

# A FEW WORDS ABOUT BILBO BENTCLIFFE

AND HIS ADVENTURE

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For many long years now there has been a silent and secret conspiracy roaring and rampaging throughout the civilised world. Its object has been to get me - by hook or by crook, or even by book - to read Tolkien's tremendous trilogy, THE LORD OF THE RINGS. Now, I am not a man to be lightly bamboozled into a frougthy issue like reading a book, and I have held out for a goodly long time. Then, at last, just a little while ago, I weakened.

Now, if getting me to read a book comes in the Mighty Achievement category, getting my nose out of it once I have started, must be classified something like A Deed So Incredible As To Be Hardly Considered.

That is why I maintain that Eric Bentcliffe picked a particularly bad time to win TAFF; he should either have done it before I started THE LORD OF THE RINGS, or at least had the decency to wait until I finished it.

I daresay there are people in this diverse little ole world who could put out a passable one-shot while holding a book in one hand and turning the pages over with their teeth, but they must be a pretty select band and I don't belong there.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT BILBO BENTCLIFFE is a oneshot - I don't intend to make it a regular subscription fanzine - produced in June, 1960 in the fond hope that it will be distributed, through the kindness and courtesy of the respective Fine People, with SKYRACK No. 21 and FANAC No. Umpety Ump and Ump Ump. I don't suppose that even if you tried real hard you could possibly think it had been produced by anyone else, and so may as well admit that it is solely and simply (!) the work of:

MAL ASHWORTH, 14, WESTGATE,  
ECCLESHILL, BRADFORD. 2. ENG.

I have known Bilbo Bontcliffe (said he, portentously, tucking his thumbs under his braces; this is no mean feat with your hands in your pockets) for about seven years, and I may say that no more homely (this is English 'homely' not American 'homely') little hobbit ever left this Shire. I can only hope that he comes safely through the dreadful trials ahead of him in the Drak Regions of U. S. Customs, and so at last to the Shining Realms of the Pittcon.

Rather more seriously, for a moment: one thing that has always made me unhappy, in connection with TAFF, is the use of the word 'deserve', which is often bandied about on all sides with gay abandon. And yet, if anyone ever did 'deserve' to win TAFF, that person must be Eric Bontcliffe.

For Eric combines within him something of every fan's fan; he is a sort of 'package deal' par excellence. During his time in fandom - a decade or more - he has been a club fan, a party fan, a convention fan, a 'trufan', a publishing fan, an APA fan, an organisation/<sup>an</sup> and along and beyond and without and beneath it all - a Science-Fiction fan.

For years he published TRIODE, one of the top fanzines in the field, and then, just as happily, put his personal fanac on one side to help set the BSFA on its feet. Once that was done he handed over the reins and took up where he left off with his own activity. He is content to occupy himself with whatever he feels to be for the good of fandom.

Another happy knack that Eric has developed is that of side-stepping any feuds or unpleasantness, even if they are thrust upon him; a 'feudin', a 'fussin' and a 'fightin' has no appeal for him, and he is, in fact, one of the most friendly, amiable, easy-to-get-along-with people in fandom.

Eric was the first fan I ever corresponded with, and the only fan I have corresponded with the whole of the time I have been in fandom. Also he published my first fan article. I realise that will count against him, but try to be lenient with him - we all make mistakes.

I guess we better leave out the bit about him hounding me up and down the corridors of semi-gafia with deadlines and material-demands, since it brings back too many nightmarish memories. Still and all, I must admit he did it well.

And he taught me how to play Nap and so win money from Ron Bennett. This was only a fortnight ago so it shows that the man still has his uses and that it is not just any old broken-down fan we are sending to Pittsburgh.

I have no doubts that Eric will have a great time on his trip; and I have no doubts either that so will the people who meet him, realising even more than they do now that they have made the best possible choice and got a good deal.

One thing I forgot to mention back there was that Eric was one of the people who insisted that I read THE LORD OF THE RINGS; on which account I can just about forgive him for winning TAFF and breaking me off it.

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