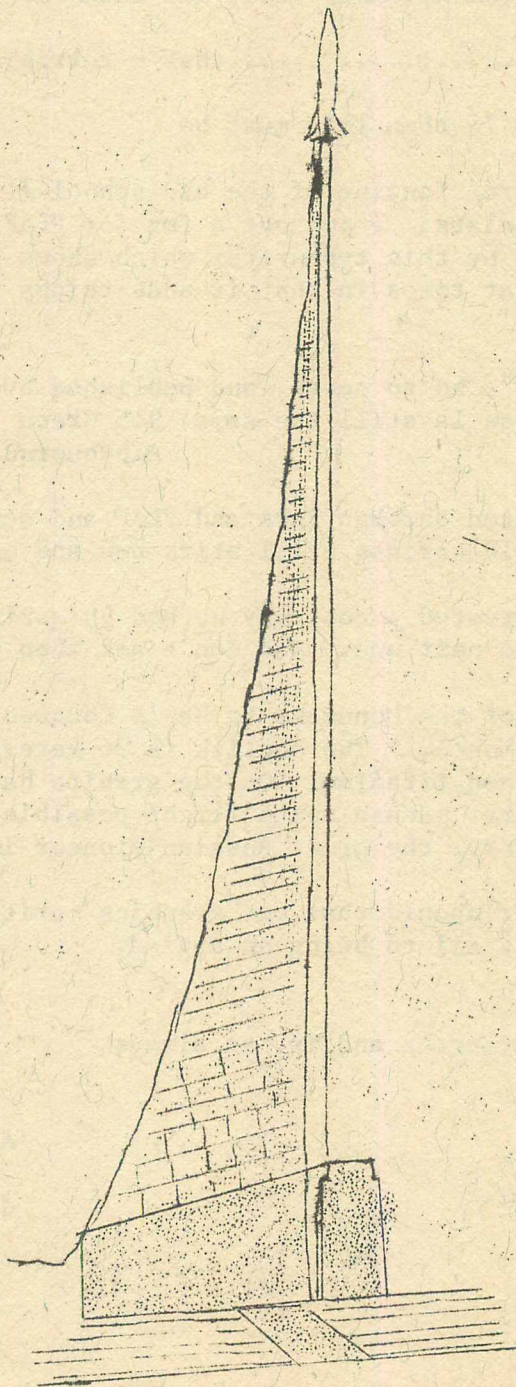


DYNATRON



Dynatron

It is, I tell you, a sorry state of fannish affairs when one cannot remember the last time he pubbed his ish or whathell the number of it was. This thing has become so infrequent that I simply could not remember if I had gotten out an issue in 1982 or not.

When in doubt, check the files. If one can remember where the files are.

Ah ha! The files inform me that I did indeed publish an issue in 1982. It was the 76th issue, dated November 1981, but actually published in May 1982.

All things considered.....that's terrible.

If that one was number 76 then this must be

Dynatron #77. A ~~crude~~ fanzine of the old school ((put out by an old fool)) By Klono's magnesium molars! I put out a fmz for FLAP and it is called VOMBIS. That title is inspired by this typewriter which shows definite vomibic tendencies in that it seems at times in that it adds things to whatever I am typing. Where was I?

Dynatron #77. "Edited", so to speak, and published by Roy Tackett, Phoolishium Disgracius. The address is still the same: 915 Green Valley Road NW,
Albuquerque, N.M. 87107, USA

This will be distributed through FAPA and FLAP and sent out to a few others to indicate that the old carcass still stirs now and again although not much.

If anyone else is interested a copy may be had by asking for it. If you're willing to wait for the next one. And don't ask when it will be published.

The cover is a sketch of the Monument to Man's Conquest of Space, also called the Space Obelisk, in Moscow. The obelisk is 96 meters tall, made of a steel frame faced with polished titanium. On the granite base are sculptures of the people who made the first manned space flight possible. In front is a statue of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, the great Russian pioneer in rocketry.

Fannish art critics--or should that be "graphics" critics?--should be aware that I make no claim at all to being an artist.

In any event this is Dynatron and is, as always

A Marinated Publication X

dated February 1983

Through the Looking Glass

*"It really ain't all
that strange, Clyde."
...Bonnie Parker*

June:

The letter arrived from Aubrey MacDermott, self-proclaimed first fan and tour arranger.

"Dear First Fandomite", it started. Yep, that's me all right. Roytac, First Fandomite; grown old and tired plowing the fields of science fiction looking for new ideas or maybe fresh twists on old ideas and finding they are more and more difficult to harvest. Is the ground played out? Should we look for newer fields? Should we stop veering and get back to the subject at hand?

Dave Kyle, MacDermott said, had been unable to go along on the science fiction tour of the USSR which took place during April/May and so another tour, limited to members of First Fandom, was being planned for September. The first tour had been a resounding success although it was mostly concerned with meetings with professional science fiction writers and the September tour would also include meetings with Soviet SF fans. Was I interested? The tour would include meetings in Moscow, Kiev, and Leningrad and would cost around \$2000 per person.

I passed the letter over to Chrystal. She read it with interest. "Do you want to go?" she asked. I admitted that the idea was intriguing. A chance to get a personal view of the current situation in the Soviet Union and, frosting on the cake, a chance to meet Soviet writers and fans and become more familiar with their views of science fiction. I am, I should explain, even after all these years, somewhat of a starry-eyed idealist who thinks that science fiction and science fiction fandom can serve as a pipeline (don't let Ronnie pick up on that word) to a better future. It's a carryover from the 1930s and I've never really gotten over it. We should all be entitled to our little bit of foolishness...

"We have always enjoyed the company of the First Fandom people," Chrys said, "and if Dave and Ruth are going it should be a lot of fun."

I should explain that Dave Kyle (who may tell you that you can't sit there) and his wife, Ruth, are old and beloved friends and their names add quite a bit of weight to the balance. Still we needed more information. On Saturday (the day for cheap phone rates) I rang up MacDermott and we discussed the tour at length. He had, he said, been discussing the matter through correspondence and telex with the Soviet Writer's Union. This latter body was quite pleased with the way the first tour had gone and was eager to have more American science fictionists meet their counterparts in the USSR.

Chrys and I are not "tour" people. We do a lot of travelling but on our own. The organized tours have always seemed to have considerable limitations on what one can or cannot do and we prefer to avoid that sort of thing. It is more fun to travel rather than to tour, seeing what interests us and, generally, avoiding the crowds at the usual tourist attractions. However, considering the way things are in the Soviet Union and the fact that this tour was supposed to be organized specifically for science fiction purposes it seemed that the pluses would outweigh the minuses. MacDermott seemed to have the necessary contacts with SF people in the USSR and that was certainly something we did not have on our own. We agreed to go.

July:

We flew to Phoenix for the 35th Westercon and most of what occurred there is incidental to this report. Others have documented the long lines to check in due to the reluctance of the National Jaycees to move out. Still that was probably one of the highlights of the convention and probably the only time in history when standing in line for three hours turned into a party. Certainly the long lines of people we later saw in front of the shops and stores in Russia did not appear to be enjoying themselves at all. The other noteworthy incident at Westercon was the night several hundred Youth For Jesus came marching along the street, stopped in front of the hotel and prayed for the godless sciencefictioneers attending the convention. It is one of the tenets of the new right religious movement that fantasy is an invention of Satan and we were all, therefore, in league with the devil.

Of primary interest, however, was the First Fandom meeting where we dinosaurs discussed important matters of the past. Chrystal and I were mainly interested in meeting with MacDermott to get more information on the Russian tour. It was not, he said, progressing as well as he had expected. Most of the responses to his flyer had been negative. Some of the First Fandomites have apparently grown extremely conservative as their years have increased and wanted nothing to do with the USSR. Ronnie had warned about having any intercourse with the rotten reds. Others sent regrets based on economic reasons. We are all close to or past retirement age and those who have retired are having a rough go of it in this wonderful new age of Reaganomics. Still, MacDermott said, he was getting enough positive responses to insure the trip would be a success. The good news was that the Soviet Writer's Union was so eager to have another visit from American science fiction people that it was picking up 25% of the tab so the trip would cost \$500 less than originally planned. And that was good news. We talked at length of how things went on the April/May tour with MacDermott and Art Widner and Art agreed that it was a great experience. Since there were to be meetings with Russian fans included in the September tour it was sure to be a worthwhile trip.

"And Dave and Ruth are going?" I inquired of MacDermott. Well, no, they were not. Dave had a number of personal problems which made it impossible for him to go at this time. Nevertheless he would be with us in spirit. Ummm. O.K. We're already committed and it ought to be fun. Who, exactly, was going? I never did find out until we all met in Chicago.

The remainder of July and August were taken up with planning. The itinerary arrived, after some delay, from Amity Tours, the outfit which was handling the arrangements:

"You will depart from the Science Fiction Congress in Chicago September 7, 1982, aboard Yugoslav Airlines flight 507, 7:25 p.m. for Belgrad Yugoslavia, arriving 2:25 p.m. on September 8. You will be transferred to your first class hotel and spend one night in Belgrad. Transfer to the airport on September 9 for your flight to Moscow leaving at 10:45 a.m. arriving in Moscow at 4:50 p.m. You will be met at the air port by In-tourist and transferred to your first class hotel Cosmos."

We had no plans for attending Chicon (worldcons have gotten to be a bit of a drag) so had to arrange transportation to and from Chicago. What clothes to take? Casual for the most part but also something a bit more business-like since there were supposed to be at least three O*F*I*C*I*A*L meetings to attend. What will the weather be like in September? Who knows? Call travel agencies. They don't know. Check with the library. The library can tell me about Mexico City but not about Moscow. The daily paper carries a report of temperatures sometimes but it isn't all that much help. Farther north and a continental climate. Cooler perhaps but in mid-September maybe still fairly warm. (It was.) All travel will be by air so that puts a limitation on baggage. Particularly when one plans on carrying books both ways. Books use up baggage allowance in a hurry.

A letter arrived from Amity Tours with the application blanks for visas to enter the USSR. The Soviets are thorough in their nosiness. What is your profession? Where do you work? Have you visited the USSR before? Do you have relatives in the USSR? Et bloody cetera. Paranoia is a disease of governments; all governments. Attach photograph. Photograph must be exactly so. When we told the woman at the photography shop what we required she said, "Ah, you are going to Russia." Right. Or should it be left? Purpose of trip? Tourism. What else? I even got a haircut. At a regular barber shop.

What is your profession? As in the west the classless Soviet society is divided between those who follow a profession and those who simply work. As Orwell put it, in the classless society everyone is equal only some are more equal than others. What is your profession, Roytac? I considered several possible answers and finally wrote in "electronics technician." A worker and proud of it and to hell with the professionals. A few days later I received a call from Amity Tours. The Soviet Writer's Union wanted to know more about me. What were my science fiction credentials? I gave them about a yard of stfish credentials. Amity later told me the Writer's Union was very much interested in meeting me. (They were to be disappointed but that's getting ahead of the story.)

And since I work for the federal government there was the matter of the security briefing. I have worked for the federal government longer than the security agents are old and could give them advice on what to do and what not to do but, nevertheless, there must be the security briefing. Suffice to say I found it amusing. That was after I found their office; security offices are tucked away in hidden places.

Also amusing, in a way, was the reaction of friends and acquaintances when we told them we were going to the USSR. Most were absolutely horrified. Most said there was no way they would visit the Soviet. "Suppose they don't let you come back?" "Oh, I don't think there's any danger of that. Lots of Americans visit the USSR and Washington has never stopped any of them from coming home." "No, I mean suppose the Russians won't let you out." "Why would they do that?" "Well, because they're Russians."

One sometimes wonders which side of the looking glass is which.

6 September:

Labor Day finally arrived and we finally departed. Daughter Rene and her husband, Dan MacCallum, delivered us to Albuquerque International Airport and turned us over to the tender mercies of TWA. The flight, on an L1011, is an international one which, for reasons known only to TWA, makes up in Albuquerque and ends up, eventually in Frankfurt, Chermany. The Albuquerque to Chicago leg was rather less than crowded and made for an altogether pleasant flight with plenty of room to spread out. Travel by commercial airline is, on the whole, a lousy way to go. As Doc Miller put it on the trans-Atlantic part of our trip: "My grandfather came over from the old country in steerage and he had more room than we have." I agreed. Conditions on the slave ships were probably worse than modern air travel...but not by much.

We left Albuquerque in bright sunshine with the temperature heading for 90°. Some foolish mortal must have pointed out the New Mexico state line to Jupiter Pluvius for we no sooner crossed it than we were in clouds or between clouds or above clouds all the way to Chicago. We landed at O'Hare amid a cool drizzle which made us thankful for hats and raincoats. We gathered up luggage, I got on the hotline to the Rodeway Inn which sent their shuttle for us and we were settled in before noon. The bar and restaurant were closed for the holiday, however, and would not open until six. The Rodeway management, not wanting to be beseiged by starving guests, had set out free sandwiches and coffee in the lobby which was enough to hold us over until evening.

Since, theoretically at least, Chicon was still in session I decided to head for the Hyatt to see if I could locate MacDermott and whoever else might be wandering around. Worldcons are becoming sinkholes of commercialism and non-fannishness and not all that many trufen show up any more but I could truthfully say that I was not attending Chicon but rather looking for information. I soon discovered that local transport in Chicago (Jane Byrne, mayor) is not cheap. I could either take a \$5 taxi ride to the airport and then a \$6 bus ride downtown or I could take a taxi direct to the Hyatt for \$15. I opted for the latter on the grounds that the timesaving was worth four bucks. The ride took a bit longer than we figured, though since we had to detour around the Labor Day parade, an event which brought out every politician in the city. All politicians are friends of labor on Labor Day even if they are something different the rest of the year.

The first familiar face I spotted among the hordes of trekkies, dragonmasters, wookie-worshippers, and friends of E.T. was that of Milt Stevens. Milt steered me to the only bar in the Hyatt which was open and I found the bartender could build a passable martini. (Considering it was among the last martinis I was to have for two weeks, it was delicious.) We watched the passing parade for a bit while discussing the LAin84 bid, the state of the economy as it affects fandom ("My business is getting better all the time," said Milt. Milt works for LAPD.), and did Chicon make expenses. (Barely and only by cutting back on many things.) Eventually I spotted MacDermott in the lobby, went over to check the trip out with him. Everything was all arranged, he said. We were going to meet with lots of science fiction people, he said. We were to meet at the ticket desk of Yugoslav Air Lines (JAT) at O'Hare about three o'clock Tuesday afternoon to begin our fabulous journey to the Soviet Union. If the plane does not leave until seven forty-five why be there so early? To get checked in and all that. Ummmm.

Rusty Hevelin wandered up. "Hi, Roy. Where've you been hiding? I haven't seen you all weekend."

"Hi, Rusty. I've been hiding in Albuquerque all weekend which is why you haven't seen me. I just stopped by to say good-bye."

"oh. Good-bye, Roy."

"Goodbye, Rusty."

And with that I went out the door, caught a cab back to the Rodeway Inn. By the time I got back toe workers of Chicago had decided that the holiday was over and gone back to work. The restaurant was open, the food was good, not over-priced. Which, again, speaks well for the management of the Rodeway Inn. There was not another restaurant within blocks. Because of the torn up streets one could not have gotten to it if there had been.

Chicago (Jane Byrne, mayor) is putting in a metro (that's a subway to non-foreigners) between downtown and the airport. In order to do this it is necessary to tear up every street between Green Bay and South Bend. Chicago (Jane Byrne, mayor) does things big. It has something to do with being number two.

7-8 September:

We confirmed our reservations at Rodeway Inn for the return trip, checked out, made our way to O'Hare's international terminal. JAT is way over there in the corner but there's no one there now because their plane isn't due in until about five and that's hours away. OK. I needed to find some lockers in which to stash the luggage then. The lockers are through the security checkpoint. They would be. In order to get through the security checkpoint I must remove assorted metal items including my belt buckle. I keep making mental notes to wear less metal when I travel by air but somehow always manage to lose those notes. At least I was better off than the chap whose pacemaker set off the alarm. He had a terrible time convincing the guards.

"Why are all the lockers past security?" I asked the guard.

"To keep people from putting bombs in they like they did in New York," he said.

"You wouldn't wanna take a chance on somebody blowing up the airport, would ya?"

My answer was a non-committal grunt. I found the lockers, stowed the gear, made my way back to the lobby.

"It's going to be hours before the rest of them show," I said to Chrys.

"The bar is open," she wisely pointed out.

"Right."

We found seats in the lounge by the windows so we could watch the planes arrive and depart. Across the room a fellow southwesterner nodded a greeting. (Who else wears hand carved belts with livestock decorated buckles and bolo ties?) The martinis cost \$2.50 each, a ridiculous price even though they were of good size and well built. We sipped and watched the aircraft drive around on the tarmac. What's that one? Luftsana, the German airline. How about that one? Ummm, Jordanian, I think. See anything that looks Yugoslavian? Wouldn't know it if I did.

Along about three of the p.m. I spotted MacDermott at the JAT desk. We checked in with him. The Millers were here. Beatrice Taylor was wandering around somewhere. The Fechters had not yet arrived from Sacramento but their flight was due in shortly. JAT would start checking us in and taking luggage in about an hour. There are just eight of us? That's all. Okay. I once again made my way through security, picked up the luggage, got in line behind MacDermott. Doc and Sue Miller joined us. Beatrice Taylor was wandering around somewhere. Eventually the Fechters arrived, some JAT employees showed up. They took tickets, handed out boarding passes, checked the baggage, told us the plane would be late. About two hours late. It hadn't arrived yet. Wonderful.

Let me explain about Yugoslav Air Transport. They have two (count 'em) DC-10s for trans-oceanic flights. And they fly daily. One leaves Belgrade eastbound for Sidney. The other, called *Nikola Tesla*, (and if you do not know who Tesla was you have no business in the science fiction world) leaves Belgrade late in the morning, spends some 10+ hours in the air on its way to JFK in New York. The plane is on the ground for about an hour in New York then flies on another 2½ hours to Chicago. In Chicago *Nikola Tesla* is on the ground for about 2½ hours for servicing and receiving of passengers for the return flight to Belgrade. All told that DC-10 spends about 20 out of every 24 hours in the air. Well, it's an airplane, isn't it? That's one hell of a workout for any piece of machinery.

We spent the waiting time getting acquainted. Watson and Sue Miller are medical people from Herrin, Illinois; Watson is a surgeon and Sue is a nurse. Bud Fechter is a retired Army officer who now sells real estate in Sacramento; Judy is British and they met in Egypt. Beatrice Taylor is a librarian in Fort Lauderdale and formerly from Pittsburgh. Aubrey MacDermott is already complaining of being ill.

The flight was finally called and the large herd of people milling about in front of the gate straggled out across the tarmac to the aircraft. Ahead of me I spotted a young man wearing a button which proclaimed "Think ahead. Read Science Fiction." We found our seats and saw that the First Fandom group was pretty well scattered throughout the aircraft. Chrys and I had window seats on the starboard side. The Fechters were behind us in the middle seating section, the Millers on the portside across from them. Aubrey was somewhere forward as was Bea Taylor. Directly across from me, though, was the young man with the SF button and his companion who was browsing through a Chicon program book.

Ah ha! Stf fans for sure.

ghee
I leaned across the aisle and introduced Chrys and myself. They introduced themselves as Bruno Ogorelec from Zagreb and Krsto Mazuranic from Samobor. Bruno and Krsto are part of a group of Yugoslav fans who are planning on bidding for the Worldcon in 1989. Their trip to Chicon then was a combination of business and pleasure, the business end of it being to get the feel of the workings of a world convention and to lay the groundwork for their own bid. What they had found out seemed to have encouraged them for they were full of enthusiasm and convinced that a successful world science fiction convention can be held in Yugoslavia.

We finally thundered down the runway and into the sky some three hours behind schedule. This is, I gather, the normal procedure for Yugoslav Air Transport. At least none of the four flights we took on JAT departed anywhere near on time although, in fairness, the cause of the delay on the Moscow-Belgrade flight was the Russians, not the Yugoslavs.

Our fellow passengers were mostly Yugoslav tourists returning home or else Yugoslav-Americans taking a trip back to the old country. One chap I talked to was taking his daughter to visit relatives. He had come to the U.S. shortly after the end of World War II, was now retired and returning to visit Yugoslavia to tell his left-behind relatives just how great it was in the U.S.A. The passengers all applauded when the plane cleared the ground. I told Krsto they should have held their applause until the pilot got the damned thing down again.

There is no need to detail the dreary flight across the Atlantic and half the Mediterranean. Transoceanic flights are monotonous, wearying, and not at all conducive to one's well being. Conversation can carry on only for so long. Reading rapidly turns into sleeping. The seats are uncomfortable, there is no leg room and why we put up with it is beyond me. Perhaps because flying is the only way left to get from here to there. But flying definitely makes for empathy with cattle in a livestock truck. We finally touched down at Zagreb a little after noon on the 8th, unloaded passengers, flew on to Belgrade where we were able to deplane, stretch the legs, all that sort of good stuff.

Things began to get interesting when we got to the immigration booth. We did not have visas to enter Yugoslavia. Our fearless tour leader sputtered that we were just over-nighting in Belgrade and would be going on to Moscow the next day and were not supposed to need visas for that. (HORT, who I was struggling to control, muttered something about defecation and craniums. I told him to be cool.) The law is the law, said the immigration official whose eyes gave away a trace of merriment, and you must have a visa to enter Yugoslavia. "Wait over there."

We waited over there for a halfhour or so until the rest of the passengers had been checked through. The immigration officer then took our passports into the office and stamped them with Yugoslav visas.

It's like this, he explained, Yugoslavia would be more than happy to enter into the same sort of reciprocal agreement that the U.S. has with the countries of Western Europe in that no visas are required for visiting each other's countries. The U.S. State Department, however, does not want to enter into that sort of arrangement with the countries of Eastern Europe so we must all play the silly game. It is one of the facts of history that all governments, regardless of their political spectra, are paranoid but that is the subject for some other report, not this one. In any event I put the blame on Amity Tours for messing up on the Yugoslavian visas; as a presumably responsible tour agency Amity should have seen to them. Everything worked out O.K. but there were, nevertheless, some anxious moments which should have been avoided.

Arrangements for our brief stay in Belgrade had been made through Kompass Tours. We were to be met at the airport, delivered to the hotel, have a night on the town, delivered back to the airport the next morning. Kompass was at the airport in the person of one Paedrog Djordvic, an efficient and knowledgeable tourist shepherd. He got us through customs with a word and a wave of his hand. One of Beatrix Taylor's bags had displayed vomibic tendencies and got off the plane at Zagreb instead of staying aboard with the rest of the luggage. Not to worry said Paedrog Djordvic, it will be here before you leave in the morning. He was a marvel at getting things done and at anticipating possible hangups and seeing to it that they did not occur.

Belgrade airport is located about 15 miles outside the city and the transport provided was two Fiat sedans. Efficient? Can you imagine the efficiency it took to pack four middle aged Americans (with middle age spread) and their luggage into each of those little cars? The highway was in better shape than most American roads and if there was a speed limit no one paid any attention to it. Paedrog Djordvic kept up a running commentary of explanation all the way. (His job is to sell Yugoslavia to tourists, is it not?) This new building is for this purpose and that one for another. There is a new 4,000 seat auditorium. (I wonder if that is where they plan to hold the worldcon?) A long line of cars at a gasoline station: yes, there is a shortage of gasoline. Yugoslavia produces only 25% of the petroleum it needs, the remainder is imported from Libya, Iraq and Iran. With the current war between the latter two countries the supply of oil is uncertain. Gasoline is rationed and sells for just under \$3 per gallon.

Belgrade was hot and humid on the 8th of September. The Park Hotel, class B and not class A as Amity Tours indicated, advertised air conditioning but due to the shortages of fuel it was not in operation. The elevator was tiny, room for two people or one person and luggage. We were all booked onto the 4th floor and our room faced the street with a large window which helped make up for the lack of air conditioning. Chryst and I took one look at the high-sided narrow bathtub and agreed that we were indeed back in Europe. Bathtubs are one of the major hazards for those who travel in Europe and their use requires extreme care and alertness. Woe to the unwary tourist who treats those traps like American or Asian tubs. Poor Bea Taylor made that mistake the following morning. She slipped and cracked a rib.

Around 7:30 Paedrog Djordvic and his assistant showed up, packed us snugly into the Fiats, and hauled us to Belgrade's Bohemian quarter for dinner. (For the benefit of the younger generation, undoubtedly unfamiliar with the term (and anything else not on the boob tube...but then they wouldn't be reading this anyway...get back on the track, Tackett, you're veering) the Bohemian quarter is the artists area of the city in which dwell the artists, the writers, the actors and, in days of old, a onetime sergeant of marines.) We wandered around a bit admiring the arts and crafts, ended up in the restaurant for a dinner of Yugoslav delicacies including a most delightful plum brandy. A string band came in to provide entertainment; the violinist was one of the best I've heard in years. Also of note was the "town crier", complete with drum, who announced the day's events in the quarter.

And back to the Park Hotel at the end of a looonnng day.

A couple of general observations. Belgrade and Yugoslavia seem fairly prosperous although it is obvious that the cost of petroleum has had its effect there. There seems to be no shortage of consumer goods; at least the lines so common in the Soviet Union were not apparent in Belgrade. The streets of Belgrade are clean and busy and the people friendly. Tito is remembered with fondness. There is no love for the Soviet Union.

9 September

Paedrog Djordvic and his assistant shoehorned us and our baggage into the Fiats once again and delivered us to the airport for the (approximately) ten a.m. JAT flight to Moscow. We discovered something else Amity didn't tell us about: the airport exit fee of seven dollars per person (American money, please, but change is in dinars). Doc Miller came to the rescue on this as he had enough in small bills so that we were able to escape having to take a handful of dinars in change and...theoretically...contributing them to a Yugoslav charity.

The flight (three hours) to Moscow was uneventful. Our fellow passengers were Russians returning from holiday or business trips to Yugoslavia. ("Why would any Yugoslav want to visit Russia?") We arrived in Moscow about 1330 local time. It took about 2½ hours to get out of the airport. First there was immigration where a very young and very nervous soldier checked our passports and visas most carefully all the while glancing to his left where his superior was checking his performance. The impression I got was that he was on his first shift and scared as hell about screwing up. Particularly when a group of Americans showed up at his booth. And then came customs. Our Intourist guide, a tall and lovely young woman, showed up at that point and said she would be waiting to pick us up when we got through the gate. She had a long wait. The lines were long and the inspectors efficient or inefficient depending upon one's point of view. In fairness they processed foreigners fairly quickly but were exceedingly slow and thorough when it came to inspecting Soviet citizens. And we got our first introduction into why it is the worker's paradise. We had been standing in line about 45 minutes when the inspector looked at his watch and decided it was break time. He simply left. And here is this long line of people left wondering what the hell is going on. There was a great shuffling and reshuffling and we finally ended up in another line. Eventually we made it through the gate. Nadia, the Intourist guide, took us in tow, got us on the bus and we were on our way to the hotel. And glad to get seated again because all that standing in line is a pain in the legs...not to mention other places.

On the way into the city Nadia pointed out the huge tank trap monument erected at the point where the German armies were stopped in World War II. The Great Patriotic War, that is. One thing that became apparent during our stay in the Soviet is that one of the major pillars of their foreign policy is that the Germans are never going to do it again. Considering the amount of wanton and uncalled for destruction done by the Nazi armies one can well understand that.

Approaching the hotel we were duly impressed by the 96 meter high monument to man's conquest of space...a soaring curve topped by the world's largest Hugo award. And made of titanium. That probably has the war departments of the rest of the world frothing at the mouth since titanium is one of the "critical" metals of which, as with gold, the Soviets have more than they know what to do with.

The appropriately named Hotel Kosmos has been described adequately, I think, by those who made the first stf trip in May so there is no need for me to go into it again. Except perhaps to note that a couple of the elevators didn't work and neither did the doors on our closet.

At dinner, cafeterial style, MacDermott said he had been trying to contact a Mr. Panov, who apparently was supposed to be our connection with the Soviet writer's union, but that Mr Panov was in the hospital having suffered a heart attack. While the rest of us were on the Moscow city tour Friday morning MacDermott would be visiting Friendship House to make some contacts and arrangements for meeting with science fiction people.

Had that not all been arranged previously?

Apparently not.

10 September

I was rather interested in taking the Moscow city tour for, perhaps, a peculiar reason. In his essay "Inside Intourist" (published in EXPANDED UNIVERSE) R. A. Heinlein had stated that the population of Moscow was more on the order of 750,000 rather than the 7,000,000 the Soviets claim. The Albuquerque SF Society had, in its peculiar way, discussed this at some length and I wanted to see if I could make any sort of guestimate about it. I really have no idea of what the actual figures may be but I would have to say that Heinlien is wrong. That city is a lot bigger than he figured it to be.

Moscow also has the disadvantage of being a double capital. It is the capital of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and also the capital of the Russian Soviet Federated Republic. Considering the national government, the state government and the city government there are probably 750,000 politicians and bureaucrats in the city. That seems to be one of the ways the USSR solves the unemployment problem: if there is no other job for a man, make him a politician. The city council of Kiev, for example, is made up of 800 members. 800? It's a wonder they get anything done.

Of course that isn't too much different from here. Most of our politicians are useless, too.

At lunch MacDermott announced that he had been able to arrange a meeting with some people but only four of us (MacDermott, Bea Taylor, Roy and Chrys Tackett) would be able to attend. The Millers and the Fechtters would have to take the afternoon's Intourist tour.

A driver and car delivered the four of us to a charming (that's an euphemism for "run down") old building where we were met by a half-dozen people who escorted us to a room on the third floor and handed us their cards. They were all, with one exception, officials of the Copyright Agency of the USSR. My notebook contains the entry, scribbled on the spot: "What the hell business have we with the Copyright Agency of the USSR?" The one exception was Michael Kovalchuk who, as Vladimir Gakov, is the editor of WORLD'S SPRING, an excellent collection of science fiction short stories. He was apparently called in as a consultant on science fiction.

MacDermott immediately launched into a rambling spiel about fandom and his place in it and it became apparent that our hosts were not particularly interested. They apparently thought we all had some kind of connection with American publishers and wanted our assistance in getting more Soviet science fiction published in the U.S. They wanted to know if we could arrange for a Soviet author to be a guest at a worldcon. They knew more about us than was apparent on the surface. I found myself in conversation with Victor Lobaev, whose card listed him as a "Senior Consultant." We talked about my activities in stf fandom. "You publish a fanzine?" he asked. "Yes," I said, "it is called Dynatron." "Oh, yes," said Victor Lobaev, "you've been publishing that for more than 20 years."

Hello, said Hort to Roytac, smile pretty for the man.

The senior bureaucrats apparently decided that we were not publisher's representatives and shortly excused themselves. We talked a bit more with the minor functionaries and then it was time to catch our ride back to the Kosmos.

And that was the extent of the alleged science fictional activity on our first visit to Moscow.

MacDermott declared that he didn't know what the problem was other than Mr Panov was in the hospital and unable to arrange things. But we still had meetings scheduled for Kiev and Leningrad.

Sure.

11 & 12 September

With nothing science fictional in sight we did the cultural/tourist bit. We visited museums, the Kremlin, rode the subway (an art museum itself...also damned fine bomb shelter), went to Tolstoy's house. Doc Miller, Chrys and myself turned down the opportunity to visit Lenin's tomb ("I wouldn't stand in that damned line even if the guaranteed the resurrection." WM) We took a cab back to the hotel and drank vodka instead.

You have to look at it this way: Communism is a religion. A visit to Moscow and Lenin's tomb has the same significance for the Communist as does the pilgrimage to Mecca and the Ka'aba for the Muslim. If you have been lead to believe that Communism is the political system of the Soviet Union...think again. The political system is socialist. Communism is their religion and it has all the trappings of any other religion.

13 September

We found ourselves crammed into an Aeroflot plane for the flight to Kiev. Crammed is the word. Aeroflot is efficient. Their planes have three seats where there is only room for two.

Kiev is a beautiful city with lots of greenery and has been described as a park which contains a city. Good description. I can think of no other city where one can see deer roaming free in the woods in the heart of town. The city was celebrating its 1500th anniversary.

MacDermott complained that Intourist had switched hotels on us. Let me explain a bit here. He was growing more and more irritable and irritating and complained constantly about the other members of the tour, particularly those of us who smoked. Some allowances can be made because he was somewhat ill...although not as ill as he would have had us believe...it is hard to fool a medico like Doc Miller. In addition nothing was coming off as scheduled and there was a great deal of grumbling by the members of the tour. By the time we reached Leningrad I think he was beginning to picture a number of lawsuits in his future...in addition to other hallucinations.

He did manage Mar Pinchevsky in Kiev who came to the hotel to visit for a couple of hours. Mar Pinchevsky is an editor of VSESVIT magazine which publishes, due to his influence, a good deal of science fiction in its pages as he is a sciencefictioneer himself. Pinchevsky said that if he had only known we were coming he could have arranged a number of things for us such as getting some of the local science fiction people together, a tour of his magazine, visits to bookshops where he would have helped us get some science fiction and the like. However he had no idea that we were in Kiev until MacDermott called him. He dropped everything and came to the hotel to meet us but could not stay long as he was due at the airport in a couple of hours.

Pinchevsky and Dimitry Bilenkin whom we later met in Moscow were our only sources of stiff information.

14 September

We spent the day doing the cultural tourist bit visiting the monastery and St Sophia cathedral and various parks. The highlight of the day was attending a performance of Eugene Onegan, performed by the Leningrad Opera Company at the Kiev Opera House. ("Is Onegan O apostrophe negan?"...Bea Taylor.) The costumes and singing were great. Very fine stuff, that.

Another highlight was teaching the bartender at the hotel to build a martini. It was a chore but we finally managed with the help of a Swedish tourist. It wasn't the best martini but it was better than no martini and, who knows?, I may have actually launched civilized drinking in Kiev. If, in years to come, we hear that one can get a really good martini at the Rus hotel in Kiev...I shall take a small bow.

15 September

Another thrilling Aeroflot flight. This time to Leningrad. We arrived about 1400 and it took another hour to get to the hotel. (The Pulkovskaya, a two-year old well-run hotel where everything worked. It was built by the Finns.) Intourist had arranged a city tour for us. Too late in the day, we protested. We were tired. We wanted to rest.

Chrys was not feeling well. MacDermott was being obnoxious. I did the Jeckyl and Hyde bit and turned from amiable Roytac into Horrible Old Roy Tackett who called up an old Marine Sergeant Major out of the past and laid it all out. We, all of us, were thoroughly pissed off. He had promised us meetings with science fiction people in Moscow. Four of us met with a bunch of bureaucrats. He had promised us science fiction meetings in Kiev. One magazine editor showed up when he had received a call informing him that we were in town. We were now in Leningrad and he had promised us science fiction activity in this city. Was he able to produce or wasn't he? He didn't know. He would try to arrange something.

Our Intourist guide wanted to know what the problem was. We explained to her that we were supposed to be a special science fiction tour, not a cultural/tourist group, and that nothing was being done. The promised meetings had not taken place and we had not even had the opportunity to obtain any science fiction books. She was alarmed. She was distressed. This was the first she had heard that we were supposed to be a special tour. "Please wait. I will be right back." She headed for the Intourist offices. Came back shortly and said that Intourist had no mention of us being a special tour but that she had made arrangements for us to visit bookstores during our stay in Leningrad.

16 September

We were off for a visit to Petrovets, Peter the Great's summer palace on the Gulf of Finland. Restoration work is still going on as the Germans had almost completely destroyed it...mostly by pure vandalism. Fortunately there were the original plans still intact as well as photographs, written descriptions, and even some of the original material for the wall coverings and the like. The palace (now a museum, of course) would soon be back in the same condition it was when the Czar stayed there.

Why do I get the impression that these people are not convinced that the Czar is gone for good? That if he ever returns and finds they have allowed his properties to fall to ruin he'll send them all to Siberia?

In the afternoon we had a brief city tour and then visited World of Books, the city's largest bookstore. There was a long line in front of the store ("They are waiting to buy books.") but being foreign tourists we were escorted right in and to the science fiction section. We were able to obtain a few books both in Russian and English translations of Russian stories.

Incident. Chrys, Bea Taylor, and the Millers had gone upstairs with our guide to see what else was to be found. I was standing in the lobby with the Fechtters chatting about the store. The day was cool. I was wearing my raincoat and a slouch hat. Through the door walked another man in a raincoat and slouch hat. He paused briefly, looked at me, gave me a wink and the high sign and went up the stairs. Judy said he was probably going to telephone headquarters to find out who the new agent was at World of Books.

Back at the hotel Chrys and I found a small bar with a friendly bartender who was willing to sell his stock for rubles instead of the dollars everyone else demanded. We picked up a bottle of Stolchinaya and a couple of bottles of Havana Club rum, some Pepsi and some ice and had a small party.

17 September

At breakfast MacDermott told me that the reason we had not met with any of Leningrad's science fiction people was that Intourist had switched hotels on us again and all of the local people had gone to the other hotel where they thought we were to be staying.

After breakfast MacDermott told me that the reason we had not met with any of Leningrad's science fiction people was that they were all out of town, this being the season when they retire to the Black Sea to write their books.

Choose one, two, or none of the above.

During the morning we made the rounds of the Berizoka (tourist) stores hot on the trail of science fiction and souvenirs. Thanks to our faithful Intourist guide I was able to pick up enough to finish filling the bookbag. We also finished souvenir shopping for neighbors and our kids. Mostly inlaid wood wall plaques or other things that were flat and light weight. Chrys spotted a lovely scarf and asked about it. It was made in Japan.

So it goes.

The afternoon was set aside for the Hermitage on sort of a run through it basis. As the guide pointed out, if one spent only one minute in front of each art object in the Hermitage it would take 60 years to see them all. Truly one of the world's great museums of art.

The evening was reserved for a "gala dinner" at one of Intourist's restaurants. The food and wine were plentiful. The entertainment was entertaining. Chrys said it was a hell of a note that she had to take me halfway around the world to Leningrad to get me on a dance floor.

At midnight we returned through the deserted streets of Leningrad to the hotel and all turned into pumpkins.

18 September

The morning found us touring the Peter and Paul fortress where are buried the 18th and 19th Century czars. The fortress also served as the secret prison in which the 18th and 19th Century czars kept their more prominent enemies...including their children in several cases. The noonday gun went off ten minutes past the hour. The official clock was slow.

In the afternoon we made the long trip back to the airport for the return flight to Moscow. Even though it took only an hour it was a long flight. Any flight on Aeroflot is a long flight. Back at the Kosmos MacDermott argued with the guide about changing our restaurant. He said he had asked us all about changing and we all wanted to. None of us could recall being asked but we were too tired to argue about it.

We had a late dinner, rearranged our luggage, and so to bed.

19 September

MacDermott told me after breakfast that he had arranged with Michael Kovalchuk and some others to come over to the hotel "tomorrow afternoon." I pointed out to him that "tomorrow afternoon" we were supposed to be on our way to Belgrade. He went off mumbling to himself.

Chrys and I opted out of the scheduled tours in order to visit the economic exhibit across the way. We are both interested in gardening and Nadia told us there were both flower and vegetable gardens at the economic exhibit. There was also a space exhibit. (It was closed.) The exhibit is HUGE and, since it was a Sunday, absolutely packed with people. We walked our fool legs off almost but did find the very lovely flower gardens and the vegetable gardens. Some of the more tender veggies, such as tomatoes, had already been touched by light frost and others were being harvested. The cabbages, a Soviet staple, were the largest we've ever seen. We compared their veggies with our home garden and broke about even. Somethings seemed better than what we grew, some were not as good.

Sign of the times? The potatoes had been dug but an old couple was going over the ground with a stick and managed to turn up three or four small ones which they exclaimed over and put in their pockets.

We made it back to the Kosmos dead tired and ready to soak our aching feet. MacDermott phoned the room to say that he had Kovalchuk and a young woman from the university in the lobby if we wanted to come down to meet them. I put my shoes back on and went to the spot described but saw no sign of MacDermott or Kovalchuk.

Later, at dinner, MacDermott said that he had finally gotten hold of Mr Panov and that Dimitry Bilenkin was coming to see us in the evening. Surprise. He did. Bilenkin was a jolly, bearded, well-traveled chap who has written several stf yarns some of which, including his The Uncertainty Principle, have been published in the states. We all talked to him for about three hours before he had to take his leave of us. Very pleasant.

And what is the state of science fiction in the Soviet Union? Fairly healthy apparently. In his A HISTORY OF THE SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, Mike Ashley points out that the world's first science fiction magazine was MIRPRIKLUSHENIYA (World of Adventure) which began publication in Russia in 1903 and lasted until 1923. The current wave of Soviet stf began about 25 years ago and its popularity grows eachtime a space rocket is launched. Bilenkin told us that most of the cosmonauts are fans, take science fiction into space with them and that one is making his mark as a stf writer.

There are active fan groups in most communities of any size, including the "new towns" out in Siberia, however the most active and largest groups are to be found in the universities. There is, it seems, little contact between fan groups and there are no fanzines. What fan-nish communication there is usually appears in the university newspapers.

There appears to be, so far as I could ascertain, only one magazine, THE ALMANAC OF SCIENCE FICTION. It is published quarterly, contains stories by both Russian and foreign writers and sells for 1 ruble, 10 kopeks. I managed to pick up a copy of issue #26. There are several books (around 20) published each year, including, starting in 1981 an anthology called MIRPRIKLUSHENIYA. (Try that on your sense of wonder.) Editions are fairly limited, however, because of the paper shortage. Which accounts for the line we saw at World of Books. One young student told us he visited the bookstore every day and was allowed to buy maybe one book per week. The Russians are a lot more familiar with American science fiction than we are with Russian science fiction. There are some Soviet science fiction films including a version of the Strugatsky's Roadside Picnic but such American successes as STAR TREK and STAR WARS have not been shown there. They know of them, of course, and a few, such as Bilenkin, have seen the films while visiting foreign countries. (Since the Copyright Agency knew about STAR TREK I left them a couple of copies of Vardeman's The Klingon Gambit.) That seems to be about it. The Russian SF community seems to be enthusiastic in the face of discouraging odds such as few books/magazines and lack of communication.

Or so we were told.

20 September

Determined to the last to stuff us full of old Russian culture, Intourist took us on one more tour; this time it was to the grounds of the oldest church in Moscow. The traffic on the streets was awesome, particularly when we had to drive on the sidewalk to get around a street repair project.

I forgot to mention earlier that the first thing Nadia told us was that in the Soviet Union pedestrians do not have the right of way. They certainly do not. Not even on the sidewalks.

After lunch we all boarded the bus for the airport which was something we were looking forward to with both welcome and dread. Welcome in that we were leaving and dread in that we knew it would take a couple of hours to get through customs. Nadia stayed with us to the last leaving only when we had all passed the customs check point. Again Soviet customs was extremely hard on Soviet citizens. The ancient First Fans passed through however with little difficulty. My book bag must have shown only a dark mass on the fluroscope for the customs agent asked me what was in it and to open it. I told him it was books. He lifted out a couple of volumes. "Ah, science fiction. I've read that one. It's good."

On the other side of customs we hunted up the Yugoslav Airline counter. Ahead of us was a group of 44 Soviet citizens bound, as we were, for Belgrade. Their passports were all carefully in the hands of their group leader. We finally got the baggage checked, picked up boarding passes, received instructions to procede to gate 3. Only one more hurdle: immigration. Or emigration as the case may be. A more experienced soldier this time who read every last word on our passports. He studied the pictures. He insisted that I take off my hat. He finally handed back the passports and waved us through. We hunted up gate 3 and found the 44 Soviet citizens occupying most of the chairs. As we had expected the flight was delayed.

Eventually we all found seats. Doc chatted with a Filipino woman who had accompanied her husband to Moscow on a trade mission. She was bound for Belgrade, she said, because after two weeks she had had all of the Soviet Union she could take. She was, she said, going somewhere where she didn't feel penned in. Yeah, there's that.

I kept one eye on the sign over the gate which declared JU 133 BELGRADE and gave the estimated time of departure. Every half hour the little wheels would spin and departure time would be set back. All of the wheels spun and JU 133 BELGRADE now read JAL 742 TOKYO. Our tour leader missed this so I took off for the security area to find out what had happened to JU 133. The on-duty militiaman had about as much English as I had Russian which is to say practically none but after several attempts we did reach an understanding. He put the question to one of the women on duty who got on the phone. Then came the fun of getting the information into English. And it was. The militiaman and I were both chuckling at our attempt at communication. He finally held up seven fingers. Ah, I said, Gate 7? Da. (Big smile) Gate 7. I hurried back, passed the word to the First Fans and the Filipino woman. We gathered our luggage and made it to Gate 7 before the mob of Soviet travellers realized there had been a change.

While waiting at Gate 7 the reason for the change and delay became apparent. A group of eastern bloc big-wigs were arriving for a conference. There was much handshaking, hugging, kissing, presenting of flowers and other false joviality that occurs when politicians get together. No matter what their persuasion or ideology they are all cut from the same cloth and are a sorry lot. None of them, east or west, have any interest in the people they are supposed to be serving.

It was close to 9:30 p.m., Moscow time, when we finally got aboard JU 133, a roomy (after Aeroflot) 707 aircraft which sped us to Belgrade and the care of Paedrog Djordvic. The Park Hotel looked delightful. We were beat.

21 September

at 7:30 a.m.

Being scheduled to leave for the airport/called for an early wake-up and breakfast. The familiar roll, cheese, marmalade and strong strong coffee. Then down to the lobby where MacDermott accused me of sneaking into the room next to his and blowing cigarette smoke through the grill into his bathroom. He was on the 6th floor, the rest of us on the 4th.

And there we were back at Belgrade airport, checking bags, clearing customs and immigration quickly and in the passenger lounge waiting for the ~~Robert E. Lee~~ good old Nicola Tesla. Scheduled departure time was 10:30 a.m. but that had already been changed to 10:35, an ill omen. There being not much else to do we spliced the mainbrace and chatted with some of the other travellers. Departure time was now 11:00.

MacDermott had been chatting with an American woman then wandered off to check on something or other. The woman looked at me. "Are you people on that man's tour?" she asked. I admitted we were. "God," she said, "are all you people stupid?" "Not any more," I told her.

Departure time was now 11:30. JAT announced that our flight would depart from gate 3A and since the way was open some of us wandered off towards the gate. When we got to the gate we found that the departure time was still 11:30 but there would be an hour-an-a-half's delay. All right. I told the First Fen that I'd stay to watch the baggage if they wanted to go back to the lounge. Which they did and which I did. Shortly thereafter some of our fellow travelers (so to speak) began to show up. An obnoxious bunch from the east and middlewest. They crowed about with much joviality. A brief conversation ensued.

New Yorker (to friend): This guy with the hat has been waiting here all this time and he'll probably be the last one to get on the plane.

Guy with slouch hat and raincoat: No, I won't be.

New Yorker: You sound like you mean that.

Gwshar: You can take it to the bank.

New Yorker: The line starts behind this guy with the hat.

Departure time was 1300. And it was. The crowd surged towards the airplane with First Fandom leading the way. We boarded, found our seats, settled in for the long (10 hour) and boring flight to New York. We would be, of course, some three hours late and there was a great deal of concern about making connections.

Across the aisle from Chrys and me was a lovely young woman with two small children, a boy of about two and a girl of about three. She had just gotten out of Poland and was on her way to join relatives in the U.S. Being old and parental types we helped her with the children who grew more and more tired. When the plane captain finally announced that we were entering the landing pattern for New York our young Polish friend broke into a big smile. "America," she said, "it's the best, right?"

You can take that to the bank, too.

Bea Taylor left us in New York, hurrying and hoping to make her connection to Florida. After a short stopover we were again in the air headed for Chicago. Bud and Judy said goodbye and hurried away to make their connection for San Francisco. Doc and Sue were met by their daughter and were off to a medical convention. Chrys and I caught the van to our hotel, stowed the bags, headed for the restaurant.

"Would you like a cocktail before dinner?" the waitress asked.

"Indeed." I said. "Bring me a martini. Make it a double."

An incomplete report to be sure. A good writer would make a book out of it but I never claimed to be a good writer. Art Widner and others who made the trip in May 1982 have covered most of it in more detail.

Some general impressions: nobody smiles, nobody laughs. Which is understandable since the Soviet people have little to smile about. There is a great shortage of consumer goods including fresh foods. Part of the problem would seem to be the lack of refrigerated transport. Milk, for instance, was extremely scarce. Some canned milk was available but no fresh milk.

I mentioned the paper shortage. It seems ridiculous in view of the thousands of miles of Siberian forest but there are no paper mills and, again, no transport. The watermelons were harvested in Tashkent but that doesn't mean much to the people in Leningrad. The grain harvest was coming in in the Ukraine, the great Soviet breadbasket. Doc Miller and I looked at the fields and agreed on why the Soviets have a grain shortage. An American farmer would raise three times as much on the same acreage. The lack the technology required to produce quality goods, it seems. Intourist hauled us around on a variety of busses: the one's that rattled and clanked were Soviet made; the smooth-running ones came from Hungary. It seemed the same with almost anything one could mention. It is a result, I imagine, of putting most of their emphasis on their military buildup. Tanks have precedence over busses and, in a manner of speaking, military boots have a priority over civilian shoes.

Considering the noises the Reagan administration is making that is something we'd better be keeping close watch on.

Individuals were willing to talk if the surroundings were private enough. ("You can never be sure just who is listening." And that's a direct quote.) The people aren't really happy with their circumstances. They hope things will improve but, realistically, do not believe they will. The number of American tourists has dropped off since Reagan took office and they regret that.

As a retired sergeant of marines I could not help but be impressed with the respect given to their veterans. There are lines for everything but the old veterans do not stand in line. They go to the head of the line no matter what it is for. (Did I hear somebody mention *Starship Trooper*? Yeah, there's a close resemblance. (RAH would throw a fit over that.)) Incidentally, the tombs of their unknown soldiers are guarded by school children.

The USSR. A depressing place to visit and I sure wouldn't want to live there.

As to what exactly went awry with the science fiction end of the First Fandom Science Fiction tour, it remains a mystery. It would be easy to simply say that MacDermott screwed up and let it go at that. It seemed at the time that he was trying to arrange things as he went along, calling on people he had met on the first tour in May and one does not make that sort of arrangements with Europeans. On the other hand Amity Tours assures me that they have a couple of inches of correspondence and telexes from the Soviet Writer's Union and Intourist assuring them that the First Fandom tour would be treated as a special interest tour and that meetings with Soviet science fiction people had been set up in the three cities we visited. On Amity's side of the ledger is the fact that the SWU did pay 25% of our expenses. Even in the alleged classless society the gulf between professionals and the laity is great--greater in Europe than on this side of the Atlantic. I have this suspicion that when the Soviet Writer's Union realized that none of us were professional writers it simply washed its hands of us.

By the way, when was the last time you had a bull session with a member of the SFWA?

Still...if you happen to get one of MacDermott's flyers inviting you to participate in a science fiction tour of the USSR...forget it.

Roy Tackett



UFO

Maybe one of these days I will get serious about writing and do something besides compose first drafts on stencils. It would tend to make things come out better and I would be able to get in everything I wanted to write about the first time (or second time) around. But I'm too lazy, actually, to want to write the same thing more than once. You'll just have to put up with addenda like this.

That little gizmo over there on the left is the only example of grafitti we saw in the USSR. We saw it scrawled on the outside walls of two apartment buildings in rather out of the way residential sections. And, of course, no one knows anything about it or has any idea of what it means. One of the apartments was in Moscow and the other in Leningrad so, presumably, the grafitti is of more than local significance. One could make all sorts of speculation about it. The use of the "peace" or "ban the bomb" symbol is interesting but even more interesting are the accompanying letters "UFO". The letters were Roman rather than Cyrillic.

And you, dear reader, may speculate to your heart's content but you know all that I know about it.

The other thing I wanted to mention was the Soviet attitude towards the conquest of space. Their enthusiasm towards their space programs is unbounded. Space is constantly in the news. Admittedly there is not much in the way of real news. Of course there is not much in the way of space news in the United States either. The big deal here is the shuttle which barely clears the atmosphere. Big deal. But I tend to veer a bit.'

On this side the "media" proclaims that we have no heroes. The Soviets do. The Cosmonauts are all heroes. Their written biographies are bestselling books. Their filmed biographies are high-rated television shows. The "conquest of space" is publicized in books, films, pictures, postage stamps and almost anywhere else it is possible to do so. I ran out of smokes so I purchased a carton of "Sixth Ocean" cigarettes. The sixth ocean is the ocean of space. The logo on the pack is a symbolic scene of stars against the deep blue background of outer space. The logo on the carton itself, two spaceships in near space against a background of Earth and the curve of the horizon melding into outer space. The Soviets are space conscious and their government obviously makes a big attempt to keep them that way.

I could get off onto one of my favorite hobbyhorses here but it is probably best that I don't. It does seem to me, though, that since that last trip to the Moon our government has done its best to play down space travel and space exploration. Ah, well, at least we proved it could be done even with the "primitive" rockets we used. Maybe another generation some time in the future will try again.

The point is that the Soviet government is keeping the interest in space at a high level... even if they really aren't doing all that much about space exploration.

The big news at the time we were there was the successful completion of the mission of Cosmonauts Popov, Serebrov and Savitskaya.

We mumble a lot about a space station sometime in the future. The Soviets have one.

So it goes.

X

Which seems to wind up this issue. If you have any questions I'll try to answer them.

With any luck I should have another issue out in May. I have some material on hand and may get a bit more. I can always use more, though. The time between issues sometimes spreads out and the mailing list certainly isn't what it once was but I did, by Foo, pub my ish.

RT

FROM:

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