phillips saw himself as occupying the same spot, as a laughingstock, as Irving Fisher did after the Hoover Crash. So he is now striking out in a new direction - or maybe just striking out.

DAGON (me): There are a few minor errors or misprints here. For one thing, the next DAGON after this one will be published on the 25th, not the 23rd, of August. For another, the sister-raper in King David's palace was not "Amon" but Ammon.

Details of the case of Corporal Louis Kahane, who killed a Vietnamese woman and is still behind bars for it, may be found in David Howard Bain's book Aftershocks (New York: Methuen, 1980). To the best of my knowledge, there has not been the slightest attempt, by Vietnam veterans or any other supporters of the war, to get Kahane out.

There are no new details to report, as of 31 July, on the "Christian Crusade to Stamp Out Science Fiction".

And, since neither Latin nor philosophy are much taught these days, ignotus per ignotum is the explanation of one unknown thing by another. It's like saying that nobody has seen the Loch Ness Monster because it was killed by the flying saucer people. (It was, they said, delicious.)

#### THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY

And it now appears that all the rest of this issue of DAGON will be under this heading. That's because I've got an awful lot of miscellany around here, as I continue to pick up, sort, reclassify, and rearranging fanzines, prozines, war games, unanswered mail, hard-cover and paperback books, and whining letters from Robert Sacks. Naturally, a lot of this stuff is going to be given away or thrown out, though not enough to satisfy Perdita.

This is affecting my records much as the Russian Revolution affected the archives of imperial Russia. Nations which have revolutions shouldn't keep archives; the Irish very sensibly burned theirs down in 1921. And, just as the most amazing revelations surfaced in the imperial Russian archives, and as more will probably surface from the Communist Russian archives, so I will be commenting in this and future issues of DAGON on the things that are coming to light in my workroom.

This also means that "The Ministry of Miscellany" will be very disorganized. As new items come to light, or work their way to the tops of the stacks in which I have temporarily placed them, there may be further comments on p. 11 on an item that has already been discussed on p. 6.

\*

I was rather disappointed in what seems to be the first book in a new series by Robert Asprin, Phule's Company (New York: Ace Books, 1990). The problem may lie in the neat, orderly mind of the author. (I said "mind", not "life".) By profession, apart from writing, Asprin is an accountant. And the neat habits that are encouraged in accountants require him not only to tie up all the loose ends, but to turn the manifold problems of his heroes into a neat, tidy, and remunerative outcome by the end of the book.

Of Asprin's book I like the "Myth" books best. However, the compulsion to tidy up the endings has made them increasingly tame. And Asprin likes to write about extremely un-tamed people, who do wild things and manage to get away with them.

Phule's Company is a future war comedy, but not in the vein of Harry Harrison's

Bill, the Galactic Hero series. In fact, it sounds more like those "Meet Your Lovable Army" books from World War II, or Dr. Richard Hornberger's original concept of HPA\*SH before television took hold of it.

Phule's Company starts from one of those military units which Asprin calls an "Omega Company", and which was called a "Q Company" in World War II, but which probably goes as far back as some ancient Assyrian warlord who said, "Let's put all the goof-offs and goldbricks into Captain Slagbut's outfit and send them to the Judaeon frontier and hope we never see any of them again!" In this case, Omega Company is considered the perfect duty post for a Lieutenant of the Space Legion who is in deep disgrace for strafing the signing of a peace treaty, but who can't be summarily court-martialed because he is the only child of the president of Phule-Proof Munitions, who manufactures all the weapons the Legion uses. So he is promoted to captain and sent off to Haskin's Planet, to take charge of an Omega Company.

Even without Omega Company, the Space Legion is a pretty dismal outfit. The regular army is made up of planetary contingents, but the Space Legion is a sort of combination of the French Foreign Legion and a poorly managed security guard agency. It accepts enlisted men, women, and things without questions about their past, and sells officers' commissions to the highest bidder. Its members all choose new names, usually because the old ones would get them into serious trouble somewhere.

Captain Jester, as young Phule now calls himself, is a hero who would lighten the late Robert A. Heinlein's heart, assuming that he had one and that he wouldn't have got upset by the levity with which Asprin approaches military matters. He is old-money rich, but has made a personal fortune by his own efforts. He greases his way with his own money, rather than using ours as Lieutenant Criminal North did. And he has a butler - a resourceful and discreet civilian named Beeker, whose marginal notes are throughout the book, and who is obviously modeled after Jeeves despite the fact that Phule seems more like Heinlein's Rico than like Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster.

And so Captain Jester takes command, and in the course of the book turns Omega Company into a tough, highly disciplined, effective fighting force with high morale and a slice of some of his more profitable business enterprises. Asprin the Accountant has taken over a failing business and put it into first-rate order, and incidentally shown a successful and highly profitable First Contact with a previously unknown alien empire.

And, by a curious circumstance, nobody gets killed in the course of the entire book. Even Phule's attack on the peace ceremony, while doing considerable damage to property, caused no casualties. The Red Eagles, an elite regular army unit which Omega Company meets in a competition of drill and obstacle courses, remind me of nothing so much as that elite Kremlin unit which never fights, never patrols a distant border, and exists only to show off highly polished drill techniques to anyone who watches a military review in Moscow. The only casualty in the First Contact is a man who is knocked unconscious by a stun gun - he recovers quickly, and Phule signs a deal with the aliens to import the weapon into the human-dominated Alliance.

Anyone who wants science-fiction that shows the military life as the highest good to which humanity can aspire, will read Jerry Pournelle's tales of the "Co-Dominion" or S. M. Stirling's Marching through Georgia. Anyone who thinks that war is a monstrous evil that we must excise from our lives will read Bill, the Galactic Hero or Haldeman's The Forever War or Shepard's Life during Wartime. Asprin falls between two stools here, and I don't think that we'll see as much of Phule's Company in the future, as we will of Thieves' World and of Skeeve's world.

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Incidentally, I have been credibly informed that the "S." in "S. M. Stirling" stands for "Steve", putting an end to my suspicion that, as with C. J. Cherryh, a woman stood behind those sexless initials. I would urge anyone who wants to know what "military futurism" is all about, to bypass such wishy-washy types as Heinlein or Pournelle or Drake or Cherryh, and go straight to Stirling for the real stuff. The loving care with which Stirling writes about mass murder, imperialism, and racism as the highest development of human character is a summary of "military futurism"

in science fiction, as we have come to know it in the past 10 or 15 years.

\*

Wyrd Sisters is the sixth of Terry Pratchett's "Discworld" series of comic fantasy novels, and the most recent to be published in this country by New American Library in its Roc Dook series. (Two more have already been published in Great Britain: Pyramids and Guards! Guards!) This one returns to us Granny Weatherwax, whom we first met in Equal Rites. We also meet the two other witches of her coven, Nanny Ogg, and a junior witch named Magrat Garlick. The coven is Magrat's idea, and in her Pratchett is obviously satirizing the Neo-Pagan witches we are, if lucky, acquainted with. Magrat is young, plain, eager for the approval of the elder witches, and like our contemporary Neo-Pagans learned most of her witchcraft out of books. And when in the course of the story she meets a young man in the jester business who seems attractive to her, we learn that while she can make a potent love potion, and deliver a baby competently, she doesn't know much about the steps that lead from the former to the latter of these situations.

The three witches get precipitated into the complications that arise after King Verence of the small mountain kingdom of Lancre, is murdered by his cousin Duke Felmet, who seizes the throne. What he does not seize is King Verence's infant son, who with the crown gets smuggled out and placed with a family of traveling actors. Yes, I know, you've all read fantasy novels of this sort before, which end with the missing prince as a young man returning with a band of loyal followers and a "white" wizard (halflings with rings optional at extra cost), overthrowing the evil usurper, and reigning happily ever after. But Pratchett does it slightly differently. Not wanting an 18-year-gap between the beginning and the ending of the story, he shortens it by magic, and makes the exiled prince and moderately successful actor uncertain as to whether he wants to abandon the life of a strolling player. (The crown has become one of the company's props.) We also get the idea that when it is poorly kinged, the kingdom - not just the people but also the land - can get upset about the situation. This isn't new in fantasy novels either; you'll find it in the "Dolorous Stroke" subplot of the King Arthur story. But Pratchett, as is his habit, puts it in a quite different and very comic light.

The ending tears to shreds all the cliches of this type of fantasy plot. And I for one am left eagerly looking forward to the next one.

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In the last DAGON I observed that, as a further degradation of the political process, New York has just proclaimed its Official State Bottle. But, as in many other matters of political decay, Great Britain is ahead of us. This probably arises from the fact that Margaret Thatcher took office nearly two years before Ronald Reagan, and therefore was ahead of him in the common downward path which these nations have taken during the 1980s. (For example, Thatcher had her war in the Antarctic Ocean about a year and a half before Reagan saved us from the spectacle of Grenadian bombers darkening our skies and Grenadian troops storming ashore on our beaches.)

According to the 1990 edition of Whitaker's Almanack, for which I am indebted to Paul Evans, the following political parties or candidates participated in the most recent elections for the British and European Parliaments:

Loony Official Monster Raving Party	Right of Falkland Islands to Elect
Monster Raving Loony Rock Music Party	Westminster M.P. Party
Monster Raving Loony Liberal Christmas Party	Anti Left Wing Fascist Party
Monster Raving Loony Mad Hatters	Corrective Party
RABIES (Rainbow Alliance Brixton Insane Extremist Section)	University Information Officer
Common Market No, Hanging Yes	Wessex Regionalist Party
Revolutionary Reform Party Representative of Christ	Vote No Delsen for South Africans
Capital Punishment Referendum Party	Creek Road Fresh Bread Party
	Protestant Reformation Party
	Green Party
	Gold Party
	Feudal Party

Fancy Dress Party  
 Only Official Best Party Candidate  
 Capital Punishment Will Save More  
 Lives  
 Gremloid Party  
 Ex Labour Moderate  
 Public Independent Plaintiff  
 Red Front  
 Rainbow Alliance Change the World  
 Rainbow Alliance Payne and Pleasure  
 Party  
 Free Trade Liberal Party - Europe  
 Out

Official Fidgeyitous Party  
 Ecology Party  
 Independent Christian Nationalist  
 Independent Community Campaigner,  
 East Oxford People  
 Retired  
 UPUP (Ulster Popular Unionist Party)  
 Let's Have Another Party Party  
 Rainbow Zippy Alliance  
 London Class War Party  
 Anti-Yuppie Revolutionary Crowleyist  
 Vegetarian Visionary  
 Independent Janata Party

The British seem to understand, much better than we do, how to make the political system even more ridiculous than it is making itself. So far, about the best we have done in this line is to run a few "Greens" (whose slogan is "Back to the Pleistocene") and Libertarians, and elect one or two corpses.

The originator of all this silliness was the Czech author Jaroslav Hashek (1883-1923), whose The Adventures of the Good Soldier Shvejk in the Great War I have frequently and enthusiastically recommended in these pages. Back in the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hashek ran for office as the candidate of "The Party of Moderate Progress within the Bounds of Law". This "party" was mainly the excuse for a few parties at Praha taverns, which were called "campaign rallies".

\*

A few issues ago I reviewed the first in Marvel Graphics's series Open Space. This is apparently a series title, with different writers and perhaps artists in each issue, but with a common theme. In the not too distant future the "Smoot Drive" has made the stars available to humanity, except that the process is controlled by a huge, overbearing, greedy firm called Astranet. The plot lines seem to involve people trying to get into space despite Astranet.

L. Neil Smith has just leaped into this mess, with a story in a more recent book of this series. Smith has been notorious in science fiction for several years, as the sort of Anarchist it is fashionable to call a "Libertarian", but who basically thinks that his own whims are a Law of Nature. A few years ago, Smith dedicated one of his preachy Anarchist novels to a triple murderer, and probably lacks only animal courage to be one himself.

Smith's contribution to the Open Space series is an Anarchist fantasy about this horrible government which is trying to deny individuals their god-given rights to maneuver the stock market with inside information, shoot anyone they please, and cheat on their taxes. One of a group of contentious Anarchists inherits a decrepit old spaceship, which is fitted with a Smoot drive, and the whole ark-ful of them head off to the planets. But before they go, we get horror stories about the terrible things that the government has done to them. Smith apparently thinks that we will find plausible a future in which children are sentenced to life in prison for possession of bee-bees, and possession of the works of Ayn Rand is a capital crime.\*

But the real jokes is that this has been tried. Some eleven centuries ago, a bunch of Norwegians sailed off into the unknown west rather than submit to the king who had just for the first time unified the country. They set up what they regarded as an ideal society in Iceland, just as Smith's Anarchists propose to do on a new planet. They then proceeded to settle all their differences of opinion with blood feuds, interspersed with the same sort of nit-picking attention to written law that today's Anarchists find so unpleasant about our society. (Read the Njal Saga for details.) It all

This is

O At  
 P Great  
 E Intervals  
 R This  
 A Appears  
 T To  
 I Inflamm  
 O Optic  
 N Nerves

\* - Yeah - you get bored to death.

# 1620

made magnificent literature, but it must have been very unpleasant to live through. It finally broke down in the middle of the 13th century, when the country's most highly respected lawyer and poet, Snorri Sturlasson, sold the whole mess out to the King of Norway, and Iceland was a part of some mainland kingdom for the next seven centuries. (Snorri and the king later quarreled over the divvy, and the king put out a contract on him. The contract was fulfilled by Snorri's three sons-in-law, an appropriate end for this whole Anarchist experiment.)

"Anarchists from around the world held a convention in San Francisco to discuss history, debate philosophy, and share their visions of a stateless society. They concluded their activities with a 2-hour riot. Police said that 300 people from the annual convention threw stones and bottles, broke store windows, set trash fires, and commandeered a Coca-Cola delivery truck. There were 30 arrests. The disturbance disappointed conference organizers, who had sought to improve the public image of the anarchists. 'People think we're mad bombers in pointy hats with beards,' said Joey Cain, who helped organize the conference. 'We have to counteract that by showing that anarchists are responsible people.' While those at the convention disagreed about what anarchism is, they did agree that they shared a distaste for the state and a belief in direction action." - 1990 World Almanac, p. 957, "Off-Beat News Stories of 1989"

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One notion held in common by Anarchists, Republicans, and the sort of tightly organized right-wing nuts who have shoot-outs with the police at times, is the belief that there should be no restrictions whatsoever on what they call a "right" to own and carry guns. (Sometimes this is supported by quoting the Second Amendment to the Constitution, but if you read its entire text you realize that this says only that the militia, or "National Guard" as it's now called, gets to carry weapons.)

Mississippi is now trying this out. On 1 July a new law went into effect, which allows any Mississippian over 21 to pay \$100 for a three-year permit to carry a concealed weapon anywhere. (Newsday, 14 July 1990) This includes bars, sporting events, and even the state Capitol. It might be a good idea to avoid Mississippi. And maybe we should have let them secede.

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The IBM Gallery of Art at Madison Avenue and 56th Street has, until 15 September, an exhibit from various Italian museums of art and artifacts discovered at the buried cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. (Nope - none of those horny murals from the Pompeian whorehouse. Sorry.) We went to see it, along with Al Nofi, who has visited Pompeii, and Art Saha. It was not anywhere near as good as the Pompeii exhibit which was held a few years ago at the American Museum of Natural History. And IBM seemed to regard the exhibit mainly as an opportunity to show off all the marvelous things its computers could do in image clarification and three-dimensional views of artifacts. There was a great lack of concrete information to go with these computer displays, and we left the exhibit feeling that we had been left out of much of what was being shown.

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The Line Party for the Delacorte Theater production of The Taming of the Shrew was on Tuesday 17 July; we were there with Al Nofi, Eric Lurio, Mark Blackman, and a new First Saturday regular named Sam, with whose last name we cannot now come up. The setting in the "Old West" worked better than we had expected, but there were some problems with Tracey Ullman as Kate. Though she is an actress of great expertise and accomplishments, Ullman just didn't seem to fit in this role. Still, the play was enjoyable; on the balance, more of Joseph Papp's out-of-period stagings of Shakespeare have worked than have not. After the performance, the actress who had played Bianca made an appeal to the audience to write letters in support of continued funding of the National Endowment for the Arts, without the restrictions that Senator Helms wants to put on their grants. The name of Senator Helms was loudly hooted by the audience, and with enough of this, we may eventually be freed of the dictatorial rule that a handful of Christians in the Flyover are attempting to exert upon the arts, science, and social policy. There are even reports that Helms, who is up for re-election this year, is



running in the polls behind a Democratic, African-American challenger.

There is a new ticket distribution policy at the Delacorte this year. It is still advisable for form up the line by noon, but now each person on line is given two "numbers". This makes it possible for each person then on the line to be joined by another before ticket distribution begins at 6:15, to whom one of the two "numbers" can then be given. Each "number" held by an actual person is exchanged for a ticket once ticket distribution begins.

Morgan Freeman was quite good as Petruchio in this performance, and I had not previously realized what a commanding presence he is. I would like to see him in the title role of Shakespeare's Othello or Marlowe's Tamburlane.

The Central Park production of Richard III began yesterday, and we'll be organizing a Line Party for it at tonight's First Saturday. It runs until the 26th of August, I believe.

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It is definite - Hexacon will no longer be held. There have been increasing difficulties with hotels and motels in the Lancaster, PA area. There are even rumors that some nationwide hotel chains have sent out the word that no s-f conventions are to be allowed in any of their establishments. This should be checked into by the committees of forthcoming WorldCons and the major regional cons.

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"One of the enduring mysteries of the age is the firmly held belief of a great many people that Ray Bradbury is a science fiction writer. Those who hold this notion are not science-fiction readers, of course; most of them seem to be people who read very little. Mr. Bradbury, in an earlier era, was sometimes sufficiently honest as to admit himself that he had never written any science fiction. However, he's now apparently the media's selected science-fiction writer; he gets interviewed ad nauseam, on TV, he sells to Playboy, and when any illiterate citizen is asked for the name of a science fiction writer, it's always Bradbury.

"Now, Mr. Bradbury has a perfect right to push his own brand of nostalgia, after all. He writes pretty little tales about a non-existent Midwestern past, as illustrated by Norman Rockwell. He also writes sugar-sweet yarns in which 'rockets' whiz off to Mars, which closely resembles Indiana in 1927. Now, the Oz stories are not science fiction, and what Bradbury writes is not science fiction. If his work could be called writing at all, by a generous stretching of the word, it might be called fantasy.

"Yet this man, with a knowledge of the basics of science that is so minimal that it couldn't equal that of a sixth grader, has the unbelievable gall to enter into public discussions of space programs, science, and politics. And the Free Press wastes a page on his opinions on these subjects.

It's a bit like interviewing Nixon about morality on the grounds that he was, after all, a Quaker once.

But this incredible hack writer isn't satisfied with having conned the public into accepting his second rate fairy tales as literature. He has to, as he puts it, share a platform with 'that little Irish girl', Bernadette Devlin. This cheapo literary spiv is, he says, upset by Devlin's opinions. He naturally interprets her ideas into his own level, and accuses her of 'wanting the money for Northern Ireland'.

"Bradbury and Devlin on the same platform must have been a fine sight indeed, but a bit difficult to get into focus at the same time, considering their relative sizes. That 'little Irish girl' is about a thousand times taller than Bradbury. Her name will be remembered when Bradbury's pulp fiction has been recycled back into toilet paper.

I recall that Bradbury recently visited Ireland, and from time to time, he deigned to enter a pub or two, and notice the humble inhabitants with a lordly smile. Out of this he derived half a dozen stories of more than usually Bradburyish inanity, bearing the same relation to Ireland as the comical stage Irishman does. I would earnestly suggest that Bradbury keep well away from any good Celt in future, and keep his health." - David Mason, letter, Los Angeles Free Press, 29 September 1972

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I suppose you out-of-towners are hearing some rather horrendous stories about life in New York City these days.

Did you hear this one? About a month ago, three young black men in Brooklyn broke into a car. For doing this, they were profusely thanked by the car's owner, and given commendations by the Mayor.

It happened when a Hasidic Jew, of an ultra-orthodox sect that has lately been having some friction with the local African-American community, parked his car and went to use a cash machine at a bank. He left his five children in the car, and they amused themselves by playing with matches. The car burst into flames - and the three black men broke into it, and rescued all the children. Their pictures appeared later in the paper, when they received the mayoral commendation while the children looked on.

Did this story appear in your local papers?

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John Leonard, the free-lance, free-wheeling critic who appears from time to time in Newsday, is something of a mixed blessing. In an era of inordinate spending for military purposes, he thinks the U. S. is wasting money on scientific research. But in his column of 26 July there appeared an appreciation of the late and sorely missed science-fiction and detective story writer and critic who is most familiar to us by his pen-name, Anthony Boucher. While speaking of people who had had a strong influence on his life though he'd only met them briefly, he mentioned a time over 20 years ago when he had had to write Boucher's obituary for the New York Times. Since Boucher's "Criminals at Large" column had run in the Times Book Review for many years, Boucher had died in Berkeley, Leonard knew the Berkeley scene, and was the new kid on the block at the Times, Leonard got the job.

For all of his wide circle of acquaintances, Boucher was something of a "mystery man" to the young Leonard, "and no one knew if he was actually the Middle European intellectual he'd pretended to be." Boucher was putting Leonard on; Boucher's real name was William White, which is not likely to be borne by a "Middle European intellectual". Leonard, he says, "babbled on about the high-stakes poker games he used to stage for the best sci-fi" ((sic)) "writers in America", and also mentioned his old record collection, his part-time scouting for the University of California football team, and the fact that he was a devout Roman Catholic. Leonard did not go on to mention Boucher's deep commitment to political liberalism and his fabulous collection of raunchy limericks, possibly because both are supposed to be incompatible with Catholicism.

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From time to time we see in the amateur press complaints from someone who claims that he has been mis-represented as anti-gay, a racial bigot, or a war-lover. The wrong construction has been placed on his words, he claims, or - and this is my favorite - he has been "quoted out of context". In my experience, whenever someone claims he was quoted out of context, what he really means is: "I said it, but I wish I hadn't."

This Moment of Truth came recently to Michael Levin, a professor of philosophy at the City College of New York, who has been accused of being a racist. No, I'm not, he says in a letter to the May 1990 issue of The Graduate Student Advocate, a student publication at the City University of New York. His exact words were:

"I do not subscribe to any theory of 'racial superiority.' I contend, simply, that blacks are on average less intelligent than whites."

Now - is everything perfectly unclear?

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"In its struggle to become a real network, Fox passed the first test. It killed the one quality dramatic show it had, Alien Nation, despite its large cult following. Fox went where no network has gone since NBC cancelled Star Trek." Marvin Kitman, Newsday, 24 July 1990

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Some two years ago, in DAGON #383, I stated that our best hope for the future was "Peace through Incompetence". I then cited several bits of evidence that the U. S. and Soviet armed forces were so inefficient and bungling that, if they were really aware of their military capabilities, the two major powers would realize that they would have to make peace because they were simply incompetent to make war.

I consider this thesis to have been conclusively demonstrated by the events that have since taken place. And such events are still taking place. Remember the explosion on 19 April 1989 on the battleship Iowa, which killed 47 sailors and destroyed a gun turret? The Navy, extremely anxious to prove that no technical problems stand in the way of going into the last decade of the 20th century with a force based on World War II ships, solemnly decided that "the gun turret blast 'most probably' was the result of sabotage by a suicidal member of the gun crew." (New York Daily News, 29 July 1990) There were also intimations that a thwarted homosexual affection was the cause of this sailor's suicidal tendency.

But that isn't all the Navy did, according to this story by Bryna Brennan. The United States Navy, our "first line of defense", the most powerful and technically advanced sea force the world has ever known, actually "sent agents to interview an Ohio woman who claimed she saw the blast in a 'vision from the Lord.'" This was done by agents of the Naval Investigative Service, who interviewed Diane Opfer in North Ridgeville, Ohio, and were told that "she had had a vision of the explosion aboard the Iowa" and "had arranged for a police artist to produce a drawing of an individual she said had appeared in her vision."

Meanwhile, in a science-fiction plot that goes all the way back to Fred Pohl's Slave Ship (serialized in Galaxy in 1956) the U. S. Navy is trying to use dolphins in war. "Former Navy trainers of the dolphins say the animals are being taught to kill enemy divers with nose-mounted guns and explosives." (New York Times, 24 July 1990) The Navy admits that dolphins are being trained to its purposes at several bases, but denies that they are using the animals to kill people. Each year \$20,000,000 of our money is being used for the training program, about which we would be in total ignorance if several former trainers had not begun to speak up. The Navy has been doing this since 1960, raising the suspicion that some junior lieutenant read Pohl's novel and took off from there. Of the 16 dolphins who have thus far died in the course of the program, one of them bought it in the Persian Gulf, making us wonder what President Butch has in mind for them now that he has started to emit ultimatums in that area.

"It's dangerous and expensive to put people down there," a spokesman for the Naval Ocean Systems Center in San Diego is quoted as saying. "These animals have incredibly good sonar systems and can dive deep." However, "two former Navy trainers said the dolphins are being trained to ram enemy divers. Small cannisters strapped to the dolphins' snouts are designed to detach on impact and fire a .45-caliber bullet."

Currently, President Butch is trying to restore the "he-man" image which has been a bit damaged of late by his failure to get his silly constitutional amendment on flag-burning approved. So he is making all kinds of threatening noises about the Persian Gulp, so called because it readily gulps down men, money, reputations, and now, it appears, dolphins as well. But Butchie has planned all kinds of military actions against Iraq, and ordered two naval task forces into the region. Before he commits the Navy to combat, he ought to - but probably will not - consider how practical these stories about the Navy make any such course of action.

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Nor is the Army any better off. On 9 July 1990, six soldiers in a U. S. Army Intelligence unit in Augsburg, Germany, were reported missing. This is not surprising in itself, because Augsburg is a very dull place. But everyone was surprised when they turned up, four days later, in of all places Gulf Breeze, Florida.

But it was no U. S. Army Intelligence assignment that took these six soldiers to Florida - or, if it was, the Army is into even higher weirdness than the Navy. According to one of the men, they had been "chosen by...divine intervention to help prepare for the end of the world...about eight years from now." (New York Post, 26 July 1990) It seems that the second coming of Jesus Christ was about to occur, and that

this time he was going to arrive in a spaceship.

People are continually making claims of this sort; in 1841 the followers of a prophet named Miller expected the imminent end of the world, and made themselves ridiculous by selling or giving away all their belongings, putting on white robes, and going up to hilltops to wait for the event. (The Seventh Day Adventists were eventually assembled from the wreckage of this delusion.) But this time the story was bought by six of the men whom the U. S. Army trained and is relying upon to keep it posted on military activities of other countries. If six guys like this came out of the barrel, how many more are still in it? And, by the way, is this what we have spent trillions of dollars on for "protection", and can we believe anything at all that they have been telling us, about "Great Red Menaces" or the Persian Gulp or anything else at all?

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Dan Quayle, the man who said that Earth and Mars are essentially in the same orbit, has gone off into space again. Somebody must have read the first chapter of Arthur Clarke's Rendezvous with Rama to him, because he is now trying to drum up support for "a global effort to monitor the heavens and devise ways to divert or destroy large objects on a collision course with Earth." (New York Daily News, 20 May 1990) Quayle has sold this to the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, which supports such an effort, probably because they plan on using the money for something practical and throwing dust in the faces of government auditors who want to know what kind of asteroid protection we're getting for the money. (This is an old game in the hustling of scientific grants; when I was a graduate student, my thesis adviser actually got the U. S. Air Force to finance completely theoretical research into gravitational radiation and a quantum theory of gravitation.)

The probability that an asteroid will hit the Earth during the Bush-Quayle Administration is about the same as the probability that all the air molecules in the room will gather up in one corner of it and choke you to death. But the probability that Spacey Quayle will become President of the United States of America is a considerably larger one. All it needs is one Panamanian who does to George Bush what the Czechs under comparable provocation did to Reinhard Heydrich in 1942.

Unlike most Americans, I would welcome a Quayle presidency. It would run out to the very end, the preposterous political trends that have developed in this country in the past thirty years. Then, after having a good laugh at it, we could agree on trying something completely different that, for a change, would make a little sense.

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