

The New MILLENNIAL HARBINGER

OR: LIFE, DEATH, THE UNIVERSE, AND ASPECTS OF MODERN DRAINAGE PRACTICE, IN
THREE FORTNIGHTLY PARTS ILLUSTRATED PRICE TUPPENCE

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THIS ISSUE

is respectfully not to mention joyfully
dedicated to Amanda Jean Kirsten, born
19 October 1974. Mother and daughter
well, father drunk. Mother and daughter
chopping wood, feeding the cows &c,
not a pretty sight. The old old story: life,
death, the universe &c, sad. Good luck,
kid. (Uncle drunk.)

I SCORED THE DOUBLE

and immediately took this opportunity to
interview myself, semi-exclusively and in
some depth:

- How does it feel to be the only fan ever
to win the FAPA Egofoo Poll and the
Anzapoll in the same year?
- Rotten.
- How so?
- Very much.
- Let me put it a different way: Why?
- Nobody noticed.
- Ah.
- Dunno why I bother.
- Could've been worse. You might have
won a Hugo and nobody noticed.
- Didn't I win a Hugo?
- No.
- Nobody tells me nothin'.
- The old old story. Inconsiderate, fans is.
- I could be elected President of the
Galactic Federation and nobody would
bother telling me.
- You mean you didn't know?
- Know what?
- You weren't elected President of the
Galactic Federation.
- Bloody hell.

THE BEST OF HANSARD (cont'd):

'It led from having first got a measurement
of this slipperiness they then developed in
England special artificial stone which they
used for covering the bitumen of the road
with.'

THE BEST OF BANGSUND (first of a series):

Left ear-lobe.

(To be continued in 493 fortnightly parts.)

Dear Amanda,

Tonight, in your honour,
and to the possible detriment of my health
(but what's health among friends?), I have
drunk 1 bottle Rhinecastle black label
Hermitage/Cabernet '68 and 1 bottle
Morris's Bin 157 Cabernet-Shiraz '69. I
wouldn't do that for just anyone, you
understand. Your father will tell you that
Hermitage and Shiraz are the same thing,
and he is right. Listen to him, child. You
are only two-and-a-half days old as I write,
and I appreciate your situation (I, too, was
once so young) - but you can't begin too
early to understand these basic facts of life.
What - you ask me - What other facts of
life should one as young as I understand?
Ah (I answer), ah. And not only that:
First: To make a Success of one's Life, one
must remember Never To Antagonize One's
Parents. Man and boy, I have known your
parents (or Ruth and Barry, as I always
thought of them until today) for nigh on
nine years now. Bless you, child: of course
they're older than that. Ruth must be
pushing twenty-odd, if she's a day, and I

shudder to think how old Barry must be by now. (When I first met your mother, of course, she was younger than you are. One day you must ask me about that. When I first met your father he was in his twenties; quite over the hill even then: beardless, holding down a Good Job, addicted to chess, classical music and other vices of the time. He was driving a motor-car called a Rover in those days. You've probably heard of motor-cars, even if you've never heard of Rovers.) You could easily antagonize your father by mentioning to him the Jaguars and Rovers he drove before he was married, and the little Renaults and Holden utilities he has driven since, but I wouldn't recommend it. Offhand I can't think of any way of antagonizing your mother, but I'm sure you'll think of something.

Second: Aunts and uncles are useful. Tell your father, as soon as you can say the words, that Uncle John can beat the pants off him at chess any old day he likes, and Uncle John will love you forever. Your father won't like it much, of course, no matter how true it is, but that's Life - and that's what I'm talking to you about right now. But listen carefully to this: Your father doesn't mind being beaten at chess, because whatever men do they are only playing, deep down. Women are different. You can say that Uncle John can lick your dad at chess until the cows come home, and he won't mind too much. But don't ever - never ever - say that Aunt Sally cooks better or looks nicer or is or does anything better than your mother. Your mother is absolutely, definitely and no-argument the best woman there ever was in the world, and you have to live with that. Your father believes it, I reckon it's pretty close to being true, Aunt Sally will back both of us, so you're out-numbered, whatever you think. I hope that's clear. Adults can be pretty unreasonable about this kind of thing, so it's up to you to keep everyone happy. Just make sure that your parents think they are the best parents there ever were, and your aunts and uncles the best aunts and uncles there ever were, and your grandparents the best grandparents there ever were, and you'll be okay. In fact, if you manage all that, by the time you are 24 you should be Prime Minister.

Third: Don't ever read science fiction or have anything to do with fandom. Don't even ask your parents what those dreadful things are. If you ever become involved with sf or fandom you could easily be thirty before you get to be Prime Minister, and by 2004 I reckon that might be too old by far.

Fourth: Don't ever drink Lindeman's Cawarra claret, unless your father can't afford any better - and even then, hesitate (since there's always the chance that he's gone bankrupt or senile).

Fifth: As you grow older you will realize that aunts and uncles are notoriously hung-up and snooty, and that their main delight in Life is to meddle with the private affairs, emotions &c of their brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews. You must recognize this early, and make sure that your aunts and uncles (and grandparents, too: we're all the same after a certain age) give you all the affection and negotiable symbols of their affection (ie, shares, jewellery, banknotes &c) of which they are capable. The latter you should lock away, out of reach of your grasping parents, and by the time you are 24 you should be not only Prime Minister but Chairman of the Sydney Stock Exchange, Maybe even President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. You are young: anything is possible. (Ask your father!)

Your affectionate uncle,
John
(Canberra, 21.10.74)

THIS HAT was given to me by a Turkish friend who knows no better. You know how all English buses are conducted by Pakistanis? Of course you do. Well, in Melbourne all the trams are conducted by Italians (except when David Grigg can't find a better job). I got on the tram, wearing this hat my Turkish friend gave me, and the conductor came along and said 'Fez pliz.' I handed it to him, 'What's-a dat?' he said. 'It's a fez,' I said. 'Dat's no-a fez of mine,' he said. 'It was given to me by a Turkish friend who knows no better,' I explained. 'Ah! - is-a big different!' he said, punching a hole in it with one of those hole-punching things which all Italian conductors on Melbourne trams seem to carry about their persons. 'Shangri-la-fez!' I muttered to myself.

That was a pretty rotten story, wasn't it.

Actually, when I first made up that story a few days ago, before I consulted my reference library, I thought that Egyptians wore fezzes. (Dumbo!) And I was going to say, in my story, 'It was given to me by an Egyptian friend. He used to be a chiropractor.'

It still wouldn't have been much of a story, I guess.

Facts are the curse of the writing classes.

31 October: Not a bad sort of day at all, and as I write there's still some of it left. (Whatever might be said against Daylight Saving Time, it's still a good feeling to sit at the typewriter after dinner and see daylight outside. It is now 8pm and the dark has just come.)

In the mail today, first, a letter and poem from Margot D'Aubbonnett. Margot wrote to me about April and told me her new address, and I promptly lost her letter. That was sad, because Margot is one of my favourite correspondents, and I've been hoping she would write again. This time, to make sure I have a note of her address I will print it right here: 24 King Street, Paterson, NSW 2421. (Now I'll probably lose this stencil.) All fanzine publishers and letter writers in the audience are invited to send things to Margot. You won't regret it, I assure you.

From Leigh Edmonds, a copy of 'The Goon Goes West', posted from Seattle a couple of months ago when Leigh and Valma were staying with the Busbys. I look forward with great glee to reading John Berry's account of his American trip in 1959. I don't think John is aware of it (mainly because I don't have his address: does that sound familiar?), but I am an avid Berry fan. I have a complete run of Retribution, and I am delighted now to have 'The Goon' to put alongside it. Thank you, Leigh, F. M. and John.

My sister Ruth, who has seen the first two pages of this issue, writes to ask whether NMH stands for National Maternity Honour. Of course it does. It will stand for just about anything, just as I will. For a mother of seven days Ruth writes a rather fantastic letter. Mine ran seven pages, and I know she has written several longer than that. Incredible! It must be all that clean living out in the bush that does it. Ruth says, about NMH, 'I laughed and cried and laughed again.' Gentle readers, you may keep your Hugos and Ditmars and Nobel Prizes: it is my highest ambition to write things that will make people laugh and cry and laugh again, and Ruth has done that, and I cannot conceive a greater honour than that. Nor can I conceive a more precise way of expressing my ultimate reason for writing. George Turner once wrote of me 'John is the verbal acrobat whose overt aim is delight. Be not fooled: the delight is only froth on the serious comment, the acrobatics only a means of wearing truth as a garland rather than as a burden.' Alec Hope introduced me to his wife as 'the funniest man in Canberra'. I am inordinately proud of these things, but I am prouder still of what

my sister has written. If it comes to that... Well, there's an old saying about choosing one's friends but being stuck with relatives, or something to that effect - and I am proud to say that, if they were not relatives, I would still choose my mother, my two sisters and their husbands as friends. In a pretty rotten kind of world that's something to feel good about, and believe me, I feel good.

The final item in today's mail was a review copy of Bert Chandler's THE BITTER PILL (Wren, Melbourne: A\$4.95).

Two days ago I was interviewed for a job as editor with the Australian Government Publishing Service. It was a pleasant interview, and I think I have a fair chance of getting the job. The ad in the paper listed as qualifications 'a highly developed critical faculty and a sense of style, editorial experience and/or appropriate academic qualifications'. That didn't stop me for one moment, of course. By my standards I don't have any of those qualifications, but what I do have should be enough for AGPS.

I mention that because a few months ago I had an interview for a similar job, with a different outfit, and one of the gentlemen interviewing me asked whether I would prefer to read Agatha Christie or Irving Wallace - or something like that. I've forgotten the authors mentioned, but it was that kind of stupid question. I forget exactly what I said, but it was something like 'I would prefer not to read either, but I would choose Agatha Christie, since I have already read enough of Irving Wallace.' Something like that anyway. The AGPS people didn't ask me any dumb questions like that, but I remembered that incident tonight while reading Bert's book. Would you rather read A. Bertram Chandler or Len Deighton? (Be honest.)

When I went to the AGPS interview I was scared they would ask me 'Who is your favourite author?' My absolutely honest answer would have been 'I have two favourite authors: Bert Chandler and George Turner.' And they are. If I were asked to nominate the authors I considered greatest or something, as distinct from favourite, my answer would be different.

But it's all so silly. Who is the greatest author? Shakespeare ('yawn'). What is your favourite Beethoven string quartet? The fourteenth (but I'm not in the mood for it just now). What is the best car currently available? (The BMW 525? The top-of-the-range Mercedes? What the hell? I can't afford it, whatever it is.)

Comparisons are odorous, as Dogberry (busy doing nothing) remarked. I think he was wrong. Comparisons are odorous (or if you prefer, odious - but that's not what Willy Wagadagger wrote) only if they are unfair, ignorant, malicious, or a combination of all three. If I compare the writing of Captain A. Bertram Chandler with the writing of Len Deighton I run the risk of being odorous only because of ignorance, since the comparison is fair (both writers are respected and popular in their different fields, and most highly regarded as story tellers) and I bear no malice towards either.

I thought 'The Bitter Pill' (Ditmar Award, Best Australian Science Fiction 1970) was a pretty good story. Maybe the basic idea wasn't all that original, but it was interesting, and Bert made an interesting story about it. Now it has become a novel, in hard covers, issued by an enterprising Australian publisher who knows that sf is as acceptable as the next genre these days, and that sf about Australia is a better risk than, say, George Turner's novel about surfies and boxers and Great Danes. (Bert's book, according to Lee Harding, is 'a chillingly prophetic novel of the near future in Australia', whereas George's book is a chillingly truthful novel of the recent past in Australia. George's book remains, to my knowledge, unpublished.)

I don't like THE BITTER PILL much. The characters don't interest me, and I have a suspicion that they didn't interest Bert much. A nit-picking example: one of the main characters is Peter on page 21 and Jim by page 62. I expect the author to remember his characters' names, even if I can't. But sf, many people still say, is about ideas. Well, we've had the idea already, in the short story. In the novel it's not enough of an idea, or perhaps Bert hasn't explored it enough to warrant the longer treatment. There are those who say that 'the novel is character in action'. There are those, especially those interested in sf, who might say that 'the novel is the development of idea'. Either way, I think Bert has failed in this novel. But there are also those who don't give a stuff for 'the novel': they just like a good yarn. Fair enough. They can decide whether THE BITTER PILL is a good yarn, not me - mainly because I'm not sure what they mean.

The more I read by Bert Chandler the more I feel that he is most at home, most convincing, and most enjoyable when he is writing about the sea and ships, and about the men whose life is the sea and ships. Have

a look at chapters 15 and 16 in this book, for example, and see whether you agree with me that the writing here is much more immediate and authentic than elsewhere in the book. In Philosophical Gas 27 Bert wrote about sea stories, and asked himself: 'Do I make the transition (it shouldn't be hard) from sea stories thinly disguised as science fiction to sea stories that are just that?' I would not dare, unless half-drunk, to tell anyone what to write - and certainly not a man who started writing before I was born - unless he asked me. In PG Bert wasn't asking me specifically to tell him what to write, but I do think he was asking the question generally and genuinely, of himself, me and you, his readers. And I will stick my neck out, though barely one-quarter drunk, and say yes: please, Bert, write about the sea - novels, short stories, fictive essays, reminiscence, anything you like. What you write might not sell. I will hazard the guess that you won't match Conrad or Forester or Slocum, or Melville, Dana, Tomlinson, Masfield, Marryat - you name him. But who wants to be the second Conrad when he can be the only A. Bertram Chandler? Maybe I am too interested in autobiography to be any judge of fiction, but I feel it would be a crying shame if you never got round to writing, directly from your experience, about ships, the sea and seamen.

Sorry: I got a bit carried away there talking to my friend Bert. I started out talking about the author A. Bertram Chandler, and I'd better get back to my objective-critic stance before I forget what I wanted to say.

Captain Chandler, as I was saying, might very well write what is called a rattling good yarn, but (as I was saying) I'm not much of a judge of that. I do know that he writes very badly at times, so badly that I wouldn't go on reading if he were not a friend. In one place in this book he has a prison guard, a young roughneck of about twenty, saying 'Step on it, grand-dad! We haven't all fucking night!' I have never heard an Australian talk like that. If the guard had said 'We haven't got all fuckin' night!' I would recognize him, because that's how Australians talk. Not all Australians, but the ones who use the universal adjective. There are many other examples of this unreal dialogue. On page 46 a psychologist says... No, he doesn't 'say'. Hardly anyone in this novel 'says' anything: they all 'complain' or 'contribute' or in some similar manner avoid saying. The psychologist 'regarded Clayton over his steeped fingers'. (And he said:) 'He is, today, discredited, but he was, essentially, a great man, and a very clever one...' It's hard, even for a psychologist, to

