



THE NEW

MILLENNIAL

HARBINGER

Number Seven

July 1969

Published by John Bangsund PO Box 109 Ferntree Gully
Victoria 3156 Australia for the fifth mailing of the
Australia & New Zealand Amateur Press Association and
a few others. Free for trade comment or contribution.
No subscriptions. Halliford i. '85.

A man must be mad, typing up even more pages for the fifth mailing when there are already 20 pages of ASFR and 4 of NMH, but you get that way you can't help it. A spare moment and bang - in goes another stencil, out comes another fanzine. So here I am on 20th May typing up the July issue, Ghu help me.

Today we are on strike. Not me personally, but the railways, tramways, gas and electricity people, and others. (I'm home because I was off with a cold yesterday and the boss rang last night and said I might as well stay home today, too.) I don't want to go into the reasons behind the strike - suffice it to say that the immediate cause is the jailing of Clarrie O'Shea for contempt of court, and the ultimate cause the iniquitous Bans Clauses which the Industrial Court may (on the application of any employer) insert into industrial awards, thereby effectively muzzling the unions. Overseas readers bemused by this esoteric talk had better dismiss this paragraph or look up some references on the Australian arbitration system.

So there are no trams or trains, and no M&MTB buses; few meat deliveries; and we have no gas, and may only use two electric lights, no radiators, and what electricity is necessary for cooking. Use of transistor radios is unrestricted, so the kindly old authorities have told us the Dumb Public, but parking restrictions will be ruthlessly enforced.

You wonder that I'm huddled in this eiderdown, typing stencils by candlelight?

What else is there to do?

- Captain Chandler was invited by Phil Harbottle, editor of VISION OF TOMORROW, to revive the Golden Amazon stories. He sent me a copy of his reply, with a note authorizing me to use it in any way I please. Since Bert's part in the Golden Amazon business has been the subject of many rumours, it is good to have this definitive statement from him. The title is mine. (JB)

Dear Mr Harbottle,

May 14 1969

Thank you for the return of the manuscripts, and for your letter of May 5, received yesterday. As you surmise, John Bangsund has been keeping me in the picture VISIONwise, and shortly I should be in Melbourne to discuss matters with him personally.

I'm afraid that I cannot exhibit any enthusiasm for the Golden Amazon reprint project. In the immortal words of the late Sam Goldwyn - "Include me out". As you heard, I was one of the writers tried out by the Toronto Star Weekly in their misguided attempt to revive Violet Ray (whoever thought of that name for a character had more than a touch of genius) and, ever since then, Fearn has been a dirty word in this household.

The late Mr Fearn was not a writer's writer. No doubt he, hearing such a remark passed during his lifetime, would have cried all the way to the bank. Be that as it may, no real craftsman in the field could do anything with Mr Fearn's characters or story background.

In the unfortunately unlikely event of my being asked to give either Commander James Bond or Admiral Horatio Hornblower a further lease of life I should feel greatly honoured, and any misgivings I felt when embarking upon the project would be regarding my own lack of skill. When I was asked to exhume the Golden Amazon I was hard up, and the idea of a regular, commissioned series was well worth consideration.

Well, I think that I had tried to read a Golden Amazon story once, years and years ago, but had been unable to finish it. I decided, therefore, that I'd better get some idea of what it was all about. I borrowed a few ancient Amazings from Don Tuck, in Hobart, and discovered that Violet Ray's parents had been cast away on Venus after a mutiny aboard a spaceship - one of those odd spaceships thunk up by people with no idea at all about ships of any kind, with hordes of useless ratings... Could they have been "jet stokers"? Anyhow, from these humble beginnings she went from bad to worse, acquiring along the way a quite impossible collection of friends, enemies and a pair of brats even worse than E E Smith's Children Of The Lens.

I just couldn't do anything with this mess, so decided that I'd have to start again from scratch. This was achieved by some tinkering with Time so that I could catch Violet Ray while she was still a cheap imitation Tarzaness being drug up by the Greater Venusian Drongoes in their foetid habitat. I even managed to change her name from Violet to Vanessa and cured her of her jaundice. The resultant effort was passed on to the Fiction Editor of TSW by my Agent. She complained bitterly that it wasn't her Golden Amazon, and sent me some back

numbers of TSW for my homework. Meanwhile, THE COILS OF TIME was slightly rewritten, sold to Ace as a novel, and to TSW, where it appeared in their issue of November 7 1964.

The TSW version of the Golden Amazon I found even worse than the Amazing Stories version. Practically ever character was impossible, both from the literary and the science fictional viewpoints. The decision was made, therefore, to phase out all of Mr Fearn's monsters (with the exception of the Golden Amazon), replacing them with my own rather clottish but essentially human people. For Violet Ray herself I reserved a fate worse than death - a thorough brainwashing, then a complete reassembly.

This offering was received by the Fiction Editor of TSW rather coldly. She returned it to my Agent with the remark that it was obvious that Chandler did not like either Mr Fearn or his characters. How right she was.

Once again there was a spot of rewriting - very little beyond the changing of names. The original title was THE POWER GOD, but it was changed by Ace to EMPRESS OF OUTER SPACE.

Empress Irene lasted for three novels - EMPRESS OF OUTER SPACE, SPACE MERCENARIES and, finally, NEBULA ALERT. My title for this latter was TO RIDE THE NIGHTMARE. In it Irene (she would) tried to navigate her ship through the Horsehead Nebula. She finished up not only on the Rim, but on an Alternative Time Track. She met - but did not get on at all well with - Commodore Grimes and his lady wife. At the finish she was told by the Commodore to get the hell back to where she came from, and hasn't been seen or heard of since. I think that it was because of her dubious origins that I never cared for her much myself.

So my advice (unsolicited) regarding the Golden Amazon reprints is the same as the famous advice to those about to get married. "DON'T." Science fiction now has a reasonably good name - why spoil it?

Sincerely,

(Capt.) A. Bertram Chandler

LETTER COLUMN

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This will have to be a hasty one, since this is almost the first time I have sat down at my desk since Charlotte was born in early March. Work overdue surrounds me, but I must write and tell you how extremely pleased and grateful I was to hear that the Melbourne Convention had voted me Best Contemporary Writer of Science Fiction. Using the CAMP CONCENTRATION award as a test case, I'd say you must have intelligent voters there in Melbourne, so I'm properly pleased with the good news, and shall use it in my future publishing publicity.

.... At the Oxford con last week, I learned that you were associated with VISION OF TOMORROW! Well, I wish you all luck, and hope you will have a benevolent influence on their reactionary programme.

JB... It occurs to me that the first Australian SF Achievement Awards may not have received the publicity they deserve, though three of the four are listed in the latest SFWA Bulletin, and presumably SF TIMES and others will report them. For the record, since I haven't published them yet, the awards - "Ditmars" to those in the know - were as follows:

Best International SF Of Any Length (or collection): TOM DISCH: CAMP CONCENTRATION
Best Australian SF Of Any Length (or collection): A. BERTRAM CHANDLER: FALSE FATHERLAND
Best Contemporary Science Fiction Writer: BRIAN ALDISS
Best Australian Amateur SF Publication (or fanzine): AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

A Melbourne SF Club special award for services to Australian sf was made to LEIGH EDMONDS - an award well-deserved and popular with Convention members.

A full transcript of the Awards presentation appears in Gary Mason's New Forerunner.

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I want to make a sundial out of copper, with perhaps a base of serpentine - a rock of which there are some beautiful examples near here. After an appeal to the local librarian I got a couple of books from the Public Library of NSW (one a Popular Mechanics publication, the other A P Herbert's SUNDIALS OLD AND NEW) and can now design a dial which should accurately give sun-time. But to tell clock-time one has to add or subtract several minutes, varying with the date; there are only four days in the year when sun and clock-time coincide. Apart from A P Herbert's wife's suggestion of "setting" the dial daily I can find no solution except to engrave on the dial the instructions for adding or subtracting certain numbers of minutes. Surely someone must have found a better way to overcome the Equation of Time!

JB... Andrew Escot, where are you? Or any other learned reader, for that matter.

Donder und Blitzen! - there's a letter here from Mervyn Barrett with all sorts of interesting comments on earlier NMH's, and I can't use it this time because I'm absolutely out of duplicating paper and my accountant (Diane) says I can't buy any more until 1973 (which I take to mean about August).

To conclude I'll just mention a few recent events which probably everyone knows about anyway. First, Seth Johnson died on March 10th, of a heart attack. Seth wrote to me last year and I had a bit of a crack at him in NMH4, not knowing he was 57 and not a well man. Bob Toomey is back in America, writing furiously after his "slightly mad trip" to England. His address is now 105 High St, Springfield, Mass. 01105. GALAXY and IF have been acquired by Universal Publishing Co., New York, and Fred Pohl has resigned as editor. New editor is one-time SUPER SCIENCE STORIES editor, Ejler Jakobsson. Garrett Press, an American reprint house, has contracted to reprint in bound volumes all the back issues of ASTOUNDING, UNKNOWN, GALAXY, FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION and several others. The sets, unsurprisingly, will be very expensive. Lee Harding is writing a novel. (Oh, you knew that.) Ray Bradbury appears with Stan Freberg in a Chung-King Chow Mein tv commercial. Get that for the Film Group, d'ya hear, Paul Stevens! And that's it again, folks. (Except that my phone number is now 758 1118.) Sayonara.