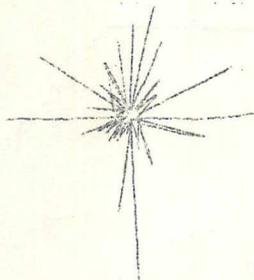
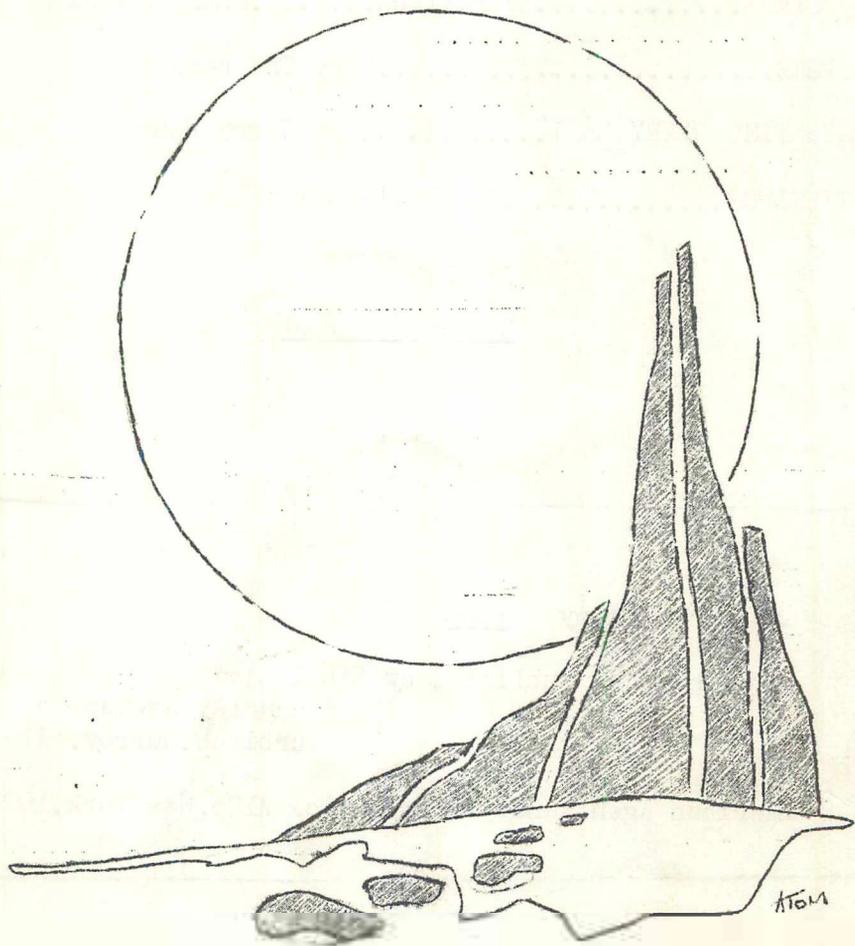


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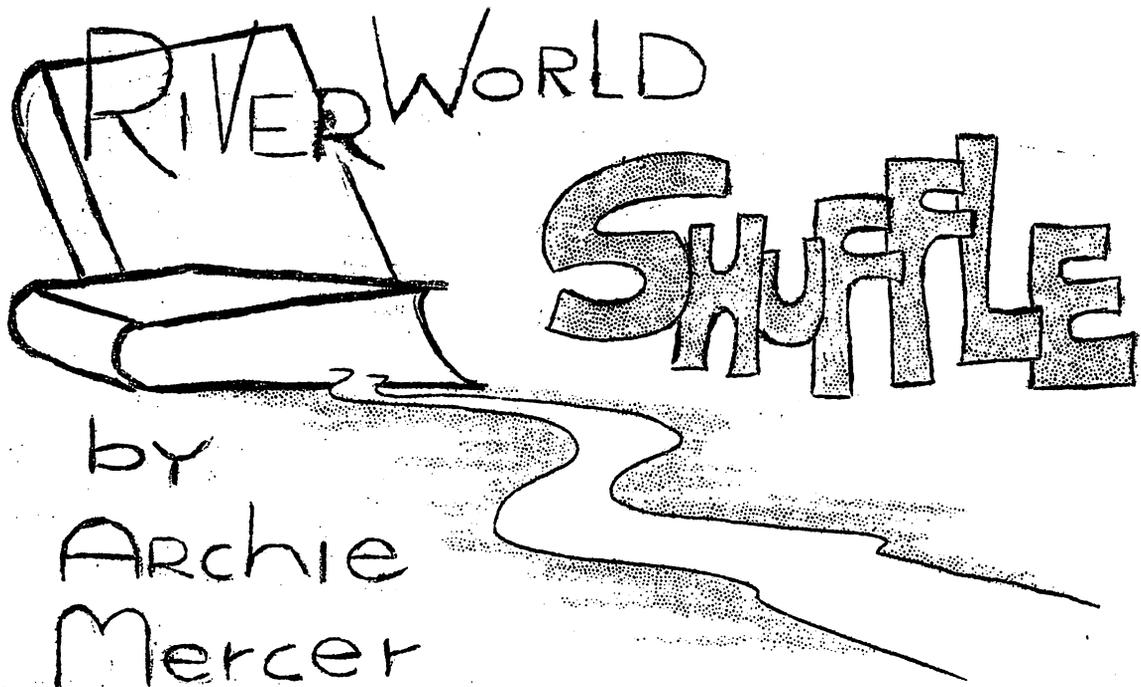
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RIVERWORLD

SHUFFLE

by
Archie
Mercer

Philip Jose Farmer's "Riverworld" series of stories is based on one of the most intriguing conceptions of science-fantasy that I have ever come across. Two books that I know of have appeared so far—TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO and THE FABULOUS RIVERBOAT, both published in America by Putnam in hardback and Berkley in paperback, and a third such is promised—apart from which at least one story on a "side-issue" theme has appeared in a magazine. Unfortunately both the story's and the magazine's titles escape me.

Terrestrial history comes to a full stop in 2008 AD. At some unspecified time thereafter, virtually the entire human and humanoid population of Earth, right back to the very beginning in the mists of time, is simultaneously resurrected on the planet dubbed "Riverworld". The entire planet, from pole to pole (the precise set-up at the poles, however, has yet to be revealed) appears to consist of one interminable river-valley, maybe ten miles wide overall from rim-wall to rim-wall, winding round and round the planet. The people are dumped down all along the banks of this river, sorted and assorted according to some system that tends to mix like and unlike in rough proportions, their necessities are provided for, and they are then left to get on with it. The nature of the individual being unchanged, leader-types still tend to seize the reins of government and follower-types still tend to accept their lead, and before long little kingdoms, republics, and empires of a mainly tyrannical nature are rising and falling from end to end of the river.

The physical norm has been established at approximately 25 years old, though everybody keeps full memory of his terrestrial life. Children who died very young are not, it would seem, resurrected at all, though those who died from the age of five or six onwards are resurrected at the same stage and slowly mature to the 25-or-so norm. Men lack facial hair (the reason for this has not so far been explained), and women lack pregnability, and disease is unknown. Death is still very much possible, and frequent—but whoever dies on Riverworld is simply re-resurrected next day in some other sector of the world-valley, memories still intact, to carry on as

RIVERWORLD SHUFFLE 2

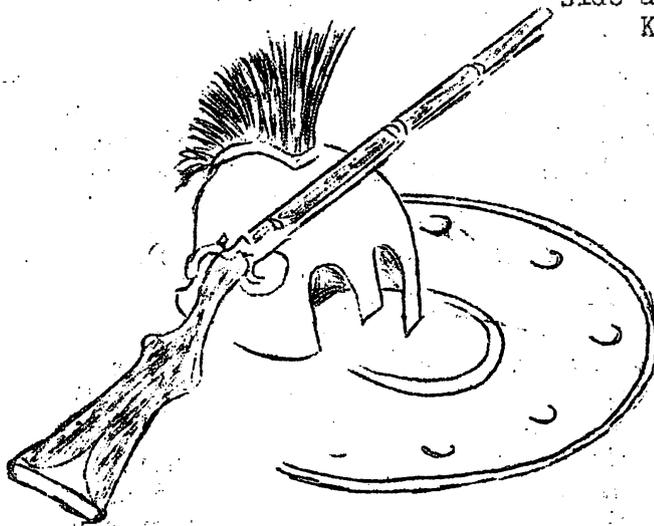
part of whichever community he finds himself among. That's the set-up, then; the overall plotline of the books concerns an attempt to ascertain the whys and wherefores of it all.

Having stated so much, though, the possibilities of casual development are almost infinite. Consider the stupendous cast of characters! SCATTERED BODIES features the 19th-century explorer and adventurer Sir Richard Burton; playing opposite him, as it were, is Alice Liddell that was, the little girl to whom Lewis Carroll used to tell stories. FABULOUS RIVERBOAT features Sam Clemens, better known by his pen-name of Mark Twain, and also shows us glimpses of such worthies as Odysseus, Cyrano de Bergerac, and King John of England. Hermann Goring makes an appearance in both books. The magazine story with the forgotten title features Tom Mix, and introduces a Jewish character tagged by name only as "Yeshua" but whose actual identity is left in no doubt. Yeshua meets up with a certain Dominican monk named Kramer, of "Sprenger und Kramer" notoriety; the two, naturally enough, do not hit it off at all well. Others of the great, the near-great, and the related-to-the-great, lurk constantly in the wings.

Consider a few of the sub-plots as yet unused! Napoleon and Wellington could meet in the field again under somewhat different but no less interesting conditions.

Or they could find themselves fighting side by side against Caesar, or Alexander, or Genghis Kahn. Davy Crockett could find himself

stalking anything from footloose 20th-century Bedouin to Neanderthals. Hero of Alexandria and James Watt could compare notes - or, more probably, find themselves designing steam-operated munitions for two rival mini-states. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers could dispute face-to-face with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Shakespear and Shaw could compete for the favours of Cleopatra. Hadyn could compose some variation on a theme by Brahm. And many, many more.



Playing strictly fair, Phil Farmer has confined the characters he has used in this series to three broad classes: known historical figures, figures from myth but with a presumed historical origin, and fictional characters created strictly for the series. I think he has done right in this. However, it by no means exhausts the versatility of the theme. I would like to see a parallel riverworld peopled by characters out of pre-existing fiction. Sanders of the River, for one, would be in his element. That other keeper of the African peace, Lord Greystoke, would likewise be very much in his, though he'd miss the animals. (Imagine him and Mowgli meeting!) Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes could use their joint powers of hyperacute observation and deductive logic to settle the whys and wherefores of their riverworld in one short story. The genteel ladies of the Victorian women novelists could be seen adjusting in their various ways to the demands of their new environment. And since humanoids are involved as well as Homo Sapiens, various sectors of the riverbank could be well-stocked with

elves, dwarves, ents and hobbits. Orcs too, for that matter. The Saint meets Sarumen, anyone?

To turn from the strictly literary side of things, it would be possible to base a chess-variant on the riverworld theme. Have a number of simultaneous games, and every time a piece is "taken" on one board it promptly turns up on another board in another game. If there were six boards, arranged in a rough circle, then the system might be that a taken pawn moved one board clockwise, a bishop two, a knight three, a castle four and a queen five. Each piece would appear on the equivalent square to the one it was on before, unless that square was already occupied, in which case it could appear on whichever adjacent square its new operator chose. It would then participate in its existing colour. The multi-game would be very slow (probably postal, of course) but it would presumably still be possible for a board to achieve checkmate. (Stalemate would cease to have valid meaning except in the short term.) A checkmated board and the pieces it contained at the time would be removed from the multi-game, and the others would continue as before except that a taken piece would "jump" its old board in its flight to a new home. Eventually, one hopes, only one board would be left - then one overall winner with a really heterogeneous "army"!

Enough of this wargaming -back to the bookshelf! We have thus far considered two possible literary riverworlds -one, Farmer's own, based on actual historical people, the other based on fictional characters that have been used elsewhere before. Another possibility would be to combine both of these in one super-riverworld, factual and fictitious characters alike, so that it would be possible for one of the latter to meet, not only the author who originally created him, but also any actor who may have become identified with the part. Thus a three-way confrontation between Frank Baum, Dorothy-who-went-to-Oz, and Judy Garland could prove well worth looking-in on. Numerous similar three-way and even multi-way associations readily suggest themselves. Think of all the actors who have every played Tarzan!

But of course, the aspect of Riverworld that strikes nearest to home is that, under the rules as set up by Phil Farmer in his stories, we are all included in the deal - you, me, Philip Jose Farmer himself, the lot of us. All of us are there, resurrected somewhere along the mighty river-bank. So what's in it for us?

Well, for a start, what a chance have we of being reunited with our nearest and dearest? Not, it would seem, a very high one. Generally speaking, the majority of resurectees turn up initially in the company of a few thousand of their neighbours-and-contemporaries; a minority turn up amongst only a few hundred of the same. Brief consideration of the numerous thousands that go to make up the full spectrum of one's neighbours-and-contemporaries will quickly demonstrate that by chance alone, one is unlikely to be accompanied by any of one's close relatives - and the experience of the characters in the stories would appear to bear this out. But then, at bottom, would the preservation of family groupings under such circumstances necessarily be all that a good thing?

Take husbands and wives, for instance. Would a typical couple, having died somewhere in their mutual seventies, on finding themselves abruptly resurrected into 25-year-old bodies rush passionately back into one another's arms desiring a full replay? Possibly they would, at the very beginning. However, it is only too probable that once the initial ardour had been quenched, one or both of them would start to notice all the other available 25-year-old talent and begin to get ideas about a really fresh start. Then parents and children. The resurrected parent would very likely want to have his children round him again. However, those "children" might themselves have died in their own

seventies -would they find it easy to accept 25-year-old parents all of a sudden? I suspect not, and that children would tend to avoid their parents like the plague. Sibling relationships, being based on single-generation interests, would probably hold up rather better. But - in all these cases, it seems to me, the possibility of incest would loom considerably larger than it does in this day and age. The fact is that, on Riverworld as Farmer envisages it, the only valid reason for any prohibition on incest would be that our culture has already indoctrinated us against it. On the whole, I would say that it would be easier all round if near relatives did not stay together on Riverworld. And at least one would be very unlikely to find oneself completely isolated, with nobody at hand from one's own time and speaking one's own language.

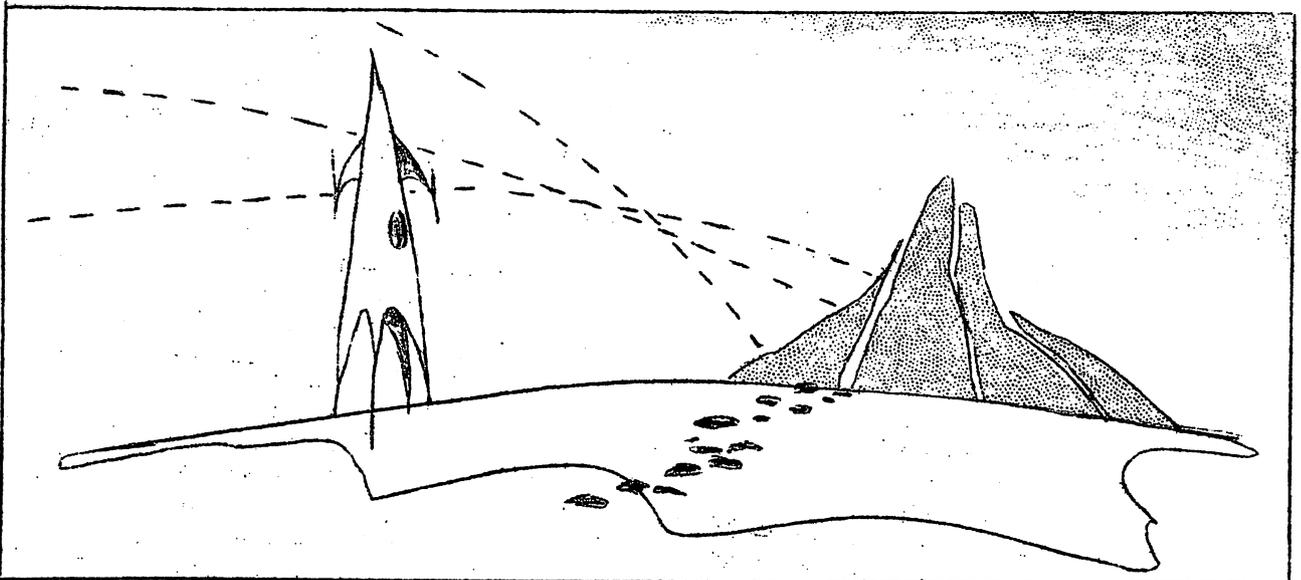
What happens then is largely up to you. Perhaps you're the natural "leader" type the one with the commanding presence that people will automatically turn to for orders. Or perhaps you're

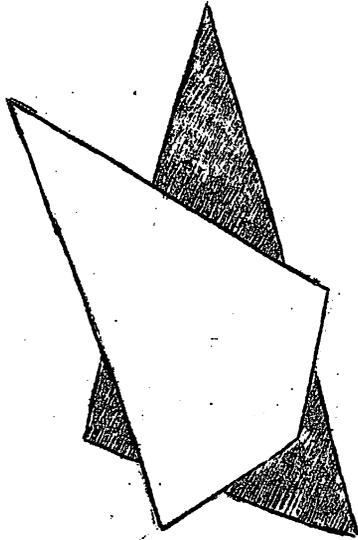


the natural "henchman" type, only too happy to have someone tell you what to do so long as you yourself aren't going to do too badly out of it. On the other hand, the chances are that anybody who gets to read this article will be neither of the above, but will be simply an individual who would rather be left alone to enjoy what, without the intervention of the two categories previously delineated, could very well prove to be a reasonable facsimile of paradise.

If that's you, then I wish you the very best of luck. You'll need it. So will I.

Archie Mercer





nibblings

RACE AGAINST TIME by Piers Anthony, Sidgwick & Jackson, £1.50. Intended for the juvenile market; I enjoyed it mainly because of the puzzle element. John discovers he lives in an artificial culture—and that he is one of six racially pure specimens carefully guarded. Tension nicely calculated and characters good.

THE STAR TREASURE by Keith Laumer, Sidgwick & Jackson, £2.25. Space Lieut. Tarleton's adventures as he tries to help a friend. Rather a passive hero for a change, one to whom things happen.

OPERATION UMANAQ by John Rankine, £2.25. Mark Chevron discovers that there is a new war going on, this one is being waged with ice! Briskly told and ingenious.

THE ETERNAL FRONTIERS by James Schmitz. Set on a planet where two types of descendants from original human settlers battle for supremacy. Swimmers live in free-fall: Walkers stride around freely. Not as good as usual, chiefly because the characters are not particularly interesting. £2.25. Sidgwick & Jackson.

NEW WRITINGS IN SF edited by Kenneth Bulmer. Sidgwick & Jackson, £2.25. This gets better each time. I liked best NOW HEAR THE WORD by David Garnett, a nice exploration of the affect of a man who can make things happen. Cherry Wilder is the first woman to appear in this series and her THE ARK OF JAMES CARLYLE is a well-told tale of a man and his alien friends. I still don't like the Aldiss ENIGMAS, even if the title is very truthful.

THE SHEEP LOOK UP by John Brunner, Ballantine No 23612, \$1.65. This one should please the "save the Earth" people. Told in the STANDON ZANZIBAR format, makes dismal reading. A very gloomy future!

THE DARKNESS ON DIAMONDIA by A.E. Van Vogt, Sidgwick & Jackson, £2.25. The Van Vogt style of writing has always been distinctive, but never more so than here. The hero is hardly introduced when he is rendered unconscious! So the interest shifts to another character. One then nips back to the first to find him in the body of an alien! The viewpoint continues to shift in this fashion, and the plot becomes more and more entangled, I wish I could say all becomes clear in the end. Dazzling pace.

DYING INSIDE by Robert Silverberg, Sidgwick & Jackson, £2.25. Brilliant novel about a man born telepathic. He has reached the age of 41 and his power is waning. It has been a gift and a curse. Now the time has come when he will no longer be different, he looks forward with fear to what he feels is a kind of dying. Due to

the skill of the writer we enter the man's mind and learn to know his strangeness. Surrounding characters are also well drawn. Highly recommended.

PLANET PROBABILITY by Brian Ball, Sidgwick & Jackson. £1.95. Complicated plot of Marvell and Liz sent to the planet where the first Frames were produced.. a follow-up to the previous Frames stories. The Frames are still an intriguing idea and a good setting for adventure tales.

THE LOST CONTINENT by C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne. Pan/Ballantine. 40p. Introduction by Lin Carter. Originally written in 1899, a famous lost Atlantis story. Very good fantasy.

DISCOVERIES IN FANTASY. Edited by Lin Carter. Pan/Ballantine. 40p. Four authors who specialised in 'lost world' stories. Ernest Bramah, Richard Garnett, Donald Corley and Eden Phillpotts. 7 stories in all. Bramah shows an imaginary Chinese world, with wit. Garnett provides amusement with his fantasy too. Corley's style I found too stilted, but I liked Phillpotts' vision of mankind's history seen through the eyes of the Gods on Olympus.

OTHER DAYS OTHER EYES by Bob Shaw. Pan SF. 35p. At the heart of this is "slow-glass" which keeps the picture of what happened in the past. Shows how it affects the life of the inventor--and eventually the whole world. Imaginative and told well.

THE WORLD OF JACK VANCE. Ace Books. 95¢. 9 stories, vivid and good collection.

PERRY RHODAN. No 35. Ace Books. 95¢. Beware the Microbes is the lead story by Kurt Mahr, Perry's menace--the threat of a plague.

PERRY RHODAN. No 36. Ace. 95¢. Features MAN AND MONSTER by K.H. Sheer --menace this time is a madness-inducing poison. Fast plotting, no let up;

STAR HUNTER/VOODOO PLANET. by Andre Norton. Ace Double. 95¢. Two adventure novels. Young man having troubles with his memories after a crash-landing is well contrasted with the other story of a planet of refugees from Africa after a race war. Influence of witch-doctors shown in plausible plot.

WIZARD OF EARTHSEA by Ursula K. LeGuin. Ace. 95¢. Pure fantasy but I liked it. This explores the idea of a proud young boy learning to use his power and trying to run before he can walk. Very unusual.

SWORDS AGAINST DEATH by Fritz Leiber. Ace. 95¢. When ACE first published this it cost 60¢! Fafhrd and Grey Mouser in a series of adventures.. skulls, jewels, and places like Murder Alley!

THE SILKIE by A.E. Van Vogt. Ace. 95¢. Silkies are man-made creatures that can move through water or space. Man's creations--or are they? This is the central puzzle told with the author's usual verve.

ZARDOZ by John Boorman with Bill Stair. Pan. 35p. I saw some of the film on TV and this probably helped my enjoyment. Zed discovers there is another world to his own where the Eternals live. Writing is plain and simple and the effect of being seen through a film director's eye comes through strongly.

SWORSHIPS OF SCORPIO. DAW No 81. 95¢. by Allan Burt Akers. A Dray Prescott adventure, fantasy done with panache.

THE TELZEY TOY by James Scmitz. DAW. No 82. 95¢. 3 Telzey stories told briskly with humour. In the first there are two Telzeys and it takes their combined ingenuity to find out which is real and which the imitation!

GAMES PSYBORGS PLAY by Pierre Barbet. DAW No 83. 95¢. Captain Setni on a planet with a culture of old Earth, mythical and all. Puzzle--is it real? If not who set it up?

SINGULARITY STATION by Brian N. Ball. DAW. No 84. 95¢. Taut adventure of the skipper who lost his ship in a "singularity in space", and his attempts to find out what happens there.

CAP KENNEDY. No 4 ENEMY WITHIN THE SKULL by Gregory Kern. DAW. 75¢. Cap has an enemy this time with the power to turn men into little better than beasts.

Nibblings 3

POLYMATH by John Brunner, DAW No 85. The author successfully contrasts the different reactions of two crash-landed ships. One group adjusts to living there; the other concentrates on getting away. Good characterisation and plot.

THE BODELAN WAY by Louis Trimble, DAW No 86.95¢. Earthman Endo is a teacher and Margil is his pupil. She is very large, temperamental, feline, and exasperating. Amusingly entertaining.

THE BOOK OF FRITZ LEIBER, DAW No 87.95¢. A goodly mixture for Leiber fans with both stories and articles. One of the latter is on his love of monsters.

A QUEST FOR SIMBILIS by Michael Shee. Fantasy adventure of two friends on the dying Earth searching for a legendary overlord.

MIDSUMMER CENTURY by James Blish, DAW, 95¢, No 89. This always interesting writer propounds a future with man versus intelligent birds.

MINDSHIP by Gerard F. Conway, DAW No 90.95¢. Ships to the stars by using mind-force - allow this possibility it follows each ship would have a man "sensitive" to act as a "cork". This story of a man forced to take these mental reins allows the author to explore the possibilities in a thoughtful way.

THE BURROWS BENEATH by Brian Lumley, DAW No 91. In the Lovecraft tradition, fine stuff for the horror fan.

PROMISED LAND by Brian Stableford, DAW No 92.95¢. Another adventure of Grainger told by him breezily as he sceptically views colonists who have found the "promised land".

CAP KENNEDY, No 5, DAW.95¢. Cap has his mind thrown back into the past - so this time he needs the help of his team.

THE ORCHID CAGE by Herbert W. Franke, DAW No 79. A new planet is approached by two exploration teams. They are competitors out to block each other - but then they discover that the seemingly ruined city can prevent attempts to penetrate its secrets. I was kept guessing by this one.

THE TIN ANGEL by Ron Goulart, DAW no 80. Bert is agent for a talking dog - Bowser who is a miracle of cybernetic and medical engineering. Bowser is a top TV star beloved by all - except Bert! Typical Goulart humour laced with cynicism and out-of-this-world gadgetry.

THE MISTRESS OF DOWNING STREET by Walter Harris, Corgi Books, 30p. Viola is the widow of the assassinated Prime Minister, and is voted into the post herself. But Britain, and America are owned and ruled by Thudd who has control of the robotic culture that gives him his power. Plenty sex in this SF, although it has rather a routine air to it. Still it is a nice change to have a heroine a la James Bond. Fairly marginal SF, not enough background details.

STONEHENGE by Leon Stover & Harry Harrison, Sphere Books, 30p. Briskly told adventure which carries an explanation for the building of Stonehenge into the bargain. Good detail of prehistoric times, with fine characterisation.

THE COMMITTED MEN by M. John Harrison, Panther Books, 35p. A powerful picture of Britain with its population dying out under radiation sickness. This shows a small group headed by a doctor who decide to take a baby born with a reptilian skin to a small group of such people they have heard about. Obviously they are to be the inheritors. Easy to become caught up in this story, very well told.

THE MOMENTS OF ECLIPSE By Brian W. Aldiss, Panther SF, 35p. 14 short stories of varying length. I can admire the dexterity with words, the ability to conjure up a scene, an atmosphere, a possible future; but I cannot like any of it. The men and women that are presented are mainly characters with whom I am completely out of sympathy. They posture, they agonise, and I remain unmoved.

DRAGONQUEST by Anne McCaffrey, Sphere, 40p. This continues the adventures of the Dragonriders of Pern, first encountered in DRAGONFLIGHT. Not quite as good as the first but still a fine imaginative idea - of humans and fire-breathing dragons in partnership. The politics of the various Weyrs and Holds make absorbing reading. I was glad to find out what happened next to Lessa!

Nibblings 4

MUTAND 59: by Kit Pedler & Gerry Davis. Pan Books 4Op. This comes from the creators of DOOMWATCH, that highly successful TV series. The title describes a plastic eater which creates havoc in our highly technical society. We are shown mainly the horror and terror that spreads throughout London. Excitingly told.

THE EARLY ASIMOV: Vol. 2. Panther SF. 35p. Apart from the fact that here is some of the best of Asimov's stories from the thirties, there is the added bonus of his explanations of their original setting before and after each story.

THE GODS THEMSELVES by Isaac Asimov. Panther SF. 4Op. A new Asimov is fine by me, even if it isn't the one I am waiting for! The discovery of a source of energy available from a parallel universe is told through the scientists who are made "failures" because they did not take part in its discovery. The characters are as interesting as the scientific theory which is advanced so clearly. This one won both the HUGO and NEBULA awards!

THE BROKEN SWORD by Paul Anderson. Sphere Books. 35p. This is a well known fantasy classic, the tale of a war between the Elf Kingdom and the Trolls. It is told with a wealth of imagination and knowledge. I must confess I dislike it, too much blood and death here for me.

DARK INFERNO by James White. Corgi Books. 30p. A very exciting story of a wrecked spaceship told by the Doctor who has to look after the passengers in their survivor pods till rescue arrives. Suspense is well maintained, and pace lively.

SON OF THE TREE by Jack Vance. Mayflower Books. 30p. Actually there is not very much about the Tree in this story, which follows the adventures of Joe. The tree is described as ruling the planet, but not many details given. At any rate Joe falls foul of the Druids who are the religious leaders.

NEXT OF KIN by Eric Frank Russell. Sphere. 30p. The story of the captured spy who keeps his alien captors buzzing with his invention of an invisible avenging 'other self' is amusingly told, with this author's usual ingenuity.

PROSTHO PLUS by Piers Anthony. Sphere. 35p. A really comic story of a dentist who is taken into space to minister to some very weird aliens. Made me laugh.

MASQUE OF A SAVAGE MANDARIN by Philip Nedford Robinson. Panther SF. A really nasty one, of a scientist who experiments on human beings. Not a redeeming light in it anywhere that I can see. Just a nasty idea taken to a logical conclusion.

NEBULA AWARD STORIES. Edited by Clifford D. Simak. Panther SF. 35p. Fine collection of 8 stories. One that lingers most with me is IN THE QUEUE by Keith Laumer. A story going nowhere about people going nowhere, which is quietly fascinating.

THE NEW ADAM by Stanley Weinbaum. Sphere Books. 35p. No 14 of their SF Classics series. This is the story of a superman, rather a sombre tale exploring how advanced abilities such as possessed by Edmund can lead to little happiness.

A POCKETFUL OF STARS. Edited by Damon Knight. Pan SF. 50p. 19 stories so gives money's worth. These were selected from the famous Milford SF Writers Conferences, and each story has a preface from the author. The stories are all off the beaten track, some more worthwhile than others, but all of them, stimulating. I've just re-read them all, and still think the best is Carol Carr's YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT TROUBLES.

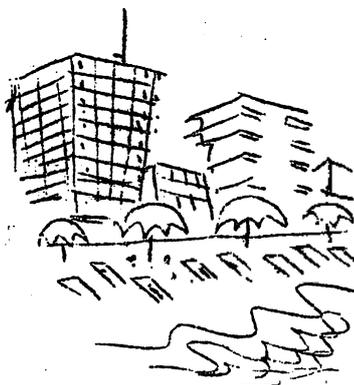
HOW THE MIGHTY ARE FALLEN by Thomas Burnett Swann. DAW No 94. The story of David and Jonathan told from a fantasy angle; would interest Renault fans a lot.

IDENTITY SEVEN by Robert Lory. DAW No 95. Identity is something Hunters Assoc. uses freely, and Identity Seven is ready to take the place of Six who has been killed. Action adventure.

HUNTERS OF GOR: No 96. DAW. by John Norman. 8th book in the Saga of Tarl Cabot, told with verve in the Burroughs tradition.

Letters

Ted Tubb
67 Houston Rd
London. SE.23

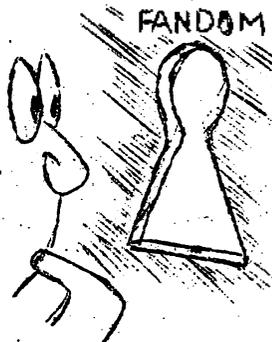


"There are times when I feel ashamed - here you are sending me Scottishe and here I am, taking them, reading them, meaning to write and thank you but, somehow, never being able to find anything worthwhile to say. Oh for that brilliant turn of word, the mastery of inflating the trite into the important, the ability to spin a web of pure fascination with but a paltry 26 letters and a scatter of points and things. But no, the muse will not come and, like the master at whose feet I crouch, Bob Shaw, no less, I echo his sentiments. But the CONOLOGICAL ORDER by Mervyn Barrett - he's so right! He's right! Again I say it, the man is right! Cons ain't what they used to be - or I'm not what I thought I was. Ah, well, tempus fugit and all that, but the idea of a con held in Spain has attractions - cheap booze, sun, a pool to lie in, soft beds, and we can talk too. Book me down for the very first one organised but, not I hasten to add, by me. Young blood must take the strain. Anyway, thanks Ethel, for remembering me and endless power to your cranking arm..." ***Like you I could get enthusiastic over a con in Spain..but also want no part of the organising!***

John Brunner
The Square House
Palmer St
South Petherton
SOM. TA135DB

"Scottishe to hand and enjoyed. Felicitations on your promotion; I'm glad you explained what Grade 7A means - I'm old enough to remember Grade A, just, which as a kid I always imagined to be a "grey day" and wondered what it had to do with cows...but Grade 7 is new to me. Pass on my thanks, please, to Mervyn for his kind remarks about me. It's nice to be noticed now and then."

Darroll Pardoe
24 Othello Close
Hartford
Huntingdon
PE18 7SU



"Mervyn, like myself, appears to have found the programming at OMPACON somewhat confused. I do agree that Gray Walter's speech was a disaster. First it started so late that most of the potential audience had drifted off to get ready for the banquet, and then there was that embarrassing speech of thanks afterwards. Be that as it may the talk itself was (for me at least) one of the best things that happened at the whole convention. It's a pity it's not been put into print in some fanzine (did anyone tape it at the time?). I don't agree that sercon items should dominate the programme to the exclusion of fannish ones. The balance should be that way, yes, but a few fan items provide a counter to the programme getting too serious and constructive. The fan items should be carefully selected, though. Less of the interminable panels on fanzine publishing, and more items of the calibre of Pete Weston's talk at the first

Novacon. Con committees need to find items outside the usual run of fan and pro topics, and with a little imagination it can be done. Witness the greatest feat of imagination on the OMPACON committee: inviting Gray Walter to give a talk. That was unusual and definitely worthwhile. I must read that fanzine book by Dr Wertham some time, though I think yours is the only favourable review of it I've seen so far. Fandom must look very odd from the outside.***Mind, it is easy to talk of using the imagination in programming but every year it gets more difficult to think up something new. I notice you don't propose one! I guess the unfavourable reviews you saw were mostly by fans who expected the book to be written with the knowledge of an insider. The fascination of it to me lay in the very fact that it wasn't just another fan writing about it all..but an outsider who had taken a cool look. Frankly I was grateful that we were taken seriously..it would have been so easy to have taken the subject comically.***

Mike Glicksohn
141 High Park Ave.
Toronto, Ontario.
M6P 2S3, Canada

"I couldn't help but smile at the number of people in the lettercol who were apparently writing to you for the first time in ages and felt called upon to apologise for that fact. I expect you'll get lots more letters on this issue, as fans guiltily think "Good heavens, what if she did stop publishing and I hadn't written since the big blizzard of '58..?". Good to hear from Bob Shaw again: it's been a while since he appeared in a fanzine. I admire his new research project enormously. I'll be in England this summer, and perhaps I can benefit from the fruits of his labours. The program director for TORCON insituted a series of luncheons for the members of the keynote panel each afternoon. The panel members were also warned in advance of the topic in question. Thus they came prepared, and by attending a free luncheon in one of the hotel's smaller function rooms, had a chance to plan out some pattern to what was to be said. It also insured that evryone was there on time! I hope this sort of practice will become standard at big conventions in the future. I don't fully agree with Mervyn

on the dropping of fannish panels but I heartily endorse a fandom-wide ban on fanzine-production panels! A certain amount of fannish programming serves to introduce the newer fans to some of the history and tradition of fandom. And this is a very worthwhile goal. The mind boggles at Sam Long's offer! A chance



to launch a rocket from the Cape offered in a fanzine. All Knowledge may indeed be found in fandom! What a beautiful idea: no wonder fandom is so much fun to dabble in. Can't write a letter without once again praising the Atomillos."

Peter Weston

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"Congratulations, Mervyn Barrett, prospective chairman of the 1975 British Easter Convention! Such a fate is the least you can expect after telling so many embittered organisers where we went wrong. That's not meant as a put-down, only that I think you simply cannot appreciate the complexity of the problems you will encounter, unless you have actually lived through the experience of running a convention yourself. All of your suggestions are more-or-less valid, but the difficulties of putting them into practice escalate in direct proportion to the degree of conscientiousness of the committee. But I'm interested to hear your criticisms of Ompacon; this must be one of the first adverse reports I've seen, yet I personally was bored for the first time ever at a convention. It was as if the right ingredients were there, but somehow had been left lying around without the breath of life...a disappointing feeling.

I'd like to correct your impression of the BrumGroup party, although you are quite right about it being a washout. We donated £10 to that party as a goodwill gesture, but among the things we had asked for (and had been promised) were (a) a separate room, (b) a punch-bowl, and (c) subdued lighting and music if possible. Just imagine trying to set up a party in a brilliantly-lighted room, permanently half-full of fans, without any ingredients except for the bottles we brought. The party was doomed before it began-and I'm afraid Fred Hemmings must carry the can for that one! As an aside, I was a bit disgusted with that bar; surely fans are not such second-class citizens that we merit only a makeshift bar of trestle tables and rough 'classroom' chairs round rickety picnic tables? There was a perfectly comfortable lounge bar at that hotel, and things would have been far more pleasant if we could have used it.

Casting my mind back to the Worcestercon for a minute, I hope you'll give us some credit for at least trying to be original. Our films, for instance, included "Charly", "Tenth Victim", and "Alphaville", all fairly recent and quite expensive, the first two being in Cinemascope (requiring two modern projectors, with anamorphic lenses). And ask Gerald Bishop whether he had only to give the films "a minimum of attention". I dare you! Trouble for me really began when, for reasons I never entirely understood, Brian Aldiss said that he was going to live in Hong Kong for a year and resigned as our Guest of Honour. This was in January, two months before the convention, in the middle of a postal strike! But really I went wrong with the Worcestercon mostly in the way that you suggest. Although my committee spent a fantastic amount of time in trying to anticipate everything, we suddenly realised on the day that all this organisation had a built-in assumption; that the programme would run like clockwork, by itself, without continual prodding.

After this assumption fell to bits with the first item, I subsequently spent my entire weekend running around in circles looking for the next speaker. It developed into a routine after a while; up early to get a hurried breakfast and then check seating, microphones, glasses of water, chalk, blackboard and so on. Then find the first speaker, drag him unwillingly away from his breakfast

Letters 4

(by this time we were running five minutes late already); simultaneously smile insincerely and convince passing fans that the programme was going to start any minute now. Dump speaker, fiddle with the amplifiers, rush into restaurant and drag sleepy audience away from their breakfasts (now we're running ten minutes late). Finally, I would jump on to the stage, make a few glib remarks about the great talk/panel/floor-show we were about to experience, introduce the star and rush to the back of the room to fiddle with the amplifiers again. After waving my arms and bellowing "Use the microphone!" "Switch it on!" a few times, I was then free to depart, with nearly an hour to find the next speaker and/or panel.

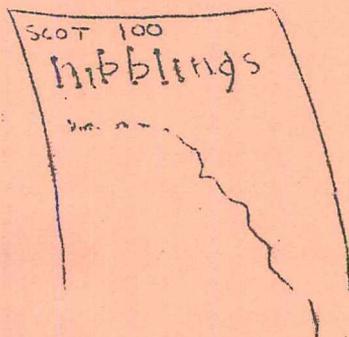
Panels were the worst. God, how I hated organising panels, The members tended to scatter to the four winds. Do you know, one panellist even went out shopping for Royal Worcester pottery, just before she was due to go on? Of course, when you find panellists they don't stay put; and by this time the first speaker is over-running anyway, so I would have to leap up and politely interrupt. Did I ever tell you about the speaker who refused to be interrupted? He would turn his head so he couldn't see hand signals, smile urbanely when I suggested he stop, and continued talking long, long into the night. Yes, Mervyn, the module system would be a great idea, with just one man responsible for one item per day. But, with the best will in the world, I'd love to see you try it!



Actually, my own pet theory these days is that conventions need lots of stage-management; use of props, good lighting, a back-cloth, utilitarian things like a dias, good microphones, and so on. Every programme item should be considered according to its individual requirements, and every effort should be made to dramatise and assist the speaker's presentations. I suspect I might get a chance to try out a few of these ideas for the British WorldCon in 1979!"

****How you do go on about my visit to the Pottery..and I got such a lovely coffee-set there too! I feel that there ought to be some items to entertain and amuse the audience..but stage-management is the key word there. Perhaps we ought to recruit some people who are into amateur dramatics?****

Archie Mercer
21 Trenethick Parc
Helston, Cornwall
TR13 8LH



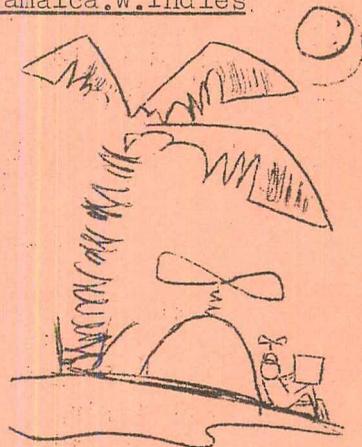
"Many thanks for Scot the sixty-seventh. That's two-thirds of a hundred! You might run a competition: specimen title page or nibblings or natterings or something for SCOT 100. Now my ideal convention would have no programme at all except club and special-interest-group meetings, and a cinematograph projector would not be allowed within ten miles of the place. It's not just because I don't much care for films myself. But films at Cons take people away that I want to talk to, which is anti-social. If one happens to approve of Mervyn's taste in Cons, however, no doubt one can applaud the lad loudly for putting the case so well... I'm slightly croggled to learn that the title of Matron has been abolished. This clears up the slight anomaly of the male nurses who, upon reaching the top of their profession, had to bear the title of "Matron"

of course, but surely there are easier ways. This Nursing Officer Grade 7A lark lacks what the French call a little something (but in French of course). Just

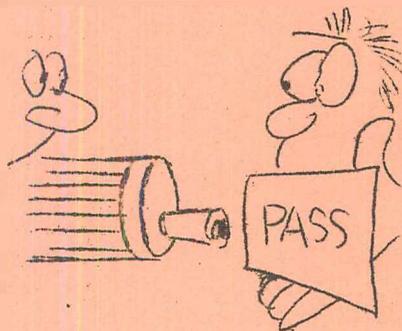
imagine a few typical examples, Waterhouse-style. "I'm sorry, you can't speak to Nursing Officer Grade 7a now-she's on her rounds." "It's got to be switched off at ten o'clock. Nursing Officer Grade 7A's orders." "Don't let Nursing Officer Grade 7A see you with that cigarette." "She was only a Nursing Officer Grade 7A's daughter - but you should see her Sister!" Or have Sisters been abolished too? Are they now Nursing Officers Grade 3B or something?***Ch, we still have Sisters..but they are Grade 6! The grades were only meant to be used for salary and job specification purposes, and in fact the Salmon Report specifically stated that the numbers should not be used. So everyone talks about the Number 7..and only the other day I heard a Senior Nursing Officer(No 8)complain she was going the call the Number 7s -"The House of Gloom". That was because they kept coming to her with wails about the shortage of staff. As a number 7 I have my own wails...I will put anyone on my 999 list for life if they can find me a Theatre Sister.***

this space annexed by the S.I.L.E. Society
STAY IN LONDON ETHEL
PLEASE COPY

Warren Silvera
122 Barnett St.
Montego Bay
Jamaica.W.Indies



Robert Coulson
Route 3
Hartford City
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"Many thanks for SCOT no 67. I have sat up all night reading it, it's now 2.45am. Me? Born Good Friday, Apr 15th 1892, so I am 82 years old! First SF story I remember reading THE FOOD OF THE GODS by HG Wells, was that published in a Pearson's Magazine? 1902? Occupation - sight-testing optician. Actually I wanted to be a pysician, never had the cash, so compromised with 'optics' that blessing to the aged. Did you know thegreatest Sci Fi stories were written by the Hebrews? If you doubt me read Ezekiel chapters 1, 8, 10 & 11. Also read Revelations. Then get a friend with a computer to figure out for you the size of the New Jerusalem that John saw. How tall it will be, how wide and how long, and how many people it will hold allowing each room to be 10ftx10x10. The engineering problem of getting food to the top floor should intrigue you both! Light supply is solar.....Ezekiel wrote about 600BC and Daniel wrote about 500 BC!"

"Gee, I wish I'd saved that comic strip about the hall monitor sitting at his post behind a machinegun...Yes, pupils sit in hallways, during study periods, and chcek passes. The idea is that everyone is supposed to be in a room during study period unless he/she has a special pass. And since there aren't enough adults in a big high school to check corridors, the students do it.It's a job handed out to special students(trusties?)and I gather it's considered a privilage because study rooms are generally in an uproar and a nice quiet hallway is the best place to get studying done.You understand I'm getting all this from Juanita and Bruce. In my little school with less than 100 students in the top 4 grades altogether, the teachers could keep an eye on things. Juanita had about 2000 students in her school in the top 4 grades,and Bruce

has about 1500 or so in his.***I do not envy the student of today!***

Space time diary

no 1

by
gerry
Webb

VISIT OF CARL SAGAN TO LONDON. EXOBIOLOGY'S BEST KNOWN SPOKESMAN.

Thursday the 2nd May:

".....Thence to the Royal Society and mightily pleased with myself, having a ticket to a discussion meeting on 'The Recognition of Alien Life' at which Professor Sagan, the New-World astronomer of note was to speak in company with many other natural philosophers.....' The ghost of Robert Hooke, past secretary of the Royal Society and fellow diarist was haunting my thoughts as I turned out of the Mall and up the steps towards Carlton House Terrace and Tony, my partner in crime, waiting amongst the statuary.

Before the proceedings began we gained a corner in the coffee room and surveyed the assembled company, recognizing a personage here; nodding to an acquaintance there. All around were dressed in standard 'earnest scientist' kit of rumpled suits and were toting obligatory brief cases. An adjacent table of a dozen quiet but animated young people therefore provided marked contrast. With coiffures that would not have looked out of place at the inaugural meeting of the R.S. and velvet clothes to match, they made Tony and myself feel quite dowdy. Alan, for whom we had been waiting, joined us.

We were now complete. Three fellows of the British Interplanetary Society, guests to an older and more senior body. (I hope that historical perspective will close this gap when viewed from the space-faring age of the 21st century). Nonetheless we were feeling not a little smug that we had the great man all to ourselves the next day at a special B.I.S. meeting. Alan cocked his head at the gay bunch next door. "Who are they?" We all listened to their earnest chatter in American college accents. Tony looked at me. His mouth quirked with a grin as he replied: "Sagan's groupies!". "Considering the fact that we all collect his books and are following him around at least for the next couple of days, that term could apply to us!", I hastened to say lest we had been overheard. Pondering this interchange we moved to the hall in good time for the opening remarks.

Any fears that I had had, after reading the abstracts, about the proceedings becoming a little dusty were quickly dispelled and I can only regret that several interesting discussion sessions were cut short in the interests of the schedule. Carl Sagan (Cornell University, U.S.A.) presented the first paper which began with the recognition of the works of intelligent life by means of aerial photographic survey. Interestingly, photography of the Earth reveals no sign of intelligent life until at least 100 m resolution is achieved whereupon the agricultural and urban reworking of the surface becomes apparent. Professor Sagan also discussed the detectability over interstellar distances of such signs

of intelligence (?) as radio and T.V. signals. (Just imagine a galactic council assessing Earth's civilisation on the basis of old Shirley Temple movies!) He also reviewed possible message contents for interstellar discourse. Inevitably a slide was shown of man's only direct attempt so far to communicate with extra-terrestrial intelligence. I refer of course to the plaques attached to the spacecraft Pioneer 10 and 11, which will eventually enter interstellar space (see illustration). These were designed by Sagan (and his wife) and F. Drake, also of Cornell. Much amusing discussion followed, mainly with respect to which parts of the message would be easy or difficult to interpret. It is a pity that we shall have to wait such a long time for an answer, at least from planetary based life, as Pioneer 10 for example will not encounter the planetary system of any other star for 10^{10} years at least.

The next two speakers showed the difficulties of distinguishing organisms or artifacts from natural objects by means of their morphology alone. C.H. Waddington (University of Edinburgh) reviewed this problem when applied to objects on a scale of from about one order of magnitude above to about three orders of magnitude less than our bodies: P.H. Gregory (Rothamsted Experimental Station) when applied to the recognition of microscopic objects.

The morning session concluded with a discussion by J.E. Lovelock (University of Reading) of how alien biospheres can be detected by the disturbing effect that life has on the thermodynamic equilibrium of a planetary surface or atmosphere. Professor Lovelock showed that a distant view of the Earth in this context shows that certain of its thermodynamic properties are recognisably different from those of the other terrestrial planets.

The afternoon sessions provided much of interest in the field of biological evolution. In particular A.G. Cairns-Smith (University of Glasgow) outlined a scheme which involved a primordial starting point for life, not requiring a pre-biotic soup of amino-acids, proteins, etc. (Which Professor Cairns-Smith referred to as a metre-thick oil slick). He also suggested that our original ancestors had biochemistries alien to our own.

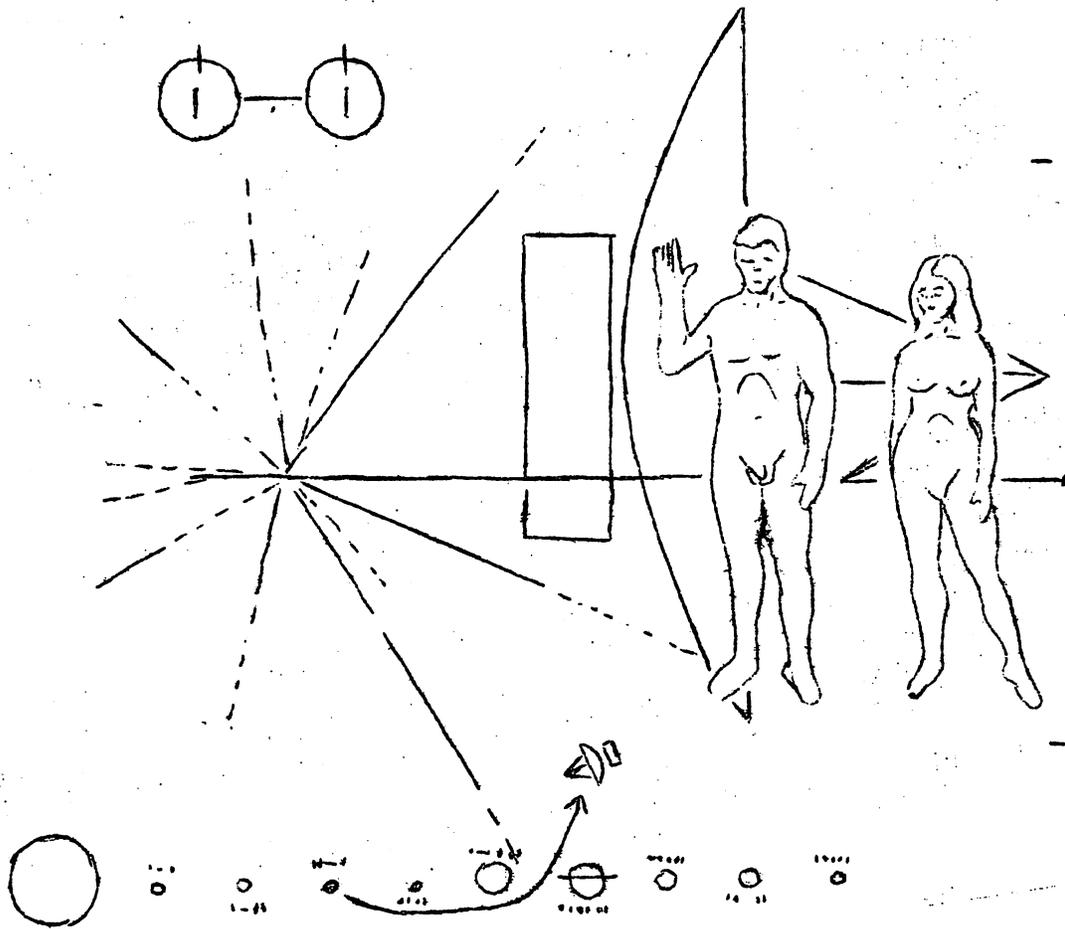
The session paused for the admission of new Fellows to the Royal Society. This involved a short and pleasant but anachronistic little ceremony. I would have been interested to know what any intelligent aliens, had they been present, made of this proceedings.

After the meeting, a stroll through London on a glorious May evening, towards the 'Globe' tavern in Hatton Garden. One of the last of a most interesting series of meetings was to take place at this pub as it is due to be pulled down - but more of this next time.

Friday the 3rd of May - this time to the B.I.S. meeting at the Royal Society of Arts where Carl Sagan was giving a more popularized lecture on his work entitled "Extraterrestrial Intelligence".

Arriving slightly puffed but in good time I was amazed to find the door barred and a small very mixed group of people milling about John Adam Street. "It's full" informed the the imposing and very determined doorman, "positively and without exception no more can be admitted". He and his colleagues made to close the door.

Ascending the stairs I gained the outside of the hall (Well, you do not expect me to tell how I did it - I may need that ruse again!) The doorman was not kidding. It was packed



THE PLAQUE ABOARD THE PIONEER 10 SPACECRAFT

I finally had to crawl in a side-door and sit on the floor. Obviously, as Sagan has pointed out in his recent popular book 'The Cosmic Connection' extra-terrestrial life is an idea whose time has come.

The lecture, in an enviably relaxed style, covered much of the subject matter of this book (see below). A comprehensive report of it by A.T.Lawton will appear in the B.I.S. magazine 'Spaceflight'. It stimulated one of the most unusual question and answer sessions I have ever heard. Profound discussion and comment from professional scientists and knowledgeable laymen was interspersed with queries from religious nuts, flying saucer cultists, etc. mind-boggling in their cosmic naivete or conceit. Time and time again, without a slip, Sagan demonstrated a breathtaking resilience of mind, diplomacy, quickness of wit, and humour. He has done this before! Finally, at a regular B.I.S. watering place a few members and fellows were privileged to have Carl Sagan to ourselves. At least for this sample of terrestrial life, a cosmic perspective seems to amplify the human one.

All in all the spirits of both past Fellows of the R.S. and the august personages of the R.S.A. staring austerely at us from their paintings would have approved the proceedings on both occasions. After all, the idea of life on the other planets in the solar system was once far more acceptable to the scientifically educated than today. As the evidence for these ideas was shown to be untenable, the general idea of life elsewhere in the universe became unrespectable by association. The enthusiasm with which Percival Lowell pursued the idea of intelligent beings on Mars around the turn of the century and with which these ideas were popularised unfortunately repelled or at least made cautious many scientists. The question was asked; at which end of the telescope is the intelligence? By about 30 years ago scientific interest in extraterrestrial life was probably at an all time low. Planetary studies in general were left to the amateurs. Stellar and galactic astronomy held sway.

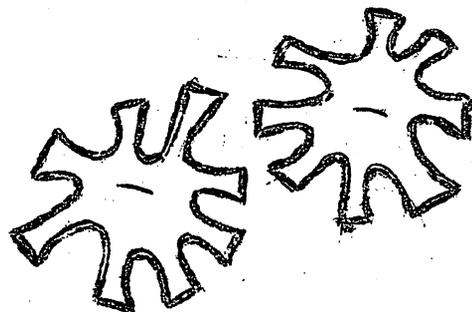
Since that time, with gathering momentum, interest has revived. New measuring instruments and the advent of spaceprobes have stimulated an renaissance in the quest for knowledge in all branches of the study of our own and the other planets of the solar system. Planets are now believed to be the common companions of stars. The building blocks of life can be synthesised in the laboratory from simulated primitive planetary atmospheres. Some radio telescopes are powerful enough to make contact with civilisations on the planets of other stars, if they possess similar equipment. Extraterrestrial life is an idea whose time has come.

We can learn a lot about ourselves from our attitude to extraterrestrial life. Sagan has said that the Pioneer 10 plaque is not a message to out there, it is a message to back here.

For those wishing to read further I can recommend two books: For a popular account: The Cosmic Connection by Carl Sagan, published by Hodder & Stoughton, 1974. £3.50

For a more rigorous scientific treatment I can recommend the report of the conference held in Byurakan, Soviet Armenia, and sponsored jointly by the Soviet Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences of the United States. The complete proceedings of the conference published as: "Communication With Extraterrestrial Intelligence" Carl Sagan, editor, Cambridge Massachusetts & London, MIT Press. £5.00

Nattering's



One day last week a Hospital Visitor asked me how long I'd been in my job; and my answer was 17 years. The same week Merv Barrett rang me up to tell me the Globe meetings would finish in June. After that it would be pulled down. Calculating that I'd worked a year elsewhere in London before I came to Surbiton - that makes it 18 years of attending - at least spradically-the Globe. No wonder a young fan can think of me as "once part of the greater mass of fandom". Only, it all depends upon what you mean by fandom. To tell the truth "my fandom" has never been in the Globe to any great extent.

This year I am seriously debating my return to Scotland and of one thing I am sure; it won't take me any further away from "my fandom". After all that's where it all started for me - sitting on night duty writing letters to other fans, putting out my fanzines and once a year the culmination of meeting good friends at the Convention.

Maybe if my work were more solitary I would wish for a Globe meeting every week; but all day long I have to deal with people. I have to understand them, sympathise with them, cajole them, coax them and sometimes manipulate them. Tjis aspect of my work has widened enormously as I move on. Consequently as I grow older I become less gregarious. Yet I find that when I do go out socially, I enjoy it more.

Although there are now more people at the Globe, in many ways it hasn't changed all that much. There were always fans there I got to know because they attended regularly; and fans whom I knew because I was a "fanzine fan". I have a theory that there is a subtle difference between the fans who start off by attending meetings and those who, like me, found their first contact by writing letters and sending out their fanzines. I think the latter group tend to stay in fandom longer.

One cannot go through life without having some unpleasant things happen-but in the fannish portion of my life I can state definitely that the pleasant outweigh the unpleasant to such an extent the unpleasant are rendered harmless.

But I wander from the Globe. When I first went there, eager and rather awed, I found a smallish group of people who had met together for years. As the years rolled on the faces sometimes changed a bit, but the small intimate groups remained. The fans with whom I could most quickly relate were the ones who knew whom I meant when I referred to a fan from Liverpool, Belfast, Melbourne,

Natterings 2

Los Angeles, Toronto, Berlin, or New York. "I always think of fandom as a sort of network that stretches -and into which I can make contact at many points. Ring the right bell on the network and ting-a-ling..you get an answer. You can go away for ages and there it still stretches when you come back.

It has been a rather restless year for me so far; I keep thinking of plans for moving and deciding (but this decision is highly suspect) that there is not much use getting things too tidy when it will all have to be packed up. I have firmly decided to move back to Scotland, but how to do so to the best financial benefit, is the problem. This restlessness hasn't done my fanzine publishing schedule any good! I suspect I am at the 'awkward age' when I could just as easily drop all fanzines as I could go on for another 20 years. In the old days folks like me used to retire into FAPA..but I've been in and out of FAPA and found it less rewarding than fanzine publication. I have just received the latest ALGOL and, after admiring its fine quality, I also admired its publishing schedule..twice a year. Now that's something I could live with!

I had to miss this year's Convention; so ever since folks have been telling me how good it was. I was most amused by the remarks about the convention by my friends Frances and Brian Varley. It was their first visit for many years to a con and what surprised them both was watching young fans being nostalgic about the fifties. They could understand older fans being nostalgic but they couldn't see how anyone could be nostalgic about something they themselves had not experienced. Hmm..I don't know that this is unusual..look at all those Gatsby fashions! Perhaps too, some of them feel that in those days British fandom, being smaller, was much more unified than it is now. Well, even that isn't true..there were factions and fusses and feuds as well as happy and close-knit cons. But it was certainly easier then to get to know everyone.

Frances found her interest in poetry revived by meeting Lisa Conessa... in fact if she ever takes time out from being 'Capability' Varley, she might even start trying her hand again. I always liked her poetry though she did not let me have much; I can remember one very fine nostalgic one she wrote after the Mancon..but then that was nostalgia rooted in reality.

I think it would be an odd fan who had not tried to write poetry at some time or another, and I wonder if today's children getting encouragement at school to write it their way will keep it up after adolescence which usually sees the end of poetry-writing. In my school we were encouraged to write but with very much the values of the teacher. One poem I wrote was published in the school magazine, I must have been about 7 years old at the time. And oh yes, I remember it! What's more I intend to inflict it upon you to make my point!

I stood alone in the meadows and looked up into the sky

I saw the fluffy cloudlets hanging up on high

They were like pretty palaces made for you and me

Where we could go and live alone wild and free.....it goes on getting worse I think. The point is I'd never stood alone in any meadows and I am very sure I got the word fluffy from a helpful teacher. That's no way to get the free childish touch which is often inspired.

Poetry in fanzines is something that comes and goes a lot, it always interests me even if I sometimes heartily dislike half of it. I have very definite tastes in poetry. For instance I always preferred the poems of Robert Louis Stevenson to that of Burns. Yet the number of people who can appreciate the Scottish poetry of Stevenson must be declining because how many still remain who can smile and appreciate his THE SCOTSMAN'S RETURN FROM ABROAD.

Apart from a few collections, I confess I have not bought many books of poetry and when I went to check found that, apart from Stevenson, I had only books by Rupert Brooke, Kipling, Whitman and Phyllis McGinley. Mind you I have also Ogden Nash and Don Marquis two very great favourites.

For years I have had the habit of cutting out a favourite or likeable poem and there are lots of them scattered about. What I dislike in a poem is pretension or the poet wallowing in a sort of counterfeit emotion. If poetry should sing it should also, I firmly believe, make sense! Surely no poet could have flung words about with more abandon than Gerald Manley Hopkins as in his poem STARLIGHT.; but when he spins out.. "Oh look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!" at least you know it refers to stars and it is a pretty good poetic description of them at that.

However I undoubtedly prefer the poet who is crisp and hits the nail on the head which explains the inclusion of McGinley in my store. And, harking back to my friend Frances, although I know I liked and admired her nostalgic poem..the one that really burned itself into my brain was one she tossed off one Sunday afternoon whilst waiting for tea....

"Ethel is a nice girl
The stoniest heart would soften
She's not nice when we tell the truth
But that's not very often"

And whilst I am thinking to myself of a return to Tayside and Dundee, there is Dundee's own poet McGonagall to remember. There are some deathless pieces of poetry he wrote which I can easily repeat to you without looking them up. My favourite requires a strong Scottish accent belabouring the last three words with a rather posh accent 'put on' for the words before.....

"The Tay, the Tay, the silvery Tay
It flows by night, and it flows by day."

Och..beat that now!

Ethel. June 1974