

# THE MENTOR 90

## THE EDITORIAL SLANT

by Ron Clarke

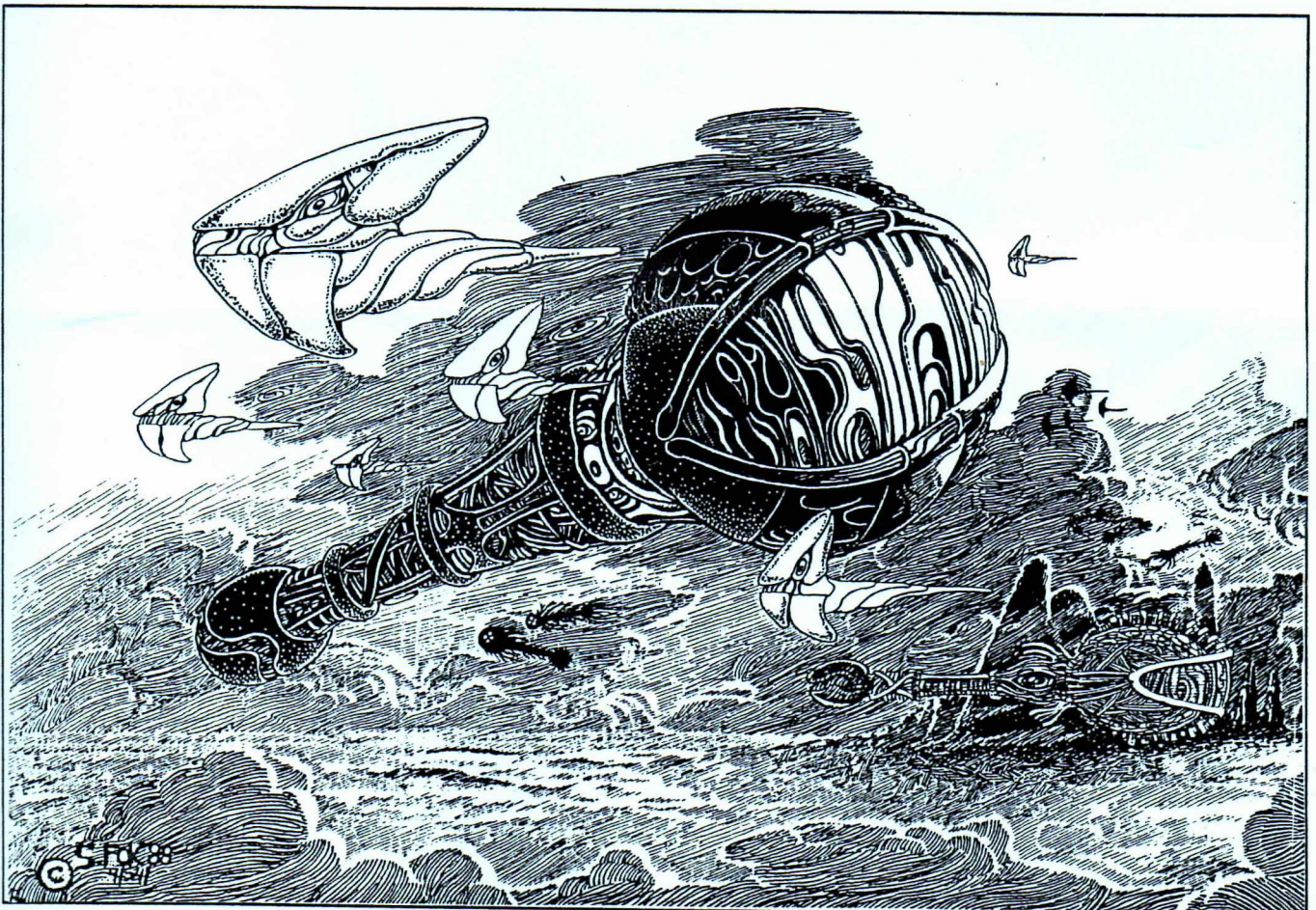
Well, it's the middle of winter in Sydney, and it's averaging 15°C in my flat. I have most of this issue together, except for Bradley Row's article, and Bill Congreve's column. It has been some time since the last issue - six months - so I thought it time to put another one out. Especially since the flow of LoCs has slowed to a trickle - about one a week.

Things have also settled down at work. The Liberal government voted in last election several months ago decided, in order to balance the budget by cutting spending by 6 billion dollars, to cut the Public Service even more than the continuing 1% a year that the previous Labour government had been doing for some years, which had been taken care of by attrition. So, as well as the 1% "efficiency dividend", we had the 10% cut. And there probably will be more cuts after the budget in August. Every federal department had to meet the additional 10% cut. In my department, that meant about 250 staff out of a national total of 5,000 odd. (The 10% cut was financial, half of which was met by cutting various programs). Out of the 80 odd staff from NSW, 50 were to come from the 120 staff in my section. Needless to say, the staff were not too happy.

Luckily the union managed to make management see the problem with *that*, and we now only have to lose 25 staff (positions) in my section. In fact, with the reorganisation, our office is one of those who will be staying pretty much intact, so I should be OK, personally.

Currently there are SF series that I am looking forward to seeing future novels, and will not miss: The Chung Kuo series by David Wingrove, the World War series by Harry Turtledove and the recently completed Gap Series by Stephen Donaldson. Funnily enough, all are not so much separate episodes as giant novels that will only be complete when the last book in the "series" is published. And, of course there are SF authors any of whose books I don't pass up (there aren't many authors like that). These are Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Iain Banks, Greg Bear and William Gibson. There are others, but these come immediately to mind.

This issue has several new columns, and several new articles that I think you will find of particular interest. The column FUTURIAN OBSERVER at the moment consists of reprints from the newzine SYDNEY FUTURIAN that I edit for the Futurian Society of Sydney. The column title was last used in a very outspoken newzine of the 1940s, giving the editor's opinions of the FSS and the goings-on (which were much more voluble then). I hope you enjoy the column - it does give some insight into Sydney fans that fans both overseas and interstate would not otherwise see. - Ron.





# Constitutional Government

by Brad Row

## Part One

*"Some men look at constitutions with sanctimonious reverence, and deem them like the ark of the covenant, too sacred to be touched. They ascribe to the men of the preceding age a wisdom more than human, and suppose what they did to be beyond amendment."*

Ron has been at me for some time to write this article (about two years) and it's probably about time I "pulled my finger out", as we say in the Antipodes, and made some effort toward getting it done.

As originally conceived the idea behind the article was to look at the constitutions of contemporary English speaking nations and "compare and contrast them" as they invariably say in essay questions. The more I thought about this task, however, the more it seemed that it was impossible to consider modern constitutions without also considering the historical context in which they evolved. The trouble is, once you start looking into history it's difficult to know where to stop. Go back far enough and you eventually come to the granddaddies of constitutional governments: those of ancient Greece and Rome.

I had to consider for some time whether it was worth discussing these ancient polities. Their ways of governing themselves are, by modern standards, extremely alien. There are very few parallels between ancient constitutions and modern ones. The Romans, for example had nothing even remotely resembling the U.S. Supreme Court (or even the British House of Lords when exercising its judicial function) and despite the similarity in name between it and the upper houses of such countries as the U.S. and Australia the Roman Senate did not perform a function which bears much resemblance to that of modern legislative chambers. And Roman "magistrates" have very little to do with those august gentlemen and ladies who nowadays fine you for swearing at policemen and relieve you of your driving licence for using it while under the influence of alcohol (although, paradoxically enough, if these offences had existed in those times it would have been a Roman magistrate who saw to it that you were punished for committing them).

Nevertheless it seemed to me that I *had* to discuss these constitutions. For one thing virtually all the founding fathers of modern constitutions were well acquainted with ancient systems of government. You won't read much of such thinkers as Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Madison or Jefferson without some reference to Roman political concepts and institutions.

More importantly, when you bear in mind that this article is intended to appear in a science fiction magazine, a

study of these constitutions is an excellent way of acquainting you with some idea of just how different ideas of government can be. In far too many of the societies, alien or human, which science fiction writers have envisaged, the systems of government look all too frequently very much like our own. Either that, or they are just so weird that one wonders how they could ever conceivably operate. In the real world the constitution of Republican Rome survived for more than five hundred years and even under the Empire important political traditions remained. By studying it you get some idea of just how very different, yet workable, systems of government can really be.

Lastly, the Roman system of government is not only one with which we have a considerable degree of familiarity, it is also one which self-destructed spectacularly in the first century BC. By studying it we can gain a very good idea of just what can go wrong in a political system and how, hopefully, we can prevent the same thing happening to our own.

My qualifications for undertaking this enterprise are probably not impeccable: I am a lawyer but I don't specialise in constitutional law. The manner in which various countries are governed, however, has always fascinated me and I suppose I have accumulated a fair degree of knowledge on the topic. The limits of my erudition will probably become apparent as I go along.

The first thing to bear in mind when considering the Roman constitution is that the Romans had little, if any, idea of the separation of powers and to the extent that the term could be rendered any meaning in their language it would have conveyed a quite different idea to them than it does to us. Leaving aside the Senate, to which we shall come later, power in the Roman Republican government was exercised by magistrates: officials elected annually, usually exercising their powers in a collegiate fashion.

The highest of the Roman magistrates were the consuls. There were two of them and they were possessed of equal powers. Originally they were simply replacements for the old Roman kings and possessed all the powers we might expect an absolute monarch to enjoy. They commanded the armed forces of the Roman Republic. They could and did try civil and criminal cases (the difference between the two was never particularly clear to the Romans) and held the power of life and death over Roman citizens (and anyone else as well for that matter). They could, through their *edicts*, effectively legislate. All of which, of course, thoroughly offends against the American idea that the legislative, executive and judicial powers should be separated and wielded by different bodies or offices. It's unlikely that the Romans even *conceived* of the three types of power as having any separate reality: to them there was only form of power: *imperium*, which was enjoyed in differing degrees and respects by the various levels of the Roman magistracy.

In Roman constitutional theory safety from abuse of power lay in two features of this system: the consuls held office for only one year and decisions by them had to be unanimous. One could negative or veto the decisions of the other. In practice another consideration came into play as well: the consulate was a popular office to which all members of the Roman political class aspired at the pinnacles of their careers. Hogging the job was frowned upon. Once a Roman had held the office of consul it was expected that he would not run again for a consecutive second term. When in later times toward the end of the Republic some Romans made a practice of this (such as Gaius Marius, who held six consulships in a row) eyebrows were raised, to say the very least. The fact that one individual could never hold the office for any great length of time was another factor which tended to weaken the dictatorial powers which it might otherwise be likely to assume.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jefferson, letter to Samuel Kercheval, July 1816.

Another factor was the development of what the Romans called the right of *provocatio* ("to speak for"). The story which the Romans were taught (and which may well be right for all we know) is that on one occasion when a consul was seeking to exercise his powers of life and death over a Roman citizen, in somewhat questionable circumstances, the individual concerned called out to his fellow citizens to aid him and resist this injustice. The result of this precedent was that a Roman citizen could not be deprived of life or liberty without the opportunity to address his fellow citizens who would have the power to heed his pleas and decline to impose the punishment sought. In practice, since the entire Roman citizenry could not be assembled every time someone was about to be charged with a crime, this task was entrusted to a panel of Roman citizens very closely matching what we would call a jury. In fact, to the Romans, the right of *provocatio* very quickly assumed the status that the right to jury trial presently enjoys in modern Anglo-Saxon jurisdictions: something almost sacred and beyond question.

This system worked tolerably well when Rome was a small state and its enemies were situated nearby. As Roman military influence expanded to cover the entire Italian peninsula and beyond it began to break down. The Roman consuls simply could not exercise their judicial powers in Rome while leading armies at a distance of several hundred kilometres. Moreover Rome was becoming a large city and the complexity of its legal affairs was also assuming similar proportions. The Romans addressed this problem by creating a new magistracy: the praetorship.

The praetors took over the judicial and legislative functions of the consuls. There were two of them: the Urban and the Peregrine Praetors. The Urban Praetor tried cases between Roman citizens; his Peregrine colleague tried cases where either one or both of the parties involved were foreigners. The end result of this was that two systems of law evolved: one administered by one Praetor and one administered by the other. We know quite a lot about the system developed by the Urban Praetor: it ultimately became the system of Roman law bequeathed to us through the Institutes of the Emperor Justinian. Concerning the other system we know almost nothing at all: the reason being that in 212 AD the Roman Emperor Caracalla declared by his edict (the famed *Constitutio Antoniana*) that all free inhabitants of the Empire were from that time onwards Roman citizens. There was nothing for the peregrine system to concern itself with and nobody bothered to preserve it for further study. In a time when books were rare and easily lost (for example when libraries burnt down) whole bodies of knowledge could vanish if they ceased to possess any contemporary relevance.

The praetors were a subordinate magistracy and subject to the control of the consuls: just as they could veto each other the consuls could also veto individual decisions of the praetors. Moreover the consuls retained the power to exercise judicial power when present in Rome and over the armies under their control: infractions of military discipline and such like were thus dealt with by them.

The establishment of the praetorship marked a pattern in Roman constitutional development. As the work became too great for the existing magistrates another board of magistrates would be created with distinct powers. The Aediles, for example, were eventually created to control the streets and markets of Rome (the job being too much for the consuls presumably) and became a kind of Department of Business and Consumer Affairs: they regulated weights and measures, controlled sharp business practices and became possessed of powers to try small scale disputes and punish infractions accordingly.

With all these magistrates and magistracies the Romans

needed another set of them to oversight the system and ensure that it was working properly. The *tribunes* were created for precisely this role. The closest modern analogue would be the office of Ombudsman: they were a sort of complaints department with powers to investigate and rectify injustice wherever it might be occurring in the Roman system. To aid them in this role they were entrusted with a power of veto over the entire Roman magistracy: even the decisions of consuls could be frustrated by the tribunes if they so wished. The power of the tribunes to thus wreak chaos over the entire Roman political system if they were so minded (which could be quite often exercised as the Republic entered its death throes in the first century BC) was constrained by the fact that there not two, but ten of them and each possessed a power of veto over the actions of the others. Very often the tribunes could and did grind themselves to a halt before their deliberations began to impinge seriously upon the rest of the magistracy.

The Roman Senate was never an elected representative chamber in the same sense as say, the British House of Commons or the U.S. House of Representatives. Until very late in the Republic, the Senators were not elected at all and even then they still held office for life. Neither, for that matter, did they possess, in strict legal theory, any power to influence the government of the country. The Senate was an *order*, a body of Roman citizens elevated to a certain status in much the same sense that a knighthood, or elevation to the peerage, confers a status upon the bearer. Originally, as the name implies, the Senate was a body of senior citizens, presumptively possessed of some special wisdom by virtue of their age, who acted as advisors to the old Roman kings.

Under the Republic they played the same role with respect to the consuls and the other magistracies which evolved in the course of time. Its powers were always advisory: it issued *consulta* (quite misleadingly, in my opinion, translated in conventional texts as decrees but which might be better translated as consultations or opinions) which the relevant magistrate—who had sought the opinion of the Senate could heed or ignore as he saw fit. Romans who met the criteria for membership of the Senate were enrolled onto it by the *censors*: special magistrates who were only elected once every five years and who had powers to maintain the rolls of Roman citizens. The censors could and did remove from the roll those Senators who for one reason or another (usually criminality or moral turpitude) no longer justified their position there and it is for this reason that the word "censor" has come to assume the meaning it possesses in the English language of someone who exercises oversight of public morals.

While, in theory, the Senate's opinions were only advisory they were in practice very rarely ignored. The reason was that virtually the entire Roman political class was represented on it. One has to remember that there was very little continuity elsewhere in Republican politics. Roman magistrates were unpaid and expected to donate their services free to the Roman state out of patriotism and a desire to advance the cause of their country. Not only was it unpaid but a political career was singularly expensive. There were of course the usual election expenses with which we are reasonably familiar in our own times. Roman magistrates were also expected (if they wished to advance up the political ladder) to stage lavish spectacles for the benefit of the Roman citizenry. The aediles, for example, were in charge of the games played in the arena which they had to put on at their own expense. If they wished to be remembered (and preferred when seeking the next magistracy) the more lavish and spectacular (and inordinately expensive) those games were the better. Caesar, for example, was renowned for the hugely expensive games which he staged while holding office as aedile.

This meant that one had to be wealthy in order to be



a player in the Roman political system. Since wealth was by and large inherited in Roman times the government tended to reside in the hands of an hereditary aristocracy. Sometime persons of modest birth or background could and did rise to the highest levels of the Roman state by dint of good fortune or unbridled ability and such intruders into the political class were known as *novi homines* or "new men". Marius, and later in the same century, Cicero, are good examples of this type of parvenu.

The expensiveness of a Roman political career meant that Romans did not stay in office very long. Typically a young man embarking upon a political career would stand for election to one of the lower magistracies. If successful, he would hold that magistracy for the one year term permitted to him and then lay it down at the end of that term. Thereafter he would wait for a number of years and then seek election to the magistracy somewhat more important than the last one he held. A Roman was obliged to have these gaps in his career by reason of the expense of holding the office and conducting the election which led to it. Moreover the offices were highly sought after and competition for them was fierce. In practice a Roman followed what was known as *cursus honorum* ("path of honour") in which he sought one magistracy after another, at intervals not infrequently as long as a decade, until eventually, if he were sufficiently able and lucky, he could succeed to the highly coveted consulship. Since in Roman times the years were named after those who held the consulship during them that final pinnacle to one's career assured one's place in history.

If the magistracy were all that operated in the Roman system one can see that at any given time magistracies would be held by persons who almost certainly had never acted in them before or would ever do so again: a government of gifted amateurs: who given a twelve month term were never going to acquire much experience in whatever job they happened to be doing. Moreover with so many magistrates wielding so many powers and functions it is not difficult to see them acting at cross purposes or getting in each other's way. This is where the Senate came in: it was in a sense, a sort of brains trust of the entire Roman political system. Once a Roman had demonstrated sufficient promise in politics by being elected to a magistracy the censors usually got around to enrolling him on the Senate. Thereafter he would remain, barring accidents, until he died. At any given time a Roman could "pick the brains" as it were, of all those who knew anything at all about his job by consulting the Senate. Few magistrates, with their ephemeral tenure on office, chose to resist its will. The system of magisterial vetoes, operating from the consuls on down, meant that those rare ones who did could soon be brought into line.

In a sense the Senate operated like a modern cabinet in the Westminster system. In the eyes of the law the cabinet does not exist and one will almost never see the word mentioned in any statute. Its decisions possess no legal force and one cannot be compelled to obey them in any court of law. Yet any minister who disobeys or demurs from a decision of the cabinet will not find himself or herself holding office for long. Just like a cabinet the Senate co-ordinated the decisions of the various Roman magistrates and just like a cabinet its advice was rarely, if ever, ignored.

Thus the Senate could and did concern itself with all levels and branches of the Roman government. It accepted and repudiated treaties. It could and did try cases civil and criminal cases at the highest levels both in the Republican period and later under the Emperors. It controlled public expenditures and allocated the areas in which Roman generals were permitted to operate. It considered, debated and amended legislation before it was put to the Roman people. Theoretically only a chamber capable of offering advice to the Roman mag-

istracy it was in practice the central deliberative organ of the Roman state.

Roman law could be made in a variety of ways. Usually a magistrate would issue an *edict*, a public announcement of the policy he would follow while in office. It, of course, a praetor announces that he will decide cases before him in a certain way he has in effect legislated. In practice a praetor would simply take the edict of his predecessor and update it as the situation required. This ongoing statement, the "Edict of the Praetor" was a highly important source for those seeking to understand the laws of Rome. In difficult cases the praetor might well seek the opinion of the Senate and its views on the question put before it would also amount to law given that magistrates would almost invariably follow it. Finally the Romans legislated in the way in which we normally understand the process: a statute would be drawn up and passed by one of the various citizen assemblies which elected the magistrates and which could also vote on laws, much in the manner of a referendum.

The assemblies could not act on their own initiative. They were invariably summoned by a magistrate who would put the particular piece of legislation before them. This process too was subject to magisterial veto and it was always understood that no legislation would be introduced to the Roman people unless it had been first vetted and approved by the Senate. When Tiberius Gracchus, for example, introduced his agrarian reform legislation late in the second century BC, a fellow tribune, Marcus Octavius, vetoed the initiative because it had not been previously debated by the Senate.

Once one understands the Roman constitution it is not a difficult step to follow the constitutions of the Greek city-states such as Athens and Sparta upon which to a considerable extent it was modelled. They were all characterised by boards of elected magistrates who conducted the city's affairs.

The Athenians departed from this to some extent by choosing their magistrates by lot (ie: by drawing names out of a hat as it were) so that all citizens could be allowed equal access to office and all magistrates were strictly limited to a single one year term. But even the Athenians, however, were not willing to apply this egalitarian philosophy completely across the field: the board of ten generals, or *strategoi*, for example, were chosen by competitive elections and could, and did, remain in office for several successive terms. The Athenians were not about to entrust their military security to somebody whose sole qualification for office was, without putting too fine a point on it, the luck of the draw. It also permitted some degree of continuity in the political system: Pericles, for example, maintained sway over Athenian politics by retaining this particular office. Members of the treasury board, to cite another example, could only be drawn from the most wealthy strata of society, the so-called *pentakosiomedimnoi*, on the theoretical basis that, given the rather lax standards of public morality which prevailed in ancient times, wealthy individuals would be less likely to raid the treasury and if they did succumb to the temptation there was at least some likelihood of actually getting the money back.

As in Rome there was a body analogous to the Senate: in Sparta it even bore the same name: the Gerusia (the Greek translation of the Latin word) although the Athenian equivalent, the Council of the Areopagus, appears to have been largely bypassed in the democratic reforms of the fifth century BC.

Aristotle was probably the first to make any serious study of national constitutions. He had a wealth of examples to draw upon: ancient Greece was divided up into a multitude of city states which had in their turn founded numerous colonies across the Mediterranean, many of which were by his time independent self-governing communities. Many other city



states, such as Carthage and Rome, while not Greek in origin, had also developed constitutional forms of government by the time when he addressed himself to the issue.

Aristotle classified constitutions into essentially three forms: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. Monarchy is of course a system of government with which the human race has been almost exclusively familiar throughout most of its history. Aristocracy while not quite as common nevertheless recurs with sufficient frequency for us to be reasonably well acquainted with it. Democracy is of course the rarest, most unstable and short lived of all the forms. Aristotle knew it well enough in his own time but for eighteen centuries from the accession of Augustus Caesar to the election of President Washington it did not exist virtually any where in the civilised world.<sup>2</sup>

These three forms had both their good and bad versions. Monarchy could be the rule of an enlightened prince or it could degenerate into tyranny. Aristocracy could transform itself from the rule of the best and most qualified to govern (the "aristoi" as the ancient Greeks would call them) to being merely the rule of the few (oligarchy). Democracy could in turn degenerate into mob rule.

Aristotle also held that these forms of government had a tendency to mutate from one to the other in an almost endless cycle. Monarchies would eventually become effete and their power would be assumed by an aristocracy acting in the monarch's name. Aristocracies in turn would eventually succumb to demands for popular input into government and transform into democracies. Democracies would in turn degenerate into factional strife and mob rule, the people would look to a strong leader for the restoration of order, the government would be transformed into a monarchy and the cycle would once again commence.

This process could be circumvented, Aristotle and the ancients believed, by a balanced constitution which combined the elements of all three forms of government. Such a constitution would be stable and resist the tendency to endlessly evolve from one form of government to another.

In his day the historian Polybius considered that the Romans had achieved such a constitution. The two consuls, the supreme military commanders, represented the monarchical element. The Senate, upon whose advice they were bound to act, and whose ranks were drawn from the wealthy political elite, represented the aristocratic element. And the popular law making assemblies which elected the consuls and the lesser magistrates represented the democratic element. Polybius considered that this balanced constitution was largely responsible for the success of the Roman Republic in subjugating the Mediterranean world to its rule.

Unfortunately Polybius spoke too soon. During the first century BC Rome was wracked by a series of internecine civil wars and episodes of domestic strife as military commanders and urban demagogues struggled for political power. Essentially a series of constitutional arrangements which worked well in the government of a small city state could only be adapted with difficulty to the task of governing a huge Empire, which the Republic had by virtue of its very political success managed to acquire, and the tensions which developed following the destruction of Carthage, Rome's only serious rival for power in the Mediterranean, tore the fabric of the old Republic asunder. Eventually it became apparent that only some form of monarchy could maintain order in the Roman state and the victory of Octavian over Mark Antony at Actium achieved a form of constitutional settlement. Henceforth the forms and offices of the Roman Republic would be preserved but with a

new, lifelong magistracy, the *princeps*, or Emperor, presiding over and dwarfing in importance all the other offices of that state.

With the passage of time that office, the principate, steadily grew in stature and power. In theory the Emperor was merely *primus inter pares* ("first among equals") with respect to the other magistrates but the stature of the office steadily increased as the institutions of old Republic became less and less important and influential in the government of the Empire. By the third century AD the Roman jurist Ulpian was able to assert with confidence that "*Quod principi placuit, legis habet vigorem*" ("what pleases the Emperor has the force of law"). By the time when the general Diocletian succeeds to the Imperial purple later that century we see the Emperor requiring all his subjects to address him as *dominus* ("my lord and master" - the manner in which a Roman slave addressed his owner: this marked the emergence of the so-called *Dominate* period of Imperial history) and the establishment of absolutism as the central political tenet of the Roman state is all but complete.

The principate was in practice the elevation of military dictatorship into constitutional principle. The Roman Army made and unmade emperors - as became unmistakably apparent during those dreadful decades of military anarchy which followed the death of the Emperor Severus Alexander in AD 235. At times during that period the Empire seemed upon the verge of dissolution as rival Emperors asserted their right to rule and even claimed whole provinces as a separate state subject to their government. The term "struck by lightning" became a bizarre euphemism in the histories for an Emperor's death at the hands of unruly soldiers. If your power depends on maintaining the affections of the soldiers beneath you your capacity to discipline that army is severely reduced. The Roman Army became an almost lawless force frequently feared more by the subjects of the Emperor than his barbarian enemies.

Diocletian and the Illyrian (the ancient province of Illyricum lay on the western coast of the Aegean) dynasty he founded restored order to the Roman state but at the price of rigid political, social and economic regimentation. To maintain the loyalty of their soldiers and to apply them to the task of deflecting the successive waves of barbarian invaders which pressed upon the frontiers of the Empire he and his successors were obliged to incur colossal expenditures which they financed by debasing the coinage and raising taxation to almost confiscatory levels. Inflation and economic chaos followed exacerbated by a series of ineffectual price controls, (the so-called Edict of Maximum Prices) which, administered under the pain of death, served only to create widespread shortages and famine.

Peasants were tied to the land in order to ensure the payment of taxes and sons were bound to follow the same professions as their fathers for the same reason. The basis of peonage and serfdom was thus laid. Service on the city councils of the Empire was made compulsory for those who possessed sufficient social status and members of those councils were charged with personal responsibility for the collection and payment of whatever taxes the Emperor deemed his due. Those councillors who failed to meet the targets were obliged to meet the difference from their own personal resources (among other, more unfortunate, punishments). In the face of these exactions and controls the Roman middle class simply disappeared and the economy of the Empire grew increasingly sclerotic and debilitated. The rule of the Emperors could no more brook debate and discussion than it could disobedience to its taxes and strictures: intellectually the Empire had fallen into a stupor from which nothing would rouse it.

The historian Levy concluded his study of the Imperial Rome by declaring that:-

<sup>2</sup> We'll leave aside the Italian city-states and Swiss cantons of the Middle Ages

*"State intervention and a crushing fiscal policy made the whole empire groan under the yoke; more than once, both poor men and rich prayed that the barbarians would deliver them from it. In AD 378, the Balkan miners went over en masse to the Visigoth invaders, and just prior to AD 500 the priest Salvian expressed the universal resignation to barbarian domination."*

What Republican Rome had created Imperial Rome was unable to retain. The Western half of the Empire effectively ceased to exist during the fifth century AD.

The history of Europe over the next five centuries inclines one to think that Aristotle's theorisings have more in them than one might at first suspect. The absolutism of the Roman Emperors and the barbarian kings who followed them

gave way to a steady weakening of central power. The emergence of the feudal state is a complex phenomenon but it is essential to have some familiarity with it if one is to understand the development of the medieval parliaments towards the end of the middle ages.

Moreover the idea of constitutional government was not lost. How feudalism, a desire to reign in the excesses of government, and that idea eventually combined to produce the forms of government with which we are now familiar is an exciting and intriguing topic which forms the subject of my next article.

- Bradley Row

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in "Wage-Price Control: Myth and Reality" published by the Centre for Independent Studies, 1978, at p45.

# FANCON - How It Was, & Why I Won't Go To It Again.

"We were going to Odessa, but found ourselves in - ..."<sup>3</sup>

by Sergey Lukyanenko

1.

How was I going to go to FanCon without fear of 10 days in a train.

In the beginning, there was a word, as it should be. Not one word, at that. Lev Vershinin kept talking about the 1995 FanCon for two to three years. And at last, he called me. "Sergey, will you come? You know, you will get a prize, so you must come!" "Which prize?" "Dunno yet. What do you want it for? Do you want us to award you for FUGU FISH COOKED RUSSIAN STYLE?" "Do you mean that there's no difference for you? How about the judges?" "What judges? Just come here, you're the winner anyway. Come on! But we can pay only for railway tickets."

I was a bit terrified. Alma-Ata<sup>4</sup> to Moscow is three

days and a half. And Moscow to Odessa is almost two days. And the same time back. But - it's not just an invitation for drinking in good company! A prize is a prize. "Sergey, you should see the prizes by your own eyes. You wouldn't believe otherwise. It will be the prize of your life. The Nebula guys will die of envy..."

That did it. I bought a ticket and started packing. Vasya-Sex called two days before ETD. "Looking forward to having you with us! The sea is warm, and we'll go boating, and the sponsors - the Odessa Brewery - donate a barrel of beer to us daily, that is 798 litres!"

The train now seemed but a small nuisance to me compared with the sea, the beer and the white motor boat. I set out.

2

How Odessa-Mamma<sup>5</sup> started to show her teeth to us, and how I learned that I was not going to get the prize after all

Do you need a description of how two dozen sf fans in one railway car go to a con? You know how it usually is: beer, wine and vodka in the car, and poor but proud independent Ukraine outside it (dear Ukrainians, please don't take this as an insult. After all, I am a Kazakhstan citizen myself...) Gran-nies (babushkas) sell boiled potatoes, watermelons, apples and sunflower seeds at the stations. The car is modestly dirty - but tolerably so, the conductors and stewards are gloomy and unhelpful, but they are afraid to approach us so everything is O.K.

Not far from Odessa, somebody stole a coat with a roll of money in it from Mr. S. It is Odessa, after all...<sup>3a</sup>

The station. The sky is dark, but Vasya-Sex is beaming. "Now we shall hire two mini-buses and go to the

<sup>3</sup> A paraphrase of a well-known song of the Civil War (1918-1921) about Seaman Zheleznyak, a leader of a Red Army detachment. The song says: "They were going to Odessa, but found themselves near Kherson, and the detachment was ambushed there..." The song was taken seriously by official propaganda, but the people used to make fun of it; after all, Odessa is 100 km away from Kherson as a crow flies, and it is next to impossible to lose one's way there, especially for a man who is supposed to know at least some basics of navigation. The absurdity of the situation is aggravated by the fact that the Red Guards were "ambushed" where they were *not* supposed to go.

<sup>4</sup> The official name in Kazakhstan is Almaty, but the Russian name of the city is Alma-Ata. Several years ago the Kazakhstan Government issued a decree 'changing the Russian name of the capital', which is, of course, nonsense: you cannot give an order to a language. Imagine for example the Bundestag issuing a decree prescribing the

THE MENTOR 90 page 4

English-speaking people to drop the name 'Germany' and forbidding the French to call it 'Allemande', since the Germans call their country 'Deutschland'. Same for Magyar (Hungary), Suomi (Finland), Sarkvelo (Georgia), etc. Tradition is most important here: by the way, the Russian for 'German' (nationality) is 'Nemets', which is old Russian for 'Mute' - 'One who cannot speak (as normal people do)'. In the old times, all foreigners were 'nemets' for the Russians - in the same way as the Romans called foreigners 'barbarians', ie 'those whose speech sounds like 'bar-bar''. Now few people remember that the Germans' name had this meaning, and anyway the Germans do not care. Some new names introduced by newly independent ex-Soviet states are simply unpronounceable for Russians.

<sup>5</sup> Odessa is nicknamed 'Odessa-Mamma', and it is now mostly a nickname of affection. But it comes from an old saying that 'for all the thieves, Odessa is a mamma and Rostov a dad'. I would not say this is a groundless slander.

<sup>3a</sup> See (3)



resthouse of the Hydrometeocenter... So... Two minibuses... One million Coupons<sup>6</sup> should be enough... but the Organising Committee doesn't have the money at the moment. Will you pay for it? We shall reimburse it..." A smart driver, seeing this, demanded 50,000 Russian Roubles - that was more than twice one lemon<sup>7</sup> of Coupons. Mr. K. paid it. (Of course, nobody "reimbursed" it.)

A petty nuisance.

The resthouse. Those who arrived before us crawl outside to greet us. Burkin<sup>8</sup> is with his girl, Voha Vasilyev, with a bottle of beer, Eugeny Lukin with a guitar, Boris Zavgorodny with a light hangover. It seems that the party was swell.

We get the keys. We were promised "luxury rooms". Instead, we have to drop our bones in horror-story dungeons. Some rest house! It's rather a survival camp. No hot water, and cold water could be mistaken for the dew precipitating in pipes. Four beds to a room. No lamp in the toilet. No blankets, and the nights are cool. The meals are non-describable by printable language. The fans who were not invited guests had to pay US\$100 for all this (for Russia, it's quite a big sum, for Ukraine, a fortune.)

Petty nuisances....

Here comes Lev Vershinin.

"Guys, I made it! I did it! Guys, are you happy? Sergey, are you happy?"

"I am."

I really was at that moment.

"By the way? Where's the beer?"

(I must admit that I was really impressed by a vision of that barrel of beer. 798 litres per diem! I fell victim to the charm of this very exact number. Not 750 litres, not 800. Not even 790. 798! And it's for free!)

"They will bring the beer in the evening."

In the evening Lev runs around trying to summon the con guests for unloading a container, full of beer and delicatessen. There is no key for the container. Later, Lev comes and explains that the container had been sitting behind the rest-house for two months. Lev nervously ignites a cigarette and says that there is a small mistake. But the beer will be here. Tomorrow. A lot of beer. Besides that, sparkling wine and ham to go with it.

So everything is nice, and we continue discussing SF in a place nearby - they serve rotten beer, but it's already here, it's beer today and not the White Queen's "jam tomorrow". Anyway, Lev's beer will be free, and mistakes happen, you know.

<sup>6</sup> Ukraine is now going to introduce Grivne as a national currency. But they are still using Coupons - a temporary currency. Value of the Coupon (Karbovanets) is so low that a dollar equivalent of one Coupon cannot be detected by means of modern science. And an inflation graph could be mistaken for a drawing of the take-off of a space rocket....

<sup>7</sup> In slang, lemon means million.

<sup>8</sup> July Burkin, a fantasy writer, a professional chansonnier and poet, is also a co-author with Sergey Lukyanenko (they wrote a very funny trilogy: TODAY, MOMI, ISLAND OF RUSSIA and TZAR, TZAREVICH, KING AND PRINCE); Voha (Vladimir) Vasilyev and Eugeny Lukin both are poets and SF writers (Lukin had published several very successful novels and stories, while Vasilyev has not as yet managed to get into print); Boris Zavgorodny is one of the oldest SF fans in Russia, a living legend of fandom. I wrote to you about him once... And his sleeping bag once became a symbol of something omnipresent - at one time he had no roof over his head, besides, he used to travel a lot, and his sleeping bag could be seen at many of his friends and acquaintances. Some fans swear that it could be seen in several houses in one night, at once.

I come up to Lev. He has an important air: he is a People's Deputy, and running for a Vice Mayor's chair.

"Lev, who's getting the prizes?"

"For a novel" - Loginov (good!), for a story - Kudryavtsev (it's high time!), and for a short story ... frankly, I dunno. There's such a big struggle, such a struggle... It'll be either you or Oldy."

I make a simple calculation.

"Lev, do you mean that out of the three main prizes, two will be received by writers from Russia?"

"Yeah".

"And that the third one can be received by a non-Ukrainian, when a competitor is a Ukrainian? That's ridiculous."

"You can get it, you really can! There's such a struggle..."

"Didn't you tell me that I am getting the prize? For FUGU FISH?"

"We have the Anonymous Judges.... Eleven of them.... Do you think that Oldies are not worth a prize?"

"They are. But why did you lie to me? I leave home for almost a month, I spend a fortnight in trains...."

"You wouldn't have come here otherwise perhaps."

What a disarming honesty. Honesty is the best weapon of a politician. Well, to hell with the prize! I put my arm round Lev's waist and we go for a couple of beers. Those are not free, by the way.

Tomorrow is the inauguration. We shall see the prizes (well, I never wanted one from the very beginning, to start with! The grapes are sour...). Besides, there will be a great night 'recreation program'.

I came here to get my prize. And I have already boasted of it to everybody. But I can do without it. But f\*\*k it....

### 3

How we saw the Dukes<sup>9</sup>, were divided into wheat and weeds, listened to toasts for Djokhar Dudayev and were supposed to visit a strip-club; how after all we found that 'l'homme propose, l'boss dispose'.

One of the most festive and solemn moments in any con is its inauguration (to say nothing of distribution of elephants<sup>11</sup> or snails).

<sup>9</sup> Svyatoslva Loginov - a very good fantasy writer, the novel in question is THE MANY TENTACLED GOD OF DALAIN (about a world made by God exclusively for the Devil, with people made after the Creator's image to serve as toys of revenge for the Devil); Leonid Kudryastsev got his prize for THE WINGWORLD - a surrealist story; Henry Lion Oldy is a pen-name of Dmitry Gromov and Oleg Ladyzhinsky (Oleg + Dima), and he (they) writes very interesting fantasy stories about a world where Gods are actually created by their priests and story-tellers.

<sup>10</sup> The Duke is the nickname of the famous Odessa monument to Kuke Richeliet, the founder of the city. The monument is the symbol of the city.

<sup>11</sup> 'Distribution of elephants' is a phrase from a popular satirical novel THE GOLDEN CALF where an O'Henry-style swindler advertised himself in a poster as 'The Great Yogi Priest' and promised 'materialisation of spirits and distribution of elephants'. This quotation became a proverb, meaning either false promises, or, ironically, giving away awards or distribution of some goods arranged in any special way. As for the snails, Sergey hints at interpresscon (St. Petersburg) where the prize is called 'The Snail' - it's awarded by the most famous, perhaps, Russian SF writer Boris Strugatsky and is named after the title of the Strugatsky brothers' novel A SNAIL ON A

FanCon here promised Something Special. The 'Odessa Gentlemen'<sup>12</sup>, 'The Masques', the Mayor, et cetera. At the inauguration they showed us the prizes - the bronze models of the Duke. They were cute.

"The buses! Everybody get in the buses! The fans into the white one, the writers into the black one!"

We were still fresh after bathing in a very, very cool sea and boarded quickly. But what a strange colour differentiation?

It was all so simple. After the inauguration itself (of course, 'The Masques' never came and 'The Gentlemen' were much sillier than even in their TV revue) there was a banquet in a restaurant on Deribasovskaya<sup>13</sup>. Then we had a good imitation of the old 'Coloured Not Admitted' times: the 'white people' in the black bus went to the banquet, while the 'black people' in the white Jim Crow bus went back to the resthouse, no banquet for them. It was an apartheid with 'writers - fans' division. Mr. People's Deputy Lev Vershinin ("when I spread caviar on my bread, I always think about my people"<sup>14</sup>) had to push a couple of fans out of the writers' black bus, no matter how their writer friends asked that they not be separated from them (at that moment nobody yet suspected the truth). July Burkin was with his girl, as usual. "You cannot take her inside with you," said Lev, "the banquet meals are rationed." But at that moment there arrived Mr. Counsellor of the President of Ukraine (Culture), who used to be an SF writer himself, and who is July's good friend.

"July!"

"Alex!"

"July, you know, you can take your girl after all," says Lev quickly.

... It was an expensive open-air restaurant. None of the guests could have afforded it himself. Lev explains the program for the night: "At midnight we shall go to a casino. Everybody gets free tokens, that is chips. Then we'll go to a strip-tease club. And then we'll have our time in a seaside restaurant, til sunrise."

The guests were impressed.

I still cannot understand, why a man who managed to organise something had to lie - till the very last moment - that there is more. He could not have expected that we would fail to notice that his promises never came to life, could he?...

We were eating our rations, chasing them down with *false Greek brandy*<sup>15</sup>. The DJ, generously sponsored by several Chechens, switches on one record after another "in honour of our beloved President, the freedom fighter Jokhar Dudaev", and we have great trouble keeping a couple of our more ardent friends from smashing the Chechens' kissers. Whores dance near the stage, and one of them is an underage girl ("well, it's strictly prohibited, of course, but if you pay enough...").

In other words, the writers are being shown how they have a good time in Odessa.

Then the guys from the Organising Committee suddenly say in a kind and caring voice: "Friends, you know what, the bus will be with us only till midnight. If you don't want to go

on foot through the whole of the city, you'd better go to the resthouse now".

So much for the casino, the strip show and the restaurant till morning, with a view of the sun rising from the sea. We go in the black bus.

The Organising Committee remained in the restaurant.

Perhaps there was a third bus, of yet another colour. For the 'most white people'.

We were ashamed to look into the eyes of the white-bus fans.

It was a very educative night.

#### 4

How we found out that a catamaran is actually two boats.

To improve our impressions from the previous night, the Organising Committee declared that they would take us for a boat ride. On a catamaran.

"It will be a whole night at sea! With an a la fourchet dinner! With girls from the strip-tease club from yesterday! By the way, Sergey, why did you leave us yesterday? It was so nice!"

The catamaran proved to be two motor boats.

"One of them is not ours", said Lev.

Everybody went to the second one. But at the last moment, when the boat was already taking off, Lev suddenly and unexpectedly jumped onto the first one. The Organising Committee was there, too. And the girls. And the a la fourchet (we got three sausage sandwiches and some fake vodka each).

On board the semi-catamaran we finally realised that the con was organised not for the fans, as was the late 'Aelita', nor for the writers and publishers as was 'Sibcon', not for all of us, as was 'Interpresscon'. FanCon was for the Organising Committee. For the Anonymous Judges. For the pre-election campaign of a politician...

#### 5

Why I shall never again go to the FanCon...

Because I was deceived when I was being invited to it. I cannot imagine that when I was awarded the 'Start'<sup>16</sup>, I could come to get it just to hear from the organisers "you know, we decided to award Pelevin"<sup>17</sup> after all...

*Because no other convention could boast of so many cases of theft, burglary, violence (right outside the rest-house). I was lucky enough not to be robbed or beaten by local delinquents. But I didn't like the daily crime report from my friends.*

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SLOPE (which in its turn got its name from a Japanese verse: 'Slowly, slowly crawl/ O snail, to the top of Fuji-/ Up and up, to the heights').

<sup>12</sup> 'The Odessa Gentlemen' and 'The Masques' are very popular comic groups.

<sup>13</sup> The most famous street in Odessa. It is where you should walk 'to see the people and show yourself'.

<sup>14</sup> A quotation from a satirical fairy tale FEDOT THE BOLD SOLDIER - it's a cue of the mean Tzar.

<sup>15</sup> Odessa is also famous for faking 'foreign goods'. A popular phrase (quotation from yet another popular satirical novel) says that 'all contraband is made in Odessa, on Malaya Amavtskaya Street'.

THE MENTOR 90 page 6

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<sup>16</sup> 'Start' - a prize for a novice SF writer who made a surprisingly good start. Sergey Lukyanenko received it for his THE KNIGHTS OF THE FORTY ISLANDS (I once told you the summary of the story).

<sup>17</sup> V. Pelevin - a very interesting writer of stories which are in a way absurd - because they describe the absurd world of the USSR and post-Soviet Russia. In this world, bureaucrats could become werewolves, the dead people could get into an afterworld where they continued this illogical and quite frightening life of Soviet workers and clerks, boys in a summer camp could suddenly discover that they are being trained to be dead, a public convenience char could wipe this world from existence, only to find out that she herself was turned into a character from a 19th century socialist novel, a chicken could discover the true nature of his universe - the poultry farm's fattening-and-slaughter conveyor, or a spaceman could turn out to be a ... kamikaze 'stage dividing device' whose task was to disconnect rocket stages (because the Communist Party wanted to hide the fact that the USSR never had technology to make automatic space equipment). The weird, Kalkian world of Pelevin is impossible and imaginary, but even so familiar to the ex-Soviet readers....



Because they showed to us that we are nobody when Serious People are playing their politics, and we should be happy to get left-overs from their table.

Because I hate losing friends when they become politicians.

Because I had my full of lies and politics.

But the revenge was our, in a way.

6

How the grapes turned out to be sour after all, the Dukes ducked out, how everybody got drunk, how Gennady Prashkevich<sup>18</sup> made the Night of Long Crystal Knives, and why Vershinin had made a mistake by letting Prashkevich down.

Any con has its flops. But when you see how the organisers run about, black from lack of sleep and really doing their best, you must be a swine to blame them. When a person does everything possible and more - it shows.

On the other hand, when you see how the writers and the fans are 'the second-rate' people (and the fans even 'the third-grade') while the bosses are #1, it shows too.

There is a joke. 'When they made me eat hay, I put up with it...' You know the one.

When the writers did not receive the money for the tickets home but received tickets for bad trains with several transfers, to Moscow via Karachi and Terra del Fuego (I exaggerate but...) we endured it.

When those who came here without any money with hope for the promised tickets, started to think about going home by stowing away in a cargo train, we tried to put up with it.

When the convention became but an election campaign trick, we endured it.

But. When. At the closing ceremony. They. Declared to us. That the Dukes are stolen!

It was better with me (remember, I was going to receive the prize only before Lev told me that it was a kind of a practical joke). I even laughed. But the others were really hurt. One of the winners, writer K., who never uses dirty language, could say nothing but 4-letter words for a couple of hours....

By the way, we later found out that the Organising Committee just... did not want to pay the craft-shop for the Dukes.... Too expensive, they thought, and anyway, the con was over. Well, this is not a 100% proven story, but everybody believes it far more than the tale of a thief, who for some reason, chose to steal ten bronze ingots (they were heavy, and where could the thief sell them?...)

The prizes were deserved. That is, except the one for the unwritten... er, I mean unpublished story<sup>19</sup>. But the ceremony became a humiliating practical joke when a clown from 'The Odessa Gentlemen' declared with glee that, hey guys, you know, the Dukes are stolen!

I realised only after the ceremony was over that, after all, this was not a joke, and the prize-winners returned to their seats. And to be frank, I was glad that I was 'awarded' no prize....

After the ceremony, the con guests started to get drunk. They tried to quench their emotions.

In the process, I joined Gennady Prashkevich who was doing it in his room. He also did not get any 'reimbursement' and did not know how to get home.

At that moment the Counsellor of the President of Ukraine (Culture), Mr Prashkevich's friend, who once had been his apprentice at that, entered his room.

'How did you like the FanCon, Gennady?' he asked.

Something gleamed in Prashkevich's eyes. The Organising Committee guys were dancing around: the order was to show the Big Boss that the FanCon is a great thing.

"Imagine, buddy, they did not pay me," Prashkevich said. "I don't even have money for a drink."

"Here's your money!" cried the OrgCom boys. "We were just going to give it to you in a moment!"

"By the way, Sergey, did you get your money?" asked the bigwig.

"Nope."

"Here's your money, too!"

"And what about the rest?..."

They paid everyone. The OrgCom boys were running about, bringing refreshments: the VIP had to see how great the con was. Mr. Counsellor, who knows both about conventions and about political games, was smiling. Everything was clear. By the way, he is the only politician who I met and liked. What if we always try to elect only SF writers?

"This is our Long Crystal Knives Night," Prashkevich told me melancholy. "Tonight, Sergey, we can make them do what we please. What do you want, fried bananas or the Anonymous Judge dancing on the fridge?..."

We wanted a lot of things. And the night was a long one. And the organisers were presenting to the VIP the FanCon as it was promised to be.

But to tell the truth, I did not enjoy the lies and insults at the beginning, nor the fried bananas at the end.

And the FanCon is never going to see me again.

- Sergey Lukyanenko

*I beg pardon of the people who would feel hurt by the above article. It is all about the Fancon, and is in no way about any person or persons. I should especially mention Vasily Sprinsky, aka Vasya-Sex - he did his best and more, not always successfully but with great zeal. - S.L.*

(Sergey Lukyanenko, from Kazakhstan, is well-known in Russia for his SF writings (KNIGHTS OF THE FORTY ISLANDS, [A] PRINCESS WORTH DYING FOR, THE SEA OF GLASS, THE PLANET WHICH IS NOT, A BOY IN THE DARKNESS, THE DREAM LINE, THE EMPERORS OF ILLUSIONS, THE NUCLEAR DREAM, MY DAD - THE ANTIBIOTIC, etc). I took to translate, comment and edit the above a bit, though. It's about a con which took place in Odessa, the Ukraine, in Autumn, 1995. It was organised by another popular writer, Lev Vershinin (THE SAGA OF FIRE AND WATER, THE HISTORY OF THE WRONG TOMORROW, THE CANYON OF FREE STONES, TWO MEN AT THE FEET OF ETERNITY, etc). Lev is now running for a seat in the Ukrainian Government - and the con was supposed to contribute to his charisma.... - Pavel Viaznikov.)

<sup>18</sup> GJ. Prashkevich - an SF writer and (what is more important for this exact story) a good friend of the Counsellor of the President of the Ukraine for Culture.

<sup>19</sup> In this joke, a man was hiding from his enemies in a cow's hide. "When they were feeding me hay, I put up with it, when they made me drink a whole bucket-full of water, I endured; but when they started milking me..."

<sup>20</sup> There really was such a prize - 'For the best unpublished story'.

# THE YANKEE PRIVATEER

by Buck Coulson.

Once again I am, for a time at least, involved with book production. In the past, I've been a bookbinder, a technical writer, sold a few novels and short stories, and been a book reviewer. Now I'm reading unsolicited manuscripts for a science fiction publisher, a lower branch of the editorial department. If I'd had the foresight to work for a printer at some point, I could claim a complete knowledge of the book business, since Juanita and I are selling books along with filk tapes at conventions. I won't mention which publisher I'm working for; I don't want the supply of manuscripts to dry out and put me out of a job. But if you send in a manuscript, there's a faint chance I might read it.

According to what I was told when I was invited to take the job, the office staff goes through unsolicited manuscripts when they arrive and weeds out the obviously unsuited. (The ones in green crayon, those explaining new theories of teaching, and so on.) The rest are shipped out to freelance readers like myself, who provide a plot outline, a numerical rating, and (optionally) a short opinion on publishability. After which the senior editor makes the decision on whether or not to publish. It's work, especially when the story is tedious, but there's a lot of pleasure in reading and finding a good one. Whether this system is standard in the publishing industry, I have no idea; I'd thinknot, but it's a new area for me.

Otherwise, it's now a bit past the middle of March, and time to start work on taxes, due April 15. Last year I didn't start on taxes until early April, and barely made the deadline; from now on I begin earlier. I use the "One big box" method for receipts, so the first thing is to sort them into those which are necessary for tax computation and those that aren't; this much I've done. Next job is to put deductions together by type, plus income records by type, and after that the actual computation begins. I started keeping track of all my correspondence a few years ago, and marking business letters, so it's fairly easy to go through that file and add up total business postage. Officially, being retired should simplify matters, but with income from huckstering at cons, Juanita's paid concerts, the writing incomes of both of us, and other odds and ends, it gets complicated. Three rooms in our house are used for business and seven aren't, so we can deduct 30% of our fuel, electricity, phone bills, etc. (Actually, the telephone is used about 90% for business, but it's simpler to keep household deductions the same for everything.) It takes awhile, but hey, I'm retired; what else do I have to do?

In the last installment, I mentioned that our dog died. It was too not last summer to do any walking, so I waited until autumn to get another dog and then went out to the animal shelter and picked one out. Elli is, I think, an Irish Setter/Golden Retriever cross; the height of a setter and the bulk of a retriever. Around 70 pounds of canine. The shelter manager tried to talk me out of taking her; she's been abused as a puppy and it would take a lot of work to get her back to normal, if it could be done at all. (But hey, I'm retired, so...) Anyway, I've been around dogs all my life; my first memory, from age

two or three, is of trying to ride the family dog, an English setter. I clambered on, the dog sat down, and I slid off, and for some reason I considered this the funniest thing that had ever happened to me. I've broken up dogfights barehanded, when my dog was involved and only been bitten once. (And the dog that bit me apologized as best he could; he'd intended to bit my dog, not me.) So I took the dog home and then to a vet to get her checked out. Vet said no problems except that she hadn't been spayed, so we got that done. Female dogs are still legally discriminated against in the US; a dog license for a bitch (technical term, all you feminists) used to be 5 times as costly as one for a male of any sort or a spayed bitch. Then I started working with her, with some help from Juanita.

My excuse for having a dog is that, due to diabetes and heart trouble, I require exercise. If I have a dog that has to be walked, I get exercise; if not, I don't. Elli has performed this function pretty well. I started her out slowly, partly for her sake and partly for mine; it was getting cold by then. She adapted well to the leash - actually two leashes put together, to give the dog more leeway. During the winter we didn't go over 3 miles at a time along the rural roads; when it got warmer I began going farther and we're now up to 5 miles, depending on which route we take. I want Elli used to the roads around here, as well as getting myself enough exercise. Around the place, was very timid at first, and spent a lot of time hiding in her doghouse. By now, she's thoroughly at home with us, but still afraid of strangers, but recovering a bit. She barked at a man who came to the door, but when I went out to congratulate her, she tucked her tail down and hid in the doghouse; obviously been punished for that, previously. I made over her and cheered her up; eventually she's been a watchdog. She still won't eat until I leave; no idea of what that's about, except that she's deadly afraid of small children, which might connect. In some ways it's been a science-fictional situation; it's like watching a dog grow younger. The vet said she was between 6 months and 2 years old when we got her. At the time, I picked the upper limit because that's the way she acted. Now we've had her 6 months and she can't be over a year old right now; it's like having a 70-pound puppy, which can be wearing at times. Ever had a 70-pound dog come at you at a dead run and leap into you, all four feet off the ground? I'm proud of not being knocked flat. She has a way to go to become fully acclimated to us, but she's improving in leaps and bounds. Literally. We took her back to the animal shelter to show her off, and the manager was amazed. (Elli got so excited at being with all the people who'd ever been kind to her that she threw up in the car.)

We had a relatively mild winter this year; one heavy snow while we were at a con in Nashville, TN. We had to stay over a day because Kentucky had closed and baricaded the Interstate at the state line, and it's hard to drive from Tennessee to Indiana without going through Kentucky. Had no problems when we did get home until we got stuck halfway up our driveway. We had to shovel the drive 3 times in a week, and it's 180 feet long, plus the right-angle turn into the garage, but haven't shoveled it since. Indiana from Indianapolis south is recovering from a blizzard in late March, as I write, but we didn't get enough to bother about. A few days ago it was sunny and warm and springlike; now we have snow on the ground again, but not a lot of it, and it's supposed to be warm again by the weekend.

Otherwise, about all I've been doing for the past months has been writing letters; nothing interesting enough to put into a column. I did get one interesting letter from an acquaintance in the California mountains. "We had 18 feet of snow in 11 days." But she assured me that, due to warmer weather, there were only 8 feet left on the ground when she wrote. We don't get that sort of thing in Indiana; we measure our snow in inches.

- Buck Coulson



# NOT THROUGH THE FLOWERS

by Marie-Louise Stephens

When I was driving through Melbourne, I asked my taxi-driver where he came from, and said that I was a migrant too. He said his parents had come from Pescara, "opposite Rom, on the Adriatic. I went back with my whole family. You know, I am happy here, but I wanted to see my country. And when I walked on that soil, I felt good. My roots were there. You must go back to your roots. You go back too," he said, when I got out of the car.

Could I, could I go back - my parents were dead, so were numerous aunts... there could be, maybe a cousin or two. But where? If I wrote to the Red Cross, would they help me to find the remaining members of my family? But I had no addresses. My mother had held the family together by cycling around the district, by writing and always giving news of me. But I had forgotten where they lived....

The Red Cross had found my mother for me, after she had urged me to go West, when the Russian troops were approaching in 1945 and I got on to the last train, leaving Rostok, my home town, near the Baltic Sea. She had promised to join me, but then she had been unable to do so, and I found myself in the West and my mother was in the Eastern part of Germany. When, in 1947, I walked illegally across the border and over a frozen lake in a bitterly cold winter, I found I could not live there - everything was so full of rules! 'You can't do this, you can't do that'. There was no freedom, and I had tasted freedom in the West. So, I left. I must have hurt my mother badly by going. Then there came nursing training in England, working in India and Pakistan, and my county of Mecklenburg in the North came a nostalgic memory. My mother came to visit me once in 1960. She had retired as a teacher and had permission to visit me in England to meet her son-in-law. She never once contemplated coming to me in the West - my father's grave was in the East and she had many friends there. She wanted to come again, but a letter in 1963 told me she was dead - the Berlin Wall built in 1961, no chance to go back, or visit.

But then my daughter and her husband worked for over a year in England and on their way back to Australia in 1994 visited my old country now that the Berlin Wall was down and travelling was again permitted. I told them not to waste their time and money trying to look up all the places I remembered, as they wouldn't find anyone. I was so sure they had gone West or died. But she persevered, visited the place where her great grandfather's farm had been, the church where my mother had played the organ when she was young, the house where I had spent my earliest childhood... and she found some cousins. It was the strangest feeling, when I rang those phone numbers I had been given

and heard again the familiar language and voices I had not thought of ever hearing again. It was absolutely wonderful. The question came: "And when will *you* come over and see us?"

My daughter helped me with the ticket and Lufthansa took me to Frankfurt, then Hamburg, Lueneburg and then on to Schwerin, across the old border. On one notice-board, on an abandoned station platform, I saw a name, DEUTSCHE DEMOKRATISCHE REPUBLIK, the name for the old D. D. R. They must have forgotten to take the sign down. It was hidden slightly by trees and shrubs.

I remembered, when I left Australia, friends asked: "Aren't you excited?" I had answered: "I am nervous," and they were not able to understand.

Houses along the railway track looked clean and painted - but hidden behind hedges were empty farm buildings and dilapidated big houses, empty fields, no cattle or sheep - then again newer houses and modern sheds, fields that were being cared for, cattle grazing.

In Schwerin I had the biggest shock: the small "pension" I stayed in was one of the few houses occupied in that street. The others had scaffolds around them, or were too far gone - they were crumbling. I learnt a word there I had never heard: *sanieren*, and that meant to repairs, make good. There was not much building going on, new houses were few, but so many old ones were being repaired. I had heard that once Saltpetre had been used for mortar and bricks, and when lived in, these houses were all right, they were heated and aired; but when people suddenly left their homes and left them empty, they crumbled and some were so far gone, they could not be *saniert*. Even in normal times they had to be seen to every 10 years. But on the first floor window of such an old house I saw a swallow's nest, and suddenly I felt more positive. I was often told: "You should have seen us two years ago - we have done a lot since then."

I travelled on to Rostock, my old home town. I sat on one of the benches outside the main station, when I heard a woman call to her child: "NICHT DURCH DIE BLUMEN - Not through the flowers." I had grown up with flowers, but after the wrought iron fences were taken away in the war, no one bothered about flowers. The thought was on survival, not decorations, - the same as in the after-war years.

My visit in Mecklenburg, this country near the Baltic Sea, coincided with its 1,000-year-birthday; also the Church was 1,000 years old. But since 1990 about 200,000 people had left, mostly in the age-group from 20-25. And in a country that had had about 2 mill. inhabitants, this was felt. There were not many young people, not many children. One minister said he had none to baptise, none to confirm, another minister said, he was happy: in his confirmation class there were six children. Once, before 1945, there had been large farms, where the "squire" had been responsible for the upkeep of the church - or there were six or seven villages who had made themselves responsible to keep the church roof from "leaking" - now, there might be 35 members of that same church. They couldn't pay for repairs, and I've seen a photo of a church with a notice on its closed door: "BETHREten AUF EIGENE GEFAHR - you enter at your own risk". The Bundesrepublik of West-Germany is doing a lot for historic buildings, but cannot pay for every building. Sometimes, when the congregation only consists of a few members, they have a service in the Manse. Once, when I said to someone, how sad this was, he said: "don't forget, a new generation has grown up, they sometimes ask what

these church buildings are there for. It will take a long time to re-educate and bring them back, if we can."

When I was staying with my cousin in Zingst, a small town on the Darss peninsula that is jutting right out into the Baltic Sea - I asked her: "Why don't people smile more - I come from a country where on a lonely road, we say hallo to each other, smile at mothers who push prams and try and look at the new babies." She told me: "There is not much to smile about. Once there was guaranteed work, housing, holidays, health care. Then, suddenly everything had to be paid for, rents increased, old factories closed. You remember the town we visited yesterday? Three factories were closed, a fish factory, a sugar factory, one which produced components for ships and a large nursery. Now there is only a water purification plant. Prices are West-German prices, but the pensions are only 70% of what they ought to be. Things will change, but at the moment there is still precious little work." In one article I read that every second person in the previous Eastern Germany was out of work. I met a family, where husband and wife had been engineers with the Rostock harbour installations, when it became THE important deep-water harbour in the Eastern Zone. Now they are out of work and are lucky to have found part-time jobs. "We have little money", the woman said, "but we manage - things will be different again in the future." Others told me that they never had had any intention of "going West". This place was their home, they had roots here, and they and their children would live and stay here. Luckily both of the parents had jobs.

I had my camera with me, and when I saw something interesting I snapped. I was warned once that I should not show too much interest in residential areas. Many people had left at the end of the war or later to towns in the West, then came back, when the borders were open again, took photos, went to their solicitors and demanded being given back the houses belonging to grandparents or other members of the same family. But the houses had been bought by others "in good faith". When I asked the headmaster of my old school, if I could take photos, he knew what I referred to, and said, if I could give him 3 mill. Marks, then I could have the school - that was the price for SANIEREN...

I know that there was a bank account, in to which had been paid the amount of money realised after the sale of my father's house, with the label: *Owner Living Abroad*. I had promised my husband that I would not try to get it, as I had no papers to prove who I was, passport not being enough.

Tourists now help finance the holiday villages at the Baltic Sea. Nearly every house had rooms or chalets in the garden to rent out. Tourists are coming from all over the West, as the greater part of the Baltic had been closed to them for 45 years. And there are other positive signs. New factories are starting up again. I met the owner of a cement factory, which is engaged as part of their program in building breakwaters against the Baltic sea storms. I heard of a textile firm, which was on the brink of bankruptcy - then a Columbian textile firm came to the rescue. I read in the newspapers that 300 American firms are busy in the East and invested 12 Millards of Mark - also Austria, France, the UK and Switzerland invest. There will be 55,000 new workplaces in chemical factories. How the newspapers love figures....

But I think there is something that very few people know: the West-German government paid 13 Millard Marks to build small houses in the Ukraine and Russia - so that the Russian occupying forces had somewhere to go after withdrawal. Of course it was also reparation, like the train-rails ripped up from many railway lines in the Eastern part, so that now it is sometimes a bit difficult to get from one place to another. But if these accommodations had not been built, the troops might still occupy part of the East.

Though I felt often sad at what I saw in the old East, I heard also the confident tones of men who said: come back in ten years time and then see... You won't recognise us. Some papers said that in the future the Old Eastern Germany might become the most modern and well-to-do country in the East.

Though I was home, I didn't feel "at home" - everything had changed too much, but the thread to my old home was retied and will not break again. I firmly believe that one of these days there will be flowers everywhere.

- Marie-Louise Stephens





# Lifting Your Game

by Jim Verran

Whether your writing encompasses fiction (popular or otherwise), or factual essays, it is well worth spending time reading books about as many alternative styles of writing as possible. Like writers in any genre, I read as much relevant material as possible, which leaves too little time for anything other than essential research. Even that time is not always put to the best use; there are always interesting but unrelated items to grab my attention along the way to the required information. Just try searching a reference book for something -- anything -- and see how easily your best intentions are thwarted. Regrettably, one lifetime of reading for recreation or education seems hopelessly inadequate.

On a recent trip to a local library I came across several books not easily acquired from the usual booksellers -- even if I could afford them. One of these, *THE TECHNICAL WRITER'S HANDBOOK: Writing with Style and Clarity*, by Dr. Matt Young, contains dozens of ideas on how to better communicate thoughts in writing -- yes, Dr. Young permits the occasional split infinitive. Avoidance of the split infinitive is, in his words: "... a purely artificial prohibition that derives from the time when languages were studied by using Latin grammar as the paradigm. In reality, there is only one reason to not split an infinitive: so that no one will think you don't know better."

Dr. Young, who reads and comments on hundreds of technical papers and manuscripts each year, says that technical writing should comprise short, clear sentences in the active voice. I have always had an aversion to imposing my presence on the reader, and remain unconvinced that it is mannerly (he would use polite) to refer to the reader as *you*. He also acknowledges that his speciality differs very little from other styles of writing in that it should be written for the reader, not the writer.

In Part 1, *An Introduction to Technical Writing*, he sets out his three rules: write the way you talk -- then polish; write one thought per sentence -- be explicit; write for the uninformed reader.

Writing the way you talk is fine, if you weed out the colloquial, and use universally understood phrases. However, after defining colloquial in the alphabetical section, Dr. Young mentions: "Writing is not exactly crystallized speech, but I think nevertheless that it should be a good deal more colloquial than it is. This applies to technical writing as to any other, and a good technical paper may well be written in an informal style without crossing the line into slang or inelegance." He explains that while the contraction *it's* and the pronoun *you* are colloquial, and he uses them in his book, they should be avoided in formal writing. From his North American's perspective he probably considers generic English to be that written (but not necessarily spoken) there. Leaving aside *different from*, or *to*, his examples contain very little usage peculiar to North Americans. Incidentally, although he points out that *different from* is American usage, *different than* is what native speakers, as he calls them, most often say.

In theory, one thought per sentence sounds sensible, but who wants to communicate solely in free verse? Dr. Young qualifies his second rule by allowing that it need not be strictly observed; more than one idea may be conveyed in the same sentence if contained within independent clauses. Rule #2a -- be explicit. Do not make the reader infer something, and do not bury important facts where they may be overlooked.

Writing for the uninformed reader means writing in a way that will be easily understood by the average reader, rather than a few intellectuals. An easily understood article or story is more likely to be widely read -- an author's equivalent to getting more burns on seats.

Part II, *An ABC of Technical Writing* is a comprehensive listing of definitions and useful explanations for all writers. Dr. Young gives the pros and cons for using inanimate possessives. He also provides several examples of how dangling and misplaced modifiers, a frequent consequence of attempting to write elegantly, can cloud the meaning in a sentence (you whistle and I'll point); similarly, carelessly used appositives will often produce unintended gaffes -- no kidding. By now you will be dying to read about noun extenders, those meaningless adjectives attached to nouns, like *game plan*, when *plan* is sufficient, or their close relatives, redundant phrases such as *safe haven* and *past history*. And for the gratification of pedantic types, Dr. Young confirms that the logical pronunciation for kilometer (kilometre in Oz) is KI-Luh-metre, not kilOH-metre. After all, you would not say a thousand metres.

Dr. Young's book provides an enjoyable demonstration of how his clear, personable writing style makes learning easy. I leave it for you to decide if my attempt to follow his advice is an improvement on my past efforts.

*THE TECHNICAL WRITER'S HANDBOOK: Writing with Style and Clarity* (ISBN 0-935702-60-1) is distributed by Oxford University Press outside of North America.

*WRITING WITH PRECISION*, by Jefferson D. Bates, another (you guessed it) North American, promises to show you how to: "Write so that you cannot possibly be misunderstood", part of a quote borrowed from Robert Louis Stevenson, who Dr. Young also quoted in his book. In the introduction the author asks, and answers, three questions about writing well, after which he enquires: "Why bother to write better?" Why, indeed? Mr. Bates suggests that a person who develops the skill (to write well) is likely to rise rapidly -- so long as their talent does not threaten the boss or other powers that be.

The first part is divided into fifteen sections, each split into an average of nine topics. Someone had applied a pencil to many passages throughout the book, and although this vandalism is worse than folding back page corners, the offender has successfully practised on the author's own text. Doncha just love idiots who write the answers and correct illustrative text in other people's books?

J.D. Bates uses boxed text to highlight significant examples or suggestions. There are also many cartoons portraying axioms and truisms, and he quotes a few more famous people than absolutely necessary; nevertheless, without this literary kitsch it would be pretty arid going. The exhaustive, six page list of contents and the index allow quick location of almost anything the author thinks you need to know -- about writing, that is.

The second part, in handbook format, works through some elementary principles of grammar, parts of a sentence, and the importance of punctuation. The mandatory inclusion of navigating the terrain of sexist language in writing (the term '*politically correct*' was not in vogue when this one was written) is in there, along with proofreading, and handling writer's block. In "The famous simple-minded Bates formula" (for working out

the Fog Index), the author explains his quick-and-dirty system to determine when sentences are getting too foggy. Unfortunately, it extends to seven lines short of a full page, but here is its essence: Keep the average sentence length at, or under 20 words -- well under, if possible. Counterbalance the over-long with very short sentences. If that fails, cut out the excess verbiage until the score comes down.

Although Mr. Bates gets sole billing on the cover, the third part of his book contains additional exercises set by his close associate, Louis J. Hampton. Thankfully, our egg-headed vandal resisted the temptation to pencil in the answers which are included on the final pages.

Jefferson D. Bates' style is less disciplined than that of Dr. Young. Although preaching the same sermon, the Bates' style seems more suited to a writer accustomed to being paid by the word. I found his treatise all the more interesting because he included several brief examples drawn from his days as a speech and article writer for NASA. His assertion that editing your own copy is the hardest editorial task of all is hardly news -- every writer practises self-flagellation to some degree. On the subject of proofreading, his warning says it all: "Don't slough off this important task. The mistakes you prevent may be your own."

WRITING WITH PRECISION (ISBN 0-84791-184-2 or 0-887491-185-0 pbk.) circa 1980 is from Acropolis Books, Washington DC, and well worth borrowing from a library near you.

Another, John M. Lannon's *TECHNICAL WRITING*, is a rugged paperback of 600+ pages specifically written as a text book for students. Books of this type are usually expensive, and judging from the condition of the reviewed copy, more often borrowed than bought. As expected, Mr. Lannon provides the usual comprehensive list of contents, but his is more a book for working through than for occasional spot references. He covers aspects of communicating with a specified audience, and sets out strategies for technical reporting, then extends his lessons into specific applications. Almost half of the book is dedicated to writing effective letters, informal reports, proposals (for projects etc.), and oral reporting. Grammar, usage, and the mechanics of writing (punctuation etc.) are found in the first of three appendices. The other two are: The Brainstorming Technique, and (yawn) Eliminating Sexist Language.

While the preceding two books are useful to writers in general, most of *TECHNICAL WRITING* is too subjective for any but its intended audience. The exceptions being, parts of *Charting Your Course: The Outline, and Research Information* which contains good advice on identifying information sources such as learning to decipher and locate relevant resource material on card, microfiche or computer indexing systems, and taking effective notes. Take my word for it, writing more than sketchy notes from library books, in situ, can be a harrowing experience. Considering the copyright limitations and cost of photocopying, it is better to borrow as many as permitted, delve into them in privacy, and if necessary, return a.s.a.p. to repeat the process.

This second edition of *TECHNICAL WRITING* by John M. Lannon (ISBN 0-316-514357) was published in the U.S.A., and simultaneously in Canada by Little, Brown & Company (Canada) Limited.

In *GETTING THROUGH! How To Make Words Work*, British author, Godfrey Howard uses a different approach. His book is a compilation of anecdotes about how words are most effectively used to inform, cajole, and otherwise influence people. In common with the authors of the preceding volumes, he has included many quotes, but this man has treated it as an art form -- he qualifies each chapter listed in the contents with

a quote from someone or other -- repeated for good measure at the opening of each chapter. A few even reappear elsewhere in case you missed the point. However, Mr. Howard's book does reveal a lot about the psychology of communication, and shows that there is more to "getting through" than just writing clearly. Putting aside the mechanics of writing, fiction writers will find some excellent ideas for constructing stronger dialogue in this helpful and sometimes amusing read.

The paperback, *GETTING THROUGH!* (ISBN 0-7301-0301-3) was published in Oz by Reed Books Pty. Ltd. Oh, yes, the moron with the penchant for underlining passages has also read this one.

At the time of writing this, most reference books of Australian origin, in our modest local library, were out for pre-exam swatting, but they missed one Aussie offering: *ELEMENTS OF STYLE & GOOD WRITING* by N.E. Renton. Author Nick Renton is credited with at least nine other non-fiction books; seven dealing with various business topics, and two specialist dictionaries. Arvi Parbo's honest foreword gives a clue to the abilities of Mr. Renton, and after reading "about the author" it seems remarkable that he has found the time to write so many books. Mr. Renton states his business without wasting space on pretentious banalities, and has mercifully restricted leader quotations to two; after all, there is no real advantage in serving up quips that we can all find in any good book of quotations.

As expected, a well-defined list of contents makes finding any of 111 topics, 2 alphabetical lists (words & concepts), 10 appendices, and the tailpiece "Some Curiosities Of The English Language" easy. Apart from commenting on its useability, little else needs to be said about Mr. Renton's book -- style manuals are either recommended by publishing organization as their "house style manual", or accepted and followed religiously by serious writers to maintain consistency of style. As for the rest of us....

Renton's *ELEMENTS OF STYLE & GOOD WRITING* (ISBN 1-86337-023-4 pbk) from Schwartz & Wilkinson is stamped with a RRP of \$19.95. If you feel the need for an Australian style manual, this one is worth serious consideration. If it is ever produced on floppy or compact disk, it would make an excellent tool for computer wordsmiths.

All the books reviewed here have excellent contents guides: essential for any reference work. Of the five borrowed books, I consider Matt Young's and Nick Renton's to best suit my requirements. All have plenty to offer, but there are only so many ways to serve Spam -- the other three require more than casual study and lack appeal as quick or handy reference sources.

- James Verran





# A PLANET MUCH LIKE EARTH - PART 5

BY MAE STRELKOV

(Continued from last issue)

A curious detail should have been mentioned, that shows how the little squirrel-like brain of poor Blasé works. Caught in his own "cage of errors", he performed some really nimble footwork within it, on the little spinning "merry-go-round" in his brain.

Finding he could not convince the inspectors of the authenticity of his claim that the upper part of Miguel's land was really his, he said sullenly to the Inspectors,

"Well, I can't be blamed for anything. I was working for Massachessi, on a percentage basis, and he told me to work this land so I presumed it must be *his*?. I worked it in good faith."

They then answered: "But you cut these 400 cubic meters of pine long after Massachessi had sold his place to Bernan, didn't you? You weren't working for Massachessi any longer. And if you agree that you worked for Massachessi back then, it means you recognised Massachessi's right to the place that now is Bernan's legally; so how come you now allege that this, still-further-away property that is Miguel's, really is yours, still? Or if not yours, it was Massachessi's? You're not being logical."

You could see the little squirrel-mind in its cage spinning wildly, as the texture of "solid reality" it had fabricated in self-defence melted away. What should his next argument, therefore, be? How blame Massachessi? Or how discredit the new surveyors' findings? Or wasn't it yet possible to bulldoze his way through and hold onto the desirable upper portion of Miguel's property, come what may?

While the inspectors and Blasé were still uphill, further down-mountain Mudwall and tribe had gathered to watch how things might turn out. Sylvia was there also, accompanying Mudwall's daughter who's a friend of Syvias. Sylvia and they sat about, all very friendly, picnicking, while above them - high out of hearing, of course - the drama between Blasé and the Inspectors was occurring.

Mudwall's daughter told Sylvia, "Blasé has invited my father to go with him to start legal proceedings against Miguel and Bernan and the Surveyors for stealing the land... and probably you'll get dragged into it, when these surveyors are proved wrong."

Sylvia laughed, "We won't have trouble... we're not mixed into this at all. Our forests lie beyond any timber-trail, till now, and nobody has seriously pretended that our land up there belongs to anyone else. They won't now. But your dad can get into serious trouble when Blasé loses his lawsuit as he certainly will. And your dad will be on the street, through helping Blasé, for you dad will have to pay half the expenses, in that case."

"Yes, I'll make sure my father doesn't go with Blasé tomorrow."

Blasé was so angry over how that day's doings had turned out, he could only get even by insulting our Benicio who was present during the whole scene. He called him all sorts of names, imputing that he was the *guardaespalda* and "sneak" of Miguel. It hurt Benicio deeply, for Benicio is one individual so honest and fair, so hard-working and dedicated to duty, that no one but Blasé and Blasé's syncopantic flunkys in the entire region has ever had a word to say against him. (Maybe he drinks a wee drop too much on Sundays, but that is the only criticism ever heard. And if so, he stays quietly home during that bout, so nobody has ever seen him undignified. Even at home, his dignity is unimpeachable. Which makes the insults of a Blasé all the worse.)

Well, you'd have thought Blasé would accept defeat and try some other tactic, since it seemed he wasn't going to manage to turn Miguel's land into his by "possession", another term used technically here. But he wouldn't give up. Squatters win possession by squatting, supposedly; so he wanted to play the squatter's role there, next.

And he tried to do so the very next day, not he himself, but a fellow he hired for that purpose! We weren't supposed to know, but it just happened....

Yes, it just happened that Tony was half-way up the mountain-side that next day, working with two friendly neighbors at cutting a few pines in great haste, before the season would end. Covered with sawdust, looking like a peon himself, Tony did not seem like some "owner", but rather like just another flunkey at work.

Suddenly there lurched up to them a one-eyed oldster, more bedraggled even than such oldsters here usually appear. A complete derelict! He came up to them and asked,

"Where is the *aguada* where Blasé has some *chapas*, so I can settle there and squat? I'm to take care of his pigs up there and clean some land so he can plant saplings."

The *aguada* is on Miguel's land. Water reaches he surface there in a quiet way... mostly, the water in the mountains here is unreachable save in rainy seasons when it overflows and often descends in floods. The rest of the time it sinks through the porous soil and rocks, out of sight. As for the *chapas*, old zinc sheets, they were used by Blasé's peones when cutting Miguel's wood, and were left near the stacks of cut timber over which the trouble was now happening.

More, this squatter's duty would also be to chase off all intruders who might try to push in up there on "Blasé's land".

Tony and his fellows were shocked silent. But then one of them rallied and explained to the man that he had followed the wrong trail, he must turn back and follow the main trail much higher still, to get there. So off he went.

Isn't there a saying: "Possession is nine points of the law?" At any rate, there's the other saying we all know: "Finder's keepers", and Blasé was sure he'd made a move that the absent Miguel (living in San Pedro) would not be able to contest. Squatters have first rights, unless the territorial owners want to have lots of drama calling lawyers in. (In which case squatters get their own lawyers to present them as poor persecuted "victims" of absent profiteers, and so on.)

It's very tricky. Miguel was frantic once we bought this place, (back in August 1982 and till we got here to settle in July 1983). "A squatter might move in, while you're absent and then you'd not be able to move in yourselves."

What protected us was our squatter Pedro Viltes, already living on his two-hectares of land along the roadside north from our new house, and across the highway. Vadlm and Tony on a visit left him in charge of everything, and he - wishing to stay on good terms with us - protected not only the property but the horses we'd sent on ahead, too. And of course our neighbour Morla kept a watchful eye on everything,

helping also in keeping the builders at work, for us. We owe him an awful lot, as we always remember!

Well, when Tony came home with the story of Blasé's new squatter, I exploded like a box of fireworks. I was already all on the side of "poor Miguel", and insisted we'd have to let him know about the new squatter. Which we did. But he didn't worry. He answered us: "No problem! I can already have Blasé put in jail any time I want, thanks to the report the Inspectors sent me."

Blasé, no doubt, had been planning to allege that his aged squatter had "always lived there", so if Miguel should try to turn him out, it would be a "cruel action". Yes, Blasé counted on that, of course.

This stubbornness on the part of Blasé was distressing the Paper Firm very much. They had no wish to be mixed up in stupid and illegal feuds, and desperately wished that Blasé would calm down and act sensibly. But precious contractors who work insanely in their hunger to get rich do not grow on trees. (Do not cut every tree, either.)

Trying to distract and pacify him they bought for him, right then, 4,000 hectares of forested wilderness, but so far away to the south-east and remote from people and civilisation, that for half of each year it is unreachable. There's no road and the trail becomes pure muddy bogs.

Nonetheless, for the other half of the year Blasé has access there to timber so precious, even he ought to drool at the opportunity. (True, he will have to pay back the investment by delivering wood for a while - not too long, as it turned out - to his principals.)

The lawyers of the Paper Firm and their own surveyors also solemnly warned him to "go easy"; stop making such scandals, for he hadn't a ghost of a chance to win against both Miguel and Bernan in a fair legal battle, such as was shaping up. But his *macho* pride has so far kept him on his toes, like some punch-drunk boxer who refuses to give up though reeling from the blows.

He is a valuable battler-of-the-wilds. Men like him *do* open the wilderness for the "March of Civilisation". Men like him also open *boquetes* in our ozone belts, unfortunately, though guys!

Well, Miguel himself (Before putting himself through law school years ago) was "an old timber-man" as he liked to say. He and his brothers likewise "worked jungles", hired peones to cut the wood and trim and load it on trucks which Miguel and his brothers used to drive themselves. He feels he's as much a timber-man as is Blasé, though of course nobody in the whole of Jujuy can match Blasé if we can measure his accomplishments as per the account of cubic meters of wood he's cut and hauled in his life. (And he's still quite young.)

And we? Are we getting to be "old hands with timber"? Tony is. Sylvia is. You should see them with their "tables" that help them measure and calculate the cubic meterage of any given log, big or small. And Tony is good already with the saw, too, but he doesn't like it. (no tree can be cut if it is less than a certain diameter, unless it is for clearing the jungle away totally for the purpose either of agriculture or reforestation.)

Yes, Tony and Sylvia - and Vadim also - are quite experts by now. (In such a short time! All our neighbors are admiring and amazed.) And they also know now all the different woods by their look and by their door!

Myself, I only know "how beautiful a tree looks" when it is growing freely, in some mountain height. The ordinary "*fibra corta*" wood called *caspi-zapallo*, considered almost "valueless", though sometimes used in paper-making, is one of the most beautiful trees I've ever seen. Very towering, with a strong thick trunk; and high above, a lovely cluster of foliage. I

am really sorry that a few of them too must go as the land below and right above us continues to be cleared for the boring old tame pines and eucalyptuses to replace it all.

We have also a few *quebrachos*, very old, leaning more and more, and almost ready to fall. They too will have to go in the interests of the young pines and eucalyptuses, to replace them. But as the family here reassures me, "Mother, in the deep quebradas and gullies, there will always remain any number of these trees native here. They are unreachable and will never be cut. And it's good to keep them there; they prevent flash floods. Though the hillocks of jungle that used to cover the floor of the Pedregosa all got washed away, you know. Enormous trees, maybe hundreds of years old! That's where Mudwall was getting our wood, pretending it was his wood, back in late 1983, you know."

"Well, I'm glad he got some of it," said I, "seeing that it was to be washed away anyway!"

Yes, and I think the Spirit of the Forests does not like waste, too. If a forest is doomed to vanish in some impending avalanche, it is just as well if some "timber-thief" got there first. (But was that timber-thief to blame that the avalanche occurred? I can't answer that, for I don't know. The trees are not cut too near their roots; the roots remain holding the soil together, and younger trees take over in place of their vanished seniors, soon enough.)

Nonetheless, I have read that planted young forests do not provide the necessary renewal of our atmosphere that most primeval jungles do. (Though I've also read our atmosphere's vitality depends most on the purity of our seas.)

How complicated is our planetary ecology! How delicate also!

It was on the first day of Spring here, September 21, 1983, that our first load of wood went forth under our new brand, *ngo*. It was some of that wood that Mudwall himself had been cutting (with Leon's help, for Mudwall only presides over such efforts at a distance, being no timber-man himself).

Moria had already introduced us to Leon as a cutter who worked very hard, and he promised to keep an eye on him for us as we were still new to the timber-business. "Since you don't know the business, you'll just have to trust me!" he said. But as Leon always discussed his work with us direct, we did not get around to talking it over much with Moria. He seemed to prefer, moreover, to remain aloof, usually refraining from giving opinions. Oh, he's good at lecturing on just about any topic that comes up, but he was curiously reticent with us back then, once he saw we wished to run our own show, learning as we worked.

Leon had already found a buyer long before Moria sent him to talk things over with us. This buyer had provided Leon's team of peones with a rather decrepit old bulldozer, not at all like the spectacular, monster-type that came to work for Blasé (and supposedly for us as well) in the winter of 1985, just then passed. Leon's buyer's bulldozer seemed always on the point of falling to bits, kept together by wire. Nonetheless, they had put it to work hewing out that loading platform six kilometers up the winding former Pedregosa Trail, and it was now cutting a way up ever steeper inclines, towards the floor of the Pedregoas canyon away up at the rear where the thick old forests had still survived, and which were doomed to be washed away in March of 1984.

The buyer in question had been working with Leon for months already on the project, no doubt supposing that all was in order. Leon is another convincing speaker, when he lays aside his carved-wood aspect for useful ends. At any rate, all seemed to be going well for them in their scheme, till one day Tony came back from Military Service for a few days and Sylvia and Tony explored the Pedregosa Trail on their own.



Leon had kept putting us off... we'd all told him we'd like to "go up to see" and he'd always warned us: "It's a very dangerous trail; the way is still unfinished; there are huge boulders, dangerous cracks between; as soon as the road is cleared you can come." Out of politeness, and not to display perhaps "unfounded mistrust", we'd waited till Tony got back and he and Sylvia went up that nice, smooth road (easy for cars and trucks), all the way to the *canchon*, where there were already a great pile of logs waiting for shipment (or loading, for perhaps "shipment" is not the correct term in this case?)

Leon urgently explained to our children that those logs were Mudwall's. "When I finished working for him, I'll start cutting for you," said he. When our kids insisted on seeing where the logs came from, he took them up the higher trail, purporting to show them where our land ended (just a little ways ahead) and Mudwall's began... a vast territory still *incognito* as far as we were concerned.

Later, Asking Morla, he said he's not been there himself and didn't know, there was no way to know about the boundary-lines then. Supposedly "Leon knew" and we must simply trust Leon. We tried "trusting Leon" till it hurt, and we were all squeamish over our own gullibility, versus our acute, yes our excruciatingly acute, wish to be polite.

At any rate, when the buyer learned we'd gone up to inspect, he rushed to see us. (Later, Leon told us the poor fellow's mouth had gone so dry he couldn't speak till he had a chance to drink a coca-cola, nearby at an *almacen*.)

It was a ticklish moment, but Leon brazened it out. (His mouth never, never might go dry!) As for the buyer, who had eye-trouble and must fly to Buenos Aires for an operation, (indeed, various operations next), Sylvia and he exchanged an informal hand-written draft authorising him to cut and carry off 200 *cubos* of cedar and pine, (or the like, I forget the details), paying us so much per *cuba*, before this season might end. (There was no proviso for the next season.) Actually, that amount was never carried away, in the end.

The buyer left his trucker in charge, when he left. (He trusted him more than he'd ever had trusted "Leon".) The trucker's surname, Agüero, means "sign" (or "Omen"). His nickname was "Crazy Horse". I thought of him as "The Omen of the Crazy Horse", and went back to look long and thoughtfully at the air photo of this sector of Santa Barbara's range, where the outline of an enormous horse-head does indeed appear. It's mane is the Pedregosa's cliff, it's head lies at this side nearer us, deeply forested. The bridge of it's nose forms a narrow divide up which Blasé's road tried to cross on its way to our Forest of Forever.

I studied that air photo a lot back then, and as I gazed on "The Omen of the Crazy Horsehead" - simply huge - in the heights, I seemed to hear the echoes of a most ancient Egyptian religious drama where Horus says to Seth, "Give me back my eye."

Horse? Horus? And Seth? (Setti was part of the surname of the buyer. I'll not give it here in full.)

"Very eerie," thought I, though my family were not all that impressed.

However, the actual trucker was lots of fun to work with as we all came to recognise. He used to laugh so heartedly at jokes. Around here they'd called him *Caballo Loco* (Crazy Horse), because no one drove as recklessly as he and that truck was always so over-loaded.

Crazy Horse was not out to bilk us. He took a liking to us and we loved his gift at making jokes. He was always laughing uproariously, and we felt his support even when his duties forced him to go contrary to our interests, if you can understand that. But he wished us well and felt bad if he thought we were being bilked.

But the "weaving" was too deep for such as him. His was just the task of trucking whatever Leon and Mudwall delivered to him as "from Mudwall's property", from our buyer had signed a contract with Mudwall, too. And the buyer wasn't reachable to consult. He lay in some Buenos Aires hospital motionless so as not to disturb his operated-on eye.

So all that winter of 1983, (from early July when Vadim and I first arrived, till mid-September), the buzz-saws roared non-stop on the Ridge of the Wild Pigs right above us here, (supposedly "cutting Mudwall's trees"), and further away up the Pedregosa Canyon and far out of earshot from us here, Leon was likewise piling up our tree-trunks in the interests of Mudwall who would provide the official respectability, declaring it was from *his* property (long since denuded in former logging forays by his buyers, etc.)

Soon there were thirty *cubos* of pine and cedar piled up on our *canchon* up the Pedregosa way. It looked bright for whoever was playing this trick on us. The entire neighbourhood watched, breathless with fascination. Could we possibly be that innocent or dumb, not to catch on? Blasé watched unbelieving from his side of our property; Mudwall rubbed his chubby hands with glee; Leon and family said their prayers and visited the *curanderos* (or witch-doctors) to be safe. As for Morla? He played the role of the Great Stone Face. Had he not warned us earlier re the 8 *cubos e quina*, and we'd not done a thing? And surely he'd heard how we'd ignored Blasé's peon's warning re the logging going on right within earshot of us, all that past month, on our Ridge of the Wild Pigs!

He'd no doubt lost all respect for gringos as foolish as we seemed to be. Indeed, he told us stories, boastfully, of how he'd made fools of other *gringos*, selling them wood as *quina* when it was ordinary wood.

And why were we so foolish? Tony was usually absent. Vadim and I were taking a long time to get over the effects of the flu. Sylvia, observing what timber-men out here are like, (replicas of *ucumarus*, Vadim would add here), felt she hadn't yet learned the social niceties that might protect her from mishandling if she tried exploring and spying on those toughies, all on her own. (I was still not up to those long high climbs.) Besides, no women ever used to go uphill to watch men at work there. It simply wasn't done!

Why, as mentioned further back, we'd not even gotten aroused when Leon's teen-aged sons felled some ordinary-type trees on Mudwall's property, cutting the trees down so they fell half-ruining the fence between him and us. We'd supposed it was an accident. (Now, I wonder....)

Well, I'm sure Mudwall and Leon would have gotten away with their mammoth theft of wood from our Pedregosa, that year, had it not been for the "door" that opened a way for us through our "wall of mud", Mudwall. Yes, there suddenly appeared on the scene a certain Portele, who made friends with Morla and asked Morla to help defend the rights of Portele's principal, who was being "cheated" by Mudwall. Morla, knowing well poor Mudwall's unsavoury reputation and no doubt believing the logs did come from Mudwall's land as Leon alleged, promised to help.

It was a fact that a year earlier a mysterious wood-buyer had showed up in this region paying fabulous sums, (more than the purchase of a whole huge property here might have cost anyone), just for the right to cut wood on Mudwall's property, for a set period. That affluent strange supposedly represented a bigwig in the Navy, (as did those fearful new bosses of ours who'd taken over that *estancia* Vadim used to manage in the Cordoba hills). We wondered if it was the same bigwig, today neatly locked up for multiple misdeeds (of the sort that turn one to ice to consider).

The fact that such an individual had sent one of his representatives nosing around here exactly when we ourselves were buying this adjoining property in mid-1982 was a curious coincidence in my view. I have always felt that our "cedars on high" play a role like those cedars in the Book of Isaiah, where they clap their hands and jeer over Lucifer who has fallen, (so the "sound of the woodcutter" is feared by those cedars no more.) We'd already at the former place been unavoidably acting out all sorts of symbols as if we played a perennial game of Charades. And now here in the new place, there were the same figures (in new guises) playing roles uncannily similar but on a far huger scale.

It was even distressing to note. (Taking symbols seriously is no laughing matter, for they "react".)

I have mentioned in passing Leon's "Luciferian" expression. In this past year (with Blasé and the bull-dozer our leading preoccupations) it worried me that one of the would-be buyers of our cedars on high was named Lucifer, (in a Spanish way of spelling it). Well, he didn't manage to "silence" these "Cedars on High", and I do hope he'll not enter the scene her next season, though he still has a "Right" as per the agreement that was made. I do not try to control or "fight" them, of course. Sometimes I may express disagreement, but as a personal preference only. At most, I pray. (Little brief "remarks" to deity when I worry, sometimes. I'd not insult God by lecturing him thus bombastically.)

Well, so here came Portele, our *portal* through the "block" of Mudwall, who'd been keeping us from our very own logs, already cut and ready for loading.

Portele brought a judge, lawyer, a forestry inspector and the lawyer's own secretary with him to make it legal, and they all had a fine lunch at Morla's. (Which he said he'd pay for "later", but he never did.)

Then they went forth up to the canchon, our canchon, where thirty *cubos* of lordly cedar-wood waited loading, (plus some pine) and the seal of the Forestry Authorities was placed on all the logs, and an announcement was made that till the matter was cleared up, Mudwall must move no more wood. That it evidently belonged to the absent buyer in distant Buenos Aires whom Portele said he represented, for that buyer had paid a fabulous amount for the rights to Mudwall's wood and the time-span had not yet lapsed.

I might add here in advance, it was soon proved, (by the lawyers of our new buyer himself away undergoing the operations), the documents Portele displayed were clever forgeries. There was no way to trace the actual former buyer. He had vanished; he'd left no address. In any case, he'd done the business always "incognito". But before the fraud was discovered, Portele arranged for the first lot of wood to be loaded on "Crazy Horse's" truck in a great hurry, to be sent off early, on a day in the first fortnight of September, 1983.

Both Mudwall and Leon were in a state. Mudwall, because he was thus losing an opportunity for profit that was costing him nothing but the grace of his name on the *guias*, or Bills of Lading, as "owner". Leon was the one who'd lose "all". He'd done all the cutting and hauling (with the buyer's tractor and bulldozer, to be sure); he'd lost months getting the continuation of the road done up to that first stand of precious wood (supposedly on Mudwall's land, but really on ours). And now? Not a centavo would fall to his lot! Portele would virtuously haul it all away, "indignant" at such "thieving folk" as Leon and company.

What Leon did was go into hiding and send his easy-going, lazy brother to us on the morning when the first logs must be sent away, by order of the Law, for Portele.

We were woken before dawn that morning by a shout.

"They are stealing all your wood!" gibbered the brother, whose name (if translated into English) was "Honor".

We were tired of always hearing this same cry. (From Blasé's peon, from Morla, from others less vehement but as convinced.)

"What do you mean?"

"The wood on the *cancion* of the Pedregosa!" The fellow was almost jumping up and down in his impatience at the way we took so long to understand anything.

"But that's not our wood! You people told us it's Mudwall's."

"No, no, it's your wood. I haven't time to explain. You must go and tell them they must not take it away, that it's your wood."

"How can it be our wood when you folks clearly told us it's Mudwall's?"

The poor fellow twitched and wiggled in desperation. "Come, come, we'll explain later. It's all a mistake. Come."

"But I can't just go up and say, 'That's our wood', just on your say so."

"You can phone the Forestry Authorities, and if you tell them I told you it's your wood they're sure to believe, and they'll tell you what to do."

So Vadim drove off to Palma Sola with this brother of Leon's, to phone the authorities who confirmed, "If they say so it must be so. So just go up and stop them loading. Take a policeman with you. And if you meet the truck on the way already loaded, the policeman must stop them and make them go to the police-station till it's all cleared up."

When later, Vadim turned around, after that phone call in Palma Sola, he saw quite an audience listening in. Mudwall was also there, anxiously following the conversation.

In due course, Vadim climbed back in the Dodge (it was a year later that Ed got us a pick-up to replace the Dodge) along with the policeman, Leon's brother and none-other than Mudwall, determined to "see justice done".

They reached the entrance to the Pedregosa Trail, Vadim left the Dodge there, and all four men marched up the easy drive - all six kilometers of it - to the *chanchon*.

The wood was still only half-loaded. "Unload those logs in the name of the Law!" ordered our policeman sternly. (He has later turned out to be a real dear. Later, Vadim gave to the man's wife, for him, a damajuana of good wine warning her it was strong medicine and he mustn't take more than a spoonful at a time, and it is still his favourite joke, enjoyed by all the citizens of Palma Sola.)

Mudwall watched the proceedings in expressionless silence. Leon's brother twitched uncomfortably and melted out of sight.

Crazy Horse came up to Vadim and said, "I'm glad. I was most upset by what they were doing and I didn't know what could be done to protect your interests. But now you can protect your own wood, can't you?"

Vadim said yes, he could.

So he rounded up Mudwall and the policeman and they marched back down; and at the entrance to the highway a little cluster of interested parties hung around. (One or two were timber-pinches - not quite big-shot timber-thieves, including the fellow who'd been carrying off our *gunia*, at the far northern edge of our land, all but those last 8 *rollos*, as I've told.)

And there was Morla, ever so grim! When Vadim tried to answer his questions, explaining the situation, Morla replied icily,

"Someone is fooling you. Of course it's Mudwall's wood, and it belongs to the principals of Portele. I can recommend Portele as a fine, honest man, and it will all be cleared up yet, and that wood will be proved to be Portele's owner's by right; not yours, and not Mudwall's either."



"Well," said Vadim, "I've no time to talk it over now. I must drive this kind policeman and this other gentleman back to Paula Sola. I'll see you later."

But "later", Morla was too grumpy to want to discuss anything with us.

In due course the lawyers already mentioned found the proofs of the forgery and Portele vanished into the blue. Leon reappeared rather grumpily to inform us we would start loading those 30 *cubos* of our wood already on the *canchon*, (sold to the buyer as per the old agreement), at once.

So it transpired that on September 21, 1983, the first load was carted off by Crazy Horse, with Vadim and Sylvia present to learn "how to measure logs" and put their mark on the ends of each log. For each *cubo* we paid Leon a nice percentage also, pitying him (he must have hated being pitied!)

Vadim told me later, "It was eerie. Right in the bright sunshine a vampire bat kept circling an circling the truck as they loaded it, and it wouldn't go away!"

*Vampire bat?* thought I. *Ugh!* (How important as a symbol that load must have been on a Cosmic game-board somewhere.) We do know that Leon's family had been to local witch-doctors for their magic aid. They'd asked help both from the Virgin and the devil.

Mudwall and Leon did not give up easily. When the excitement was over, and we'd been adjudicated those first 30 *cubos* on the *canchon*, as our property which were duly trucked away, and been duly paid so that we could start building on two more rooms and a small bathroom to our little house, Leon started feeling his way back into our kind and trusting good grace. He talked of "poor Mudwall", and how he'd promised Mudwall to cut a bit more wood for him too, so we could wait while he cut wood for Mudwall a bit longer, and then later, he'd start cutting wood in earnest for us too.

I suppose we were fools. We said yes.

To keep us happy, however, as even I by then used to join Sylvia on regular walks up the Pedregosa trail to admire the scenery up on our *canchon*, (and Vadim often went there also), Leon occasionally "allowed" that "this set of logs, yes, it's yours."

But mostly all the logs were again Mudwall's. (How Moral must have scorned us. We deserved to be fooled, he must have felt. I felt the same way, sometimes, too!)

But at last the season ended, and before that, anyway, Leon and Mudwall had little luck. The tractor was taken away, and all they had left was the broken-down bulldozer. Nonetheless, stubbornly Leon used to send it up the dangerous higher trail to fetch logs for Mudwall, and thus once every other day the staggering old machine managed to haul another log down purporting to come from Mudwall, and completing thus the ruin of the bulldozer. Finally, when it was time to collect from Mudwall for all his labour, Mudwall casually told Leon, "Oh, I'm sorry, I haven't a centavo left. I lost it all." And poor Leon had counted on going half-and-half with Mudwall, to pay for all his unpaid labour. So he just lost out, poor fellow! We felt really sorry for him.

As for Mudwall, infuriating though he certainly can be, we find him delightful as "comedy relief" in the grim game constantly going on here. He's short and roly-poly and wears a stocking cap always topped by a pom-pom like a little boy. He'd have made a wonderful, solemn clown.

All these actors in our drama till recently, so desperately longed to learn whether we continued ignorant of their misdoings, or did we really not care? We discretely circulated the information that we find them all so amusing we let them play their little games out of sheer curiosity on our parts, to see how far they'd go. (It makes the squirm to know that!)

Do you agree that they are perfectly delightful, these folk? Children, playing at being grown-ups like all their betters in power till so recently? To be *vivo* is the ambition of all good Argentines. (And elsewhere it must be similarly so.) *Vivo* doesn't just mean "alive" but quick on the uptake, and even quick to do your neighbour in!

Incidentally, that giant *yarará* coming out of the river and making straight for me that day, (as already mentioned), was a happening that occurred just before the loading of our first truckload of wood from the Pedregosa's *canchon*, on the September Equinox of 1983. I for one saw a link. Must we too finally learn to live in *vivo* to keep heads-above-water as we continue to sojourn in Latin America? As most Latin Americans insist, "You've got to be *vivo* before some other *vivo* does you in."

No one blames himself. It's the fault of all the other *vivos*. And there's another term: to *embromar*, which means to do your neighbour in, really hurting him somehow. It's also much in use as a term. We haven't an exact translation in our English tongue, and I - still lone English-woman at heart - observe and regret and deplore, as I watch our children's children here accepting the standards and learning to be *vivo* too, though their embarrassed parents, (our sons and now their wives) keep after them in an effort to make them see that that is not the best way to be. "Fair play" is a British concept, and Britain here is privately admired but oh, how resented! The old staff buildings along the railways (formerly British) still stand in fine condition through the years. The old bridges (formerly built by British interests) are still solid, if not attached by ferocious mudslides and floods as was the case here in March 1984. It is frustrating for the Latin Americans to know that if they want something to last (machinery, clothing, etc) they'd better "buy British" still. (Though the Japanese are taking over more and more of the market, with cleverly-made and good things, cheap enough for us to afford, on the whole.)

I look out of our front window and watch processions go by while the old ladies chant; the images bob and stagger along on the old men's shoulders. And I think, they should "buy British"... and I'm sure the images you can buy in England would no seem so hilariously funny as they wobble to and fro. It's these Colonial-style plaster *virgenes*, with their tiny prim lips and their pseudo-golden crowns and beaded satin garments (always very dusty, for you'll never blow all the dust away); they really ought to be carried with more show, to fit all they represent.

I think of how the Egyptians transported huge effigies of garish deities, towering above the milling throngs. The juggernauts of India also were overwhelming.

And then I think again of these local images born along by stubborn oldsters on holy days, (their kids are away playing football or volley-ball), and my heart turns over with the poignancy of life on Earth, still.

- Mae Strelkov



# Poetry, Too

## DRAGONS; WAKE!

by Bridh Hancock.

Once upon a time,  
beaten and knowing their time was over,  
they layd and buryd sad last eggs  
then, wishing their young a much better morrow,  
died - to all but legend and myth.

Dragons are seen now in our citys dancing,  
hopely bringing lots of good luck, and  
dragons of earth, fire and greed  
ferociously gard their horded gold; our  
dragons of East and West.

But dragons, real dragons, are ded-to-the-world sleeping.  
What do they dream? What do they know?  
Forests are felled, and mountains are washed  
to rock and ruined muddy foreshore.  
Rivers and lakes hav died of pollution,  
and pour their deth into poisoned seas.  
The skys are destroyed by other pollutants,  
and from our citys oxygen fades.  
The media protects both industry and government  
by keeping the people and its parliaments ignorant.  
"God keep the Middle Class",  
from the planet's and people's venjence.

**Calling all dragons! Last call for dragons!**

Idealists protest, but against themselves bring  
haitred and scorn and are punished like criminals.  
Better they hach the slumbering fire-birds.  
**Dragons; wake!**, or is there no hope?

## PELICANS

by Bridh Hancock.

When I see you with children snug in your arms  
I think of pelicans and alriteness;  
but oh the reception those birds shall get  
when they lite on Cryton's Isle and meet  
dinosaurs alive after ajes asleep in Jurassic amber.

Children do that to some men;  
and knowing *no man looks so tall as when he stoops to a child*,  
so many politicians hav studyd the stratejic art of  
spontaneously stoping to raise and chukil-up a young-one  
ere it beats a wise retreat to the security of a parent.

Pelicans do that to some politicians.  
They think they can be the life of any party they swallow,  
and of all they fondil or fidil with.

Ah! democracy brings forth such beasts that  
no-one and their good intentions are safe.  
What hope had the kings of our arkaic past?

Such dinosaurs dwell among us yet;  
so pity our pelicans with their bags of  
thrift and theft, shairs and secritys.  
Know: children shall be fed to them  
to buy the semblance of alriteness  
yet again, and in vain.

## BEYOND THE BEND

by Bill West

Where things are  
is always in terms  
Of where other things are,  
Whether it's crumbled up chocolate bar wrapper  
Around the corner  
Or a new star,  
And so the web keeps growing farther  
Until the bend bends over.

## ESCALATOR TO ANDROMEDA/ FOR A 1950'S S.F. WRITER

(to E. C. Tubb)

by Andrew Darlington

he types  
"LIFT-OFF :  
within 4:42  
minutes, no  
blue sky"

leans back  
drinks coffee,  
exhales nebulae  
of cigarette smoke,  
stares the wall and  
out beyond the wall  
as far as  
Andromeda

then,  
4:42 minutes  
later, he  
returns to  
the typewriter



# THE REIGN OF DARE: Dan Dare in "Reign of the Robots"

by Andrew Darlington

Elitism. Snobism. Or Purism...?

Whatever "ism" you choose, the facts are inescapable.

To Elvis Presley devotees his Army period forms a quality threshold; the "pre" and "post" records dividing the classic from the mediocre.

To Dan Dare aficionados that watershed is provided by the final extinction of the original *EAGLE* in April 1969. Dare survived the meltdown, and indeed - still survives. His adventures continued - and continue, with some gaps, first in 2000 AD, and then in the *EAGLE* relaunch through to the present day. Like the other great Twentieth Century myth-figures BATMAN and SUPERMAN, Dare has a potential for constant reinvention, renewal and reinterpretation, adapting himself to new audiences and the demands of new social and political conditions.

Grant Morrison's dour and relentlessly grim DARE was published in 1990, but is set in a mind-warply corrupt Thatcherite future of Treens ghettos rife with drug-addiction and the Mekon in league with establishment politicians to exploit and mulch the drab unemployed masses.

But the product of this "late" period is consistently dismissed or ignored by purists as lying beyond the pale of serious consideration. They prefer the 1950's when Dan, his portly Lancastrian sidekick Digby, and his green-brained Venusian foe the Mekon dominated the picture-strip like no-one before... or since. JUDGE DREDD may have cranked the medium into adult-orientated overdrive, cracked the American market, and crested the graphic novel revolution, with exploding flash-frames, dayglo splatter ultra-violence, and ROBOCOP F.X. sophistication, but Dare's got a 27-year start, and he's still here.

Purists, nostalgia-junkies and Fifties-ophiles can now feed their habits by buying the first eight years of Dare epics complete in a week-by-week format through seven DELUXE COLLECTORS EDITIONS published by Hawk Books. The Seventh and latest is unleashed now for Boys everywhere in a volume called THE REIGN OF THE ROBOTS, 128 large gravure colour pages of vintage S.F. flare. "Determined to enslave the Universe, the Mekon has conquered Earth and Venus with a horde of rebel Treens backed by an army of Elektrobots - mechanical monsters controlled only by the voice vibrations of their power-crazed master...". The third of a trilogy of linked year-long serials THE REIGN OF THE ROBOTS is an integral part of Dare's glory years, the high point of his long and continuing evolution.

Comic-book academics intent on assembling critical evidence for comparison with Dredd's greatest exploits - THE CURSED EARTH or THE JUDGE CHILD, need look no further, this is where they must begin.

REIGN OF THE ROBOTS opened on pages one and two of *EAGLE* Vol. 8 No. 8 dated 22nd February 1957 running

through to the 24th January 1958 issue. During that year Prime Minister Harold MacMillan made his "you've never had it so good" speech, novelist Malcolm Lowry (of UNDER THE VOLCANO fame) died of a sodium amytal OD complication by too much gin, Patrick Moore fronted the first ever THE SKY AT NIGHT and the Treaty of Rome kick-started the E.E.C. Elvis, Buddy Holly, and Jerry Lee Lewis all scored their first #1's as the story unfolded.

Dare had begun in 1950 when NEW WORLDS - Britain's most prestigious adult S.F. magazine, welcomed "another 'good companion' on the road to the stars", celebrating "this generation's focal point for stimulating thought". The early Hawk Books volumes faithfully reproduce each flip into space AS IT HAPPENS; compiled by comics historian and Dare authority Mike Higgs. The first confrontation with the green Venusian tyrant occurs in PILOT OF THE FUTURE. Trips to Mars and Mercury follow in the second volume, then it's off to Saturn for more derring-do. The return of the evil Mekon is recorded for posterity in PRISONERS OF SPACE from 1954. The current trilogy begins with book five in THE MAN FROM NOWHERE when the alien Lero invites Dan and his companions on their first venture beyond the solar system. The story continues in ROGUE PLANET set on the double-sunned world of Cryptos. Lavishly illustrated in full solid primary colours the alien space-capes are vividly captured by an art team co-ordinate by Frank Hampson working from live-action models and a futuristically spaced imagination.

Arthur C. Clarke was an early "scientific adviser" for the strip, and the relativistic effects of faster-than-light travel to the stars are neatly introduced when ten Earth years have elapsed by the time Dare hits home re-entry into REIGN OF THE ROBOTS. The Mekon rules Earth. London is deserted, patrolled by armies of aggressive shoot-to-kill mechanoids. The population are slave labour for concentration camps, or have been removed to other worlds. Action shifts to Venus, and back again, then out as far as the Sargasso Sea of space, a bizarre zone of dead rocketships...

'Is there no end to your evil, Mekon?' asks Dare.

'To me, there is neither evil or good! NOTHING matters but power...' replies the "cold merciless master-mind of Venus."

It's boys-own adventure stuff carried to its highest and most crafted expression. Dare seldom came better.

But a recent retro-fest compilation called DADS OWN ANNUAL accuses Dan Dare of holding back the moral and artistic development of the genre. Its "indelible puritanism" was "against the media trend" and hence "blocked the way that comics should go if they were in any way to challenge television at its own game". This is a backhanded compliment. One that can be levelled at any figure in any field huge enough to define its boundaries. Because the Dare strip in *EAGLE* delineated the standard to which all potential rivals aspired, it also inferred the limits they would - largely, be content to stay within. This was recognised even as the stories unfolded through the thrill-starved 1950's. S.F. artist Sydney Jordan of NEW WORLDS - co-creator of the JEFF HAWKE "DAILY EXPRESS" space strip, refers to "Dan Dare moving through the carefully tailored worlds of pseudo-violence and sexless relationships"

In those distant days Science Fiction was propelled by the intoxicating momentum of the space race.

The late Sixties "New Wave" reassessed all those naive assumptions and downgraded expectations of the future to the rad-wasted hell-world of Judge Dredd's Mega-City One. In Hawk Books' DAN DARE DOSSIER Norman Light notes that when Dare was first relaunched in 2000 AD "Frank Hampson must have shuddered when he saw how his creation re-appeared. The essential elements of the original Dan Dare - humanity and compassion, had been entirely cut away". While

in NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS novelist Mick Farren wrote on behalf of "the comicbook purists" about "the shock of mayhem and violence" and "the atrocity that's been committed to Dan Dare" (16th April 1977).

Is that elitism, snobbism, or purism...?

Whatever "ism" you choose, the evidence is back in print, inviting your evaluation.

Hawk Books publish:

REIGN OF THE ROBOTS : DAN DARE 7th DELUXE COLLECTORS EDITION at £18.95.

ROGUE PLANET: DAN DARE 6th DELUXE COLLECTORS EDITION at £17.95.

THE MAN FROM NOWHERE: DAN DARE 5th DELUXE COLLECTORS EDITION at £12.99.

A full-colour catalogue of books and related merchandising is available on request from: Hawk Books, Suite 309, Canalot Studios, 222 Kensal Road, London W10 5BN, UK.

#### DAN DARE DIALOGUE (Quotes from Yesterday's Futures)

1) "The Mekon Cometh...." - the Treen Guard in PRISONERS OF SPACE.

2) "Their orders are to destroy every living thing on Earth! And there's nothing you can do about it - NOTHING!" - Vora, Tyrant of Titan in OPERATION SATURN.

3) "The Space Fleet couldn't stop it! Atom Bombs couldn't stop it! Nothing can stop it! The Red Moon's here!" - from THE RED MOON MYSTERY.

4) Hardly pausing to eat or sleep, Men and Thorks, working in shifts, labour under the blazing heat of Saturn's rings. - from OPERATION SATURN.

5) "Golly Steve, isn't this Wizard" - A Space Fleet Cadet in PRISONERS OF SPACE.

6) "Strange! For countless aeons, Mekon brains have been bred to lose all trace of human emotions. Yet this Earthling's insolence awakes a strange, fierce spark of hate within me!" - the Mekon in PRISONERS OF SPACE.

7) "To deviate is death - put Plan "X" into operation" - a Phant Warrior in ROGUE PLANET.

8) "There will be no treachery from Colonel Dare. That is his foolish weakness - and the one upon which I depend to destroy him and all he stands for!" - the Mekon.

9) "The game's not played out yet, you Mildewed Monster" - Dan Dare to the Mekon.

10) "Looks like the end of the line, Space-Mates...!" - Dan Dare in MAROONED ON MERCURY.

## TWO BRITTLE UTOPIAS

by John Alderson

HEARTLAND by Nancy Corbett was published by Black Swan in 1989. It is an "after the nuclear holocaust" book and deals with the survivors in Australia... whether or not anyone else in the world survived they are unaware, apparently having no radio, despite the men having the means of holding instantaneous voting, electronically of course. I believe this is more due to deficiencies in the author's technological knowledge than anything else. Nor is this the only place this shows.

The surviving women were apparently holed up in a shelter for many months where they spent their time being harangued by radical feminists. When at length they emerged they built up their own purely women's society spending most of their time apparently swimming, sun-baking and otherwise playing around, eschewing all sorts of technology other than a generator to run the freezer wherein was deposited the pre-war sperm-bank. They made occasional sorties into the ruins of Brisbane for such things as paper. They lived north of Brisbane in a sub-tropical area where fruit and vegetables grew with very little attention and work. But they did meditate, and they were divided into several groups or tribes, lived very simply and had various gatherings and in short, lived a life of simple sloth, their greatest labour being having babies. Naturally they didn't need men and sent the boys over to the men's community in Western Australia, that is, as far away as they could be. But they refused to have the men in their society or allow the present day men to father their children, claiming they owed the men nothing. Naturally they blamed the men for the past war and all previous wars, and all previous wrongs (and all future ones).

To an anthropologist this sort of society rings a bell. The society illustrated in the myth of Prometheus have the

women, claiming to be gods, living a life of leisure, living on the proceeds of the men's hunting and having the favoured men up for sex now and then, but apparently denying the men the knowledge of their fatherhood of the children. The Amazons (devotees of Amu, also known as Kali, hence our word kill, and wife of the war-god Scanda - better known as Siva) like the foregoing knew no marriage and dumped their new-born boys on the hill-side where the men picked them up and reared them. And various present day societies who live in sub-tropical areas where very little work is needed to produce food and clothing, have a form of marriage where the men visit them and are divorced at the drop of hat. The criteria for all these societies is a living so easy that men are not needed.

How, in this book the men have built or rebuilt a little city, there being only a few thousand of them. It is devoted to learning, the arts, sport, and apparently some work, though the author is pretty vague about this. The men form "families" of three to care for the boys they get from Brisbane every couple of years by airship. The men are very peaceful; indeed they are damned effeminate with the bulk of them being openly practicing homosexuals (the women were lesbians by the way). However a boy must approach a man, not the other way around. so personally I don't see how many love affairs would ever start. Well, the men's community is highly idealised and suffers badly from the author's ignorance of how men work and think. She is as wanting in this as in her ignorance of technology. I mean, the men use videos, computers and at least two airships using helium, but apparently have no radios! And are happy to receive, look after and educate the boys but not be allowed to father any children. But it does prove some men's dream of having children without the burden of their mothers.

The men's community is too idealised and too lacking in knowledge on the part of the author to be worth considering.

However, the ideas the women of the book have about the men is enlightening. Men are aggressive, paternalistic, patriarchal and always treat women badly. Finally, when the system of the women breaks down the women insist that they will make all the social rules. Well, what's new! Frankly, the women in the book are suffering from a persecution-mania, paranoia and a massive penis-envy... and of course, a knowledge of history and anthropology. Their community is only possible because no work is needed.



# IN DEPTH

BY BILL CONGREVE

Ron tells me that a number of readers have said nice things about the manner in which I've written of my travels about Australia. You asked for it. Somewhere in this lot you may find a book review or several.

Driving out of Alice Springs towards Uluru (Ayers Rock to those of you with a lesser degree of political correctness) is a sobering experience. The desert is exhilarating. The despair of the aboriginal population of Alice is hidden from us by the bulwark of the MacDonnell Ranges

Driving towards Uluru for me felt like a pilgrimage. This stupid bloody rock is so pervasive in Australian culture, appearing everywhere from tourist advertising campaigns to trademarks for financial institutions, that a person can't live in Australia and not have the weight of the thing build up in the back of the mind. Driving south out of the corrupt oasis of Alice Springs along the Stuart Highway, where there are no speed limits and the cops only really worry about idiots who look like either killing somebody else or falling asleep and killing themselves, was another experience. Part of the way there, we turned off along Ernest Giles Road towards Kings Canyon, and then turned again down one of those disgustingly corrugated (What North Americans would call some kind of washboard effect.) dirt roads the centre of Australia does so well towards Henbury Meteorite Conservation Reserve -- a little cluster of meteorite craters that a bunch of Apollo astronauts visited for acclimatisation before one of the moon visits.

In the car with me are Astrid, from Germany, and James, from England. We met up in Cooktown, and we've turned into an intriguing sort of team. On the car stereo Iron Butterfly is pounding their way through Inna-Gadda-Da-Vida, a piece of music all three of us have found fits the outback Australian landscape.

The desert about us is stark and treeless. Trees are only found in this area along the dry creek beds. (Right through the interior of the continent there are these long, narrow beds of sand with tress down either side. Every couple of years a bit of water rolls along the top before sinking in or evaporating. The real water is from deep underneath. The water table through central Australia is fed from, of all places, the New Guinea highlands.) Just here the desert isn't red, more yellow and white. There's a few shrubs around, and a few head of cattle lie listlessly in what shade they can find. But in the middle of winter it isn't so hot. The craters are only small, of interest to the Apollo astronauts simply because they are quite recent and have held their shape. They aren't much to look at until you realise that the original meteorite was about the size of a 200 litre oil drum and the impact would have flattened half a dozen city blocks.

Pity Alice Springs wasn't here ten thousand years ago.

Thinking like this helps me fight off the flies. I don't know what Astrid and James use to help them. I don't know if they actually bother James, he's a fairly calm kind of bloke, and Astrid dreams of the next mug of coffee or glass of red wine.

If I could personally tie down and shoot every fly in the Northern Territory, I think I would be happy. Truth to tell, they're so noxious that the mind eventually shuts down and avoids the subject.

You may wonder why I dislike the Alice. It is designed for two purposes. 1) To take money away from tourists, only haphazardly providing a service in return. 2) To keep the aboriginal population in their place by refusing them jobs and giving them dole money according to an unofficial principle of social guilt rather than social welfare. In outback Australia, Social Security is used as a form of control. The policy works something like this: 'In these times of reconciliation we must recognise that, 200 years ago, Australia was stolen from the aborigines, and we must all be aware of our responsibilities. Here's your dole cheque for this week, but don't expect to get a job. We don't understand you, and you embarrass us in front of all these tourists we're making money from using your heritage as a gimmick. We don't mind you getting drunk, just do it down in the park where we know where you are but we don't have to watch.'

White Australia has stolen the continent (The policy in Tasmania was genocide. The aborigines there died out last century -- a bit too early for international current affairs TV to guilt-trip foreign populations!), put the aboriginal population up on a pedestal, reviled them, and has spoon fed them blood money in order to keep them dependent on white culture.

Nowhere in Australia are the effects of this unofficial policy more obvious than in Alice Springs. Pity the Yanks don't have a nuclear accident there.

Is it time to review a book? Yes, I think so.

#

CRAVENGHAST, Darryl Caine, novel, Ironbark pb, 472 + iv pp, \$13.95.

A rather silly imitation of the Gor novels. Laudably incorrect in these days of unofficial political censorship, but not well enough done to be exciting or erotic. (It stinks!) Horrible cover. A wanking fantasy for pimply-faced adolescents who want to be John Norman when they grow up.

#

It is difficult to properly consider what we've seen as we go bouncing back out to the Stuart Highway. The forces that shaped these craters may be special to Mentor readers because of our shared interests in life, but all around us as we live our lives, no matter where we live, are geographical features that are special in their own way and which tell their own story whether that story be glorious or merely subtle. A half kilometre south of the Henbury craters is a ridge line maybe a hundred metres high and several kilometres long. Its story is certainly not as exotic, but no less special.

We turn down the Lasseter Highway towards Uluru and pass the amazing broken boot tree and before striking into the spinifex and desert oak red sand-dune country of the centre. The desert oak (immortalised by Midnight Oil in the song 'Beds Are Burning') is a sheoak, or casuarina. Australia doesn't have a native oak. The casuarina looks like

a pine tree with cones and segmented needles. The desert oak is a small, stunted example which doesn't amount to much even when fully grown. When young, all the growth is concentrated about the trunk to reduce the exposure to sunlight during the heat of the day. These young trees are shaped a bit like tired phalluses, floppy penises that have had enough for the day and just want to go back to sleep. The first landmark is Mt Connor, which both James and Astrid mistake for Uluru. Surely no Australian can make this error, the goddamned shape of Ayers Rock must just about be part of our racial memory, yet many Australians do make this mistake.

Idiots.

We stop at the lookout, get a few photos. Bill leaves his water bottle on top of the car and doesn't realise it for the next hundred and twenty kilometres.

Idiot.

When we do finally see Uluru, it is impossible to mistake. Yes, I do feel like I'm on a pilgrimage. The others respect that. The heavy metal comes off the stereo and Ravel's 'Bolero' goes on. I've got plenty of time to think about it, but even now I couldn't tell you exactly what I thought about -- with one exception.

In the letter pages of *Eidolon*, the excellent Perth based SF magazine, Terry Dowling and Greg Egan have held a rather ill-considered exchange of ideas about the role of landscape in human consciousness and perception of reality. The whole argument to me seemed quite silly, as the mechanics of the process are quite simply explained.

The key is language, and its uses. On the most mechanical level, all communication is meaningless. We simply have a pattern against a background: a pattern of sound waves, a pattern of marks on a piece of paper, a pattern of X-rays from a rapidly spinning pulsar, a pattern of electrical impulses in the nervous system or in telephone wires, a pattern of impulses of light down optical fibre, you get the picture. Do these mean anything? Beyond the simple fact of what they are, a detectable change in energy such as a sound wave, etc, no. They mean nothing. They are given meaning by the knowledge of the observer.

For us to have communication, the person encoding the message, for instance the person writing marks on a piece of paper, must have similar knowledge to the person reading those marks. If the mark on the paper generates the same (or even a quite similar) idea in the reader, as it does for the person who generated it, then the first person has communicated that idea to the second. If those people speak a different language, or if the vocabulary of the second is different, or insufficient, then the communication process has broken down. Please note that I'm simplifying and annotating these ideas in order to get them across quickly. Ideally, we would like a two-way dialogue in order to fully meet the needs of both persons.

Note also, that I'm talking about human communication. If we take the above examples of patterns against backgrounds to be a simple statement of the uses of energy, and the interpretation of the use of energy, then we are talking about science. One of the examples I quoted was of a pattern of X-rays given off by a pulsar. A scientist studying this information will be searching for information on how the universe works, ie, the speed of rotation of the pulsar, the plane in which the X-rays are generated, the mechanism that produces the X-rays (tidal forces tearing apart matter falling towards the surface of the pulsar, or gravity crushing the matter into a collapsed state once it hits the surface, or a mixture of the two, something like that, my cosmology isn't

up to scratch these days), etc. What we are talking about is an absolute. There is no point comparing an event with the human knowledge of an event (a mistake politicians and accountants make when debating science and environmental policies). The manner in which the universe works is not open to debate. What is open to debate is how we interpret science, for we are then reintroducing the impact of human experience.

The philosophical question is: 'does a tree make a sound if it falls in a forest and nobody hears it?' Of course it does. Energy is generated, sound waves go bouncing around, etc. What people really mean when asking this question is: 'Does it matter if nobody hears it?' Or, in other words, does this mean anything if no human being observes it? It becomes a question of meaning and observers, not a question of causality. (And in this example, quite an arrogant one, implying that events don't matter if there is no human observer -- but then there was no human observer to the Big Bang without which we wouldn't exist.) It is this assumption on the part of some philosophers that perhaps there is no event without human observation that confuses human experience with science, with reality, which is bringing solipsism back into vogue despite the best efforts (albeit, centuries ago) of people such as Immanuel Kant.

This is the borderline where Greg Egan, for instance, blends solipsism, cosmology and quantum mechanics. The difference is that Egan knows well what he is about.

Back to language. Where does the knowledge human beings use to decode the thoughts of other humans come from? Any number of sources. Language is a fickle tool, generated and modified in its use by education, the media, bureaucrats, politicians, art, lawyers, kids on the street, the advertising industry, science fiction writers... There are any number of influences. One stabilising influence is education. The relevance of these influences to the communication process is the buildup of common knowledge in society by which individuals can interpret messages. My point is that individual human experience is what creates the knowledge by which we communicate, and part of our individual experience is the landscape we live in, and the importance we attach to it. Therefore, for some individuals, and perhaps for the entirety of some cultures, it is possible to exploit the landscape for the purpose of art, for the purpose of creating myth. Terry Dowling consciously does this in his Tom Tyson stories and in the linked collection *WORMWOOD*. Aboriginal culture goes on step further, in attaching landscape to not only myth but history.

The landscape becomes part of our myth making to the extent that we need or want it to, because it is part of the common knowledge shared by all members of society which the society uses to communicate. (This common knowledge should not be confused with reality -- or real events and causality in the real universe -- there need be nothing real involved at all for communication to take place -- a simple shared meaning will suffice, as communication does not take place on the level of the inherent meaning of patterns of energy -- which don't exist except on their own terms -- but on the shared, and agreed by consensus, knowledge, real or not, of what those patterns mean.)

Speaking of myth, let's take a gander at another book.

#

GREEN MONKEY DREAMS; Isobelle Carmody, collection (Penguin, tpb, \$19.95, 210 + x pp).

You! Come over here. I want to tell you the story of



death and of the fairies at the bottom of the universe.

So begins 'Long Live the Giant', just one of the parables in this volume. It's an old idea to SF readers. An immortal alien race created humanity but must now deal with the spiritual implications and ethical contradictions of dealing with a mortal race which is intelligent, self-aware, and horribly aware of its own mortality. Yet Carmody doesn't play SF games, by now you will all be aware of that by the very nature of this column. The aliens made humanity from a special kind of decomposing 'clay' which they use to road-test their creations before using the real stuff. One of the aliens let a few of his creations go, and waited to see what would happen.

Many of these parables are quite depressing, many are reliant for their power on the evils of technology, and Carmody quite properly straddles the fence between blaming technology itself for humanity's follies, and blaming the social use of science and technology. This is a tightrope Stephen King knows well and why, for me, *THE TOMMYKNOCKERS* is a key volume in King's canon. In that volume the mysterious force given off by the ancient spaceship, by which it subverts the characters into building all kinds of devilish gadgets, just happens to be the same colour as US money...

In stories such as 'The Beast' and 'The Glory Days', Carmody appears to be road testing ideas which will be used in future volumes of her Obernewtyn Chronicles, the first two volumes of which were discussed in an earlier In Depth column. Those readers interested in the third volume of that series, *ASHLING* -- well, Carmody is marking time, exploring her characters, their motivation, and the world they live in, without advancing either the theme of the series, or the plot. I'm still eagerly awaiting further developments in one of the most fascinating SF series currently happening in Australia.

As for the stories? I just wish that in the story, 'The Lemming Factor' that notorious Disney film crew had made an appearance. 'The Phoenix' is one of the best stories of the year, mainstream, yet horror, and mythic. 'Corfu' is happy and wonderful. Yet, throughout *GREEN MONKEY DREAMS*, there is an element of didacticism, or perhaps of the ethical hand-holding without which Australian literary critics and academics can't understand genre fiction, or any other fiction for that matter, which takes many stories away from the realms of myth and fable and into parable. Perhaps this is appropriate as Carmody is chiefly marketed as a young adult writer.

*GREEN MONKEY DREAMS* is the most significant single author genre collection published to date in Australia this year. May the buried giant with the finger and the attitude live long and prosper.

#

James, Astrid and I create our own enduring myth with a cask of red wine (not generally available in NT because of aboriginal drunkenness) and the Uluru sunset. Yes, that stupid bloody rock does change colour!

The Ayer's Rock Resort is a number of kilometres away from the rock itself and outside the jointly administered National Park/Aboriginal Lands. I found it very vulgar. Once again white Australia has hijacked the economic potential of black myth. We camp in the camping area there, a place which denies the very existence of the desert by pumping obscene amounts of water from the water table for the sake of a nice lawn for tourists. The sand is red. The boundary

between desert and lawn is knife sharp.

The resort here is, depending on the time of year, sometimes even on the time of day, the third largest town in the Northern Territory, behind Darwin and Alice Springs. Its purpose is to process, inform, and entertain tourists.

Uluru itself is fascinating. One morning we head off to pick up the sunrise, talking alternatively about James' football career -- he's a rugby union front rower -- and the experimental drug taking of some of Astrid's friends back in Germany. She describes the effects of home-made absinthe, and I wonder why I'm fascinated by the stuff even though I've never tried any. The sunrise is less impressive than the sunset, and much more heavily populated. We follow the tour buses around to the car park at the base of the summit climb, and then have our final discussion on whether we're going to climb the bloody thing or not. Uluru is a sacred site, and the route to the summit was pioneered by the aborigines who use it for ceremonial purposes.

We watch the tour buses unload hordes of mindless idiots who are out to collect another experience to tell their mates in the pub back home. Whether they come from Germany, Japan, USA, New Zealand, Indonesia, or Sydney, most visitors to this place are out for one thing. Occasionally Uluru bites back. This is a difficult climb for armchair tourists and one or two people a year die from heart attacks or falls.

The aborigines, of course, prefer that people don't climb. There are a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a sacred site and the aborigines themselves don't climb except for a very few elders on ceremonial occasions. Secondly, they are the spiritual caretakers of the land, and have the wish that visitors in their care don't come to harm (even if they ask for it). We came across these sentiments numerous times in the resort town, but that's because the culture in camp grounds and backpacker areas is much different to that in the motels. Unfortunately, we don't find out why it is a sacred site, and just what it is about the site that causes the aborigines to ask people not to climb. These sentiments of not climbing are, of course, never passed on to the tour operators as their income is derived from taking people to the site so that they can climb it.

Astrid won't make the climb. James is unsure. I don't want him to climb as he has a severe problem with vertigo and heights, we discovered that at Black Mountain near Cooktown, and again in the MacDonnell Ranges near Alice Springs. Yet, when he eventually decided not to climb, the vertigo thing wasn't part of his decision. This is a place he will never come to again, and for travellers simple things like vertigo tend to be left out of decision making at times like this. As Astrid and James head off to walk around the thing, a trek very few people undertake but which is vastly rewarding, I try to decide whether I'm going to climb the bloody thing myself.

I walked off alone in the opposite direction for about a half a kilometre and found a comfortable place to sit. Above me, on the side of the rock, was a massive wound caused by water eroding through the rock and creating a massive pock-marked cave. The local tribes have very literal myths, and what little I could discover about the myths of Uluru lead me to believe that it is the body of a warrior slain in battle. Even though my interest in the place has been more than casual, it has been impossible to find out much more than this. There is no library at the resort. Looking up at the cave, it is very easy to imagine the kind of myth it has caused.

The local aborigines have songs which describe the landscape they live in. As the elders who are the caretakers of these songs pass through the landscape, they sing these

songs as part of a process of reaffirming their links with the land, and in a way, spiritually recreating themselves and the land. Fine, if they move at a walking pace. Put them in the back of a landrover, and they get a little bit frantic. Put them in a plane or helicopter, and they become depressed almost to the state of catatonia.

(If anybody wants to read about this in much greater detail, the standard reference is a book called *SONGLINES* by Bruce Chatwin.)

It is impossible not to respect this reference for the landscape. My mind filled with imaginings about the soul of a great warrior being trapped in this bloody great lump of rock, forever being tormented and tickled into lunacy by foolish, irreverent gnats climbing up his ticklish side, I wander back to the starting point, still undecided. My concept of why the aborigines don't want us to climb is that by climbing we will annoy the spirits of these ancestral creatures.

Meanwhile, I'm wondering whether I'm meant to be a citizen of this country, whether perhaps the whole point of the exercise is exclusion of the invader. My feeling as an individual is that I'm not welcome, that despite being a citizen, there are parts of this country that my culture is built upon from which I'm being excluded. Another thing you find out here is that photographs of numerous sacred sites are banned.

At the base of the climb is a monument: a number of plaques dedicated to men and women who have died on the climb. One of these is of a Victorian farmer whose lifelong ambition was to come to Uluru and climb it. Seeing that, and with a little bit of rebellion in my mind, I decided to climb. While I respect the spirituality of others, part of my own spirituality where it concerns landscape, is to become a part of it through struggling across it. Experiencing the place through the use of physical energy, so to speak. At Black Mountain, I spent as much time climbing under the boulders through the heart of the mountain and sitting in the darkness as I did climbing across them to the peak. With Uluru, there is no choice. I will both climb it and walk around it. At least by now the first dozen bus loads of been-there-done-that types have pissed off to take photos of themselves wearing sunhats and safari gear in front of Kata Tjuta.

The view from the top? Apart from the red sand-dunes, this place is so flat there are no watercourses in any direction for as far as the eye can see.

By listening to an aboriginal guide after the climb, I found that the real reason the aborigines don't want others to climb has more to do with the place being a ceremonial site than a sacred site, as almost all of Australia is sacred in one way or another. The bans on taking photos of some sites are placed because photos only tell part of a story, and they would rather we have all of the story, or none of it at all. I'm reminded of the city of Jerusalem, parts of which are sacred to both Judaism and Islam. Nowadays the Jews and Arabs play 'This is mine!', 'No it isn't, it's mine!' games, and people die. The aborigines are simply saying: 'This is a ceremonial site for us, please approach it with the appropriate respect, as we realise it may be important to your spirituality as well.'

On one level I'm a little disappointed at losing my image of a giant warrior being tickled in his sleep, finding instead that the aborigines have a pragmatic approach to their heritage, but this country teaches pragmatism and my disappointment translates on as a kind of arrogance.

On another level my respect for aboriginal culture increased enormously, and these were the thoughts I had while walking around the rock.

THE MENTOR 90 page 24

Let us move onto another mythic landscape: the monster-ravaged streets of down-town Perth.

#

THE SECRET LIFE OF RUBBER-SUIT MONSTERS; Robin Pen, collection (Eidolon Books, tpb, \$14.95, 162 pp).

I'm going to chicken out and let Robin review his own book. I'm going to further chicken out and let Greg Egan introduce the review.

There is no such thing as objective criticism of cinema, or of any other artform. There are only movies, and skull movies, and this is a book of Robin Pen's wonderful skull movies.' From the introduction by Greg Egan.

The sky is turning grey, clouds moving in for a long night of hard rain. The Big Guy is cast into relief by a sun sunk low behind the city, his silhouette broken only by the bright line of reflection off the fractalated ridge all the way down his spine to the tip of his long, swaying tail. With a terrible cry that only a kaiju could utter, he smashes another building into flaming rubble. Some say he's the symbol of a vengeful Gaia, but it may well be that he just likes to smash things which try to defy change. He's a philosophical chaos; What doesn't kill me makes me stronger -- Nietzsche said it, the Big Guy lives it. Somehow, I feel more secure knowing he's out there, lumbering about in regal slow-mo, puncturing inflated real-estate values. For all I care, he can destroy this dark city. I've never really been here, and now I never will. I want his special approach to social commentary to continue, ad infinitum, his damning critique of life, human progress, and inner-city development immortalised in asphalt and twisted steel. In a way, it's a type of cinematic criticism from the other side of the screen; and he is the sensei in the dojo of transitory film.' From 'The Post-Modern' Prometheus, just one of the essays in this book.

Enough said?

No? Robin Pen is Eidolon's film critic. A reader who has followed his work column by column over the years may feel that he is as much concerned with style as content, that he is just another pimple on the face of the ego-driven construct he is commenting on, and to some extent those criticisms are true. Yet, if one is to read all his columns together, they are marvellously entertaining, witty, off-beat and well-informed. It is possible to do this book in one sitting. Just make sure the off-button for the TV is close to hand, because reading this while the ads are on won't work. Harlan Ellison with the attitude, but minus the anger.

#

I've mentioned Kata Tjuta a couple of times. For those of us a lesser degree of political correctness, that's The Olgas.

Kata Tjuta is a bunch of rocks with similar characteristics to Uluru. Each one is smaller, yet the whole is much larger. There are two walks available, as once again the whole joint is sacred land. The first walk is up Mt Olga Gorge. Wait for the tour bus to leave, and then sprint to beat the crowd from the next bus.

The other walk is the utterly magnificent Valley of the Winds track. This one is about seven kilometres of hard walking over uneven rock surfaces. The adventure trek buses come here, but the tour buses avoid it like hard work and hot beer. We manage to leave while there are very few people around, and we're on our own for almost the entire walk. Thankfully, the few people we do meet are heading in the other direction around the loop. It appears we've gone the wrong way... I could drag out my photos and write for



ages about this place. It is much more special (and spectacular) than Uluru. But it is getting late at night here, and Ron wants this column tomorrow. And there is another book to review...

There is just one anecdote. (Well, two.) My left boot died on the way in. I had to rip the rubber sole off and walk for the next five kilometres on the thin, but hard leather and cardboard backing.

There is a women's sacred site set into the back of Mt Ghee, which is an English name, but I don't know the aboriginal name. I don't know the legend behind this place, but I did take several photos. The kind of legend that could be generated is fairly obvious. Aboriginal culture can be a quite earthy one, the numerous rock carvings of vulvas and phal-luses to be found in the galleries of Carnavon Gorge in Queensland are proof of that. The site in Mt Ghee is a small valley, only metres wide, bounded on either side by long swellings of orange-red limestone resembling legs. At the head of the valley the cliff rises sheer for a couple of hundred metres. At the base of the cliff, between the spread 'legs', is a small spring that runs in wet weather through a long vertical crack in the cliff. The crack itself, and the rock around it, is blackened by algae, so that the whole resembles nothing so much as the human female genital region, which it resembles very closely. I don't know if the others thought what I did, perhaps I simply have a dirty mind, but I sat and watched it, entranced, for a full five minutes. We were all a little quiet after that.

Ten minutes later the rubber started peeling off my other boot.

#

METAL FATIGUE; Sean Williams, novel (Harper Collins, pb, \$12.95, 458 + vi pp).

Sean will be familiar to a number of TM readers. He's had several stories in these pages, and contributes regularly and diplomatically to the letter column. His first book was the limited edition collection, *DOORWAY TO ETERNITY*, published by MirrorDanse Books. His second book was the share-cropped gaming novel space opera co-authored by Shane Dix, *THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER*, published by Aphe-lion, which was glowingly reviewed in the pages of *Locus* by Russell Letson.

His third book, and first solo novel, is a futuristic, noir crime-thriller set in a isolated Nth American city after a massive social collapse. Although there are lots of cyber references such as a human personality uploaded into hardware, and the novel has been published as such, the tag of cyber-punk doesn't apply. The city of Kennedy con-

vincingly blends a decaying infrastructure with the slowly infiltrating science of the emerging societies beyond the city's borders.

The plot crackles. A genetically modified human known as Cati is murdering influential residents who wish to emerge from the city's isolation and ally with one of the out-side societies. A burglar known as The Mole is ritually playing havoc with the city's databases, breaking into properties at will, and stealing information and hardware. Phil Roads and his partner are assigned to catch The Mole, and time is breathing down everybody's necks, for the Reassimilation is only days away.

The ending satisfies in terms of action, emotional impact, and resolution of the novel's themes. My major complaint here is the obvious and trite nature and identity of the bad guys. My only other complaint is the more subtle one of Kennedy's realism. We have Kennedy described to us, and the description works well, yet we don't fully experience the futuristic decay in operation. Kennedy feels like today, with a few major, but still cosmetic alterations. While the characters are real and experienced the isolation and decay of the novel, they weren't formed and motivated by the city's past.

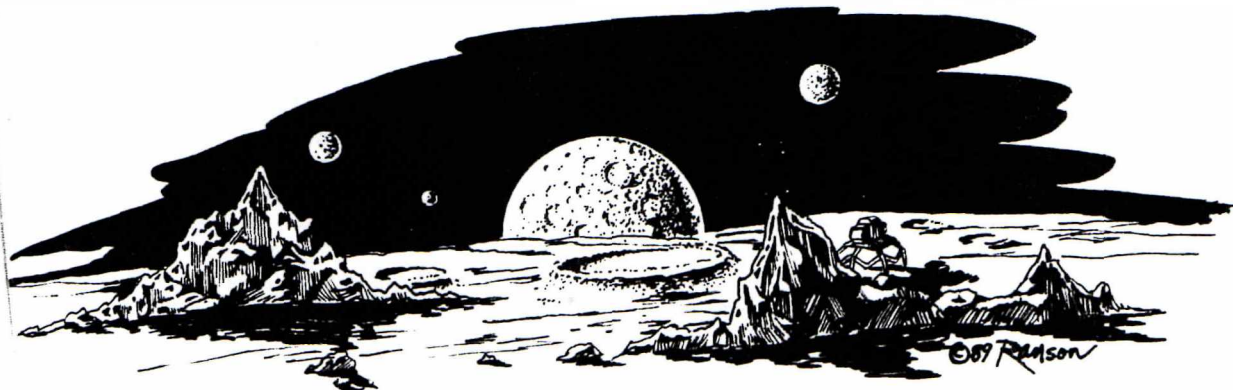
TM readers will be glad to know that Sean has written a competent thriller. The background, the plotting, the characters, all work well at novel length and augur well for the future of Sean Williams, the novelist. Recommended.

#

When we drove out of the tourist trap region, we stopped and left my boots on the amazing busted boot tree (which is surrounded at ground level by shredded rubber tyres). Yes, some of us white city types are still capable of our own myths, even if they are trite and concerned with attitude and fingers held in the air against fate.

Yet the fact that in the centre of Australia, a hundred and fifty kilometres from the nearest town (that being the tourist trap of the Ayer's Rock Resort), there is a dead tree whose every branch is loaded down with a couple of pairs of broken, impossible-to-mend boots is a source of much wonder and merriment. I love places like this. We next stopped down the road from the lookout for Mt Connor and picked up my lonely, well-scratched and beaten, waterbottle.

Uluru and Kata Tjuta are the remains of a mountain range that was once thirty thousand feet high, one of three such ranges that, at one time or another, existed in Central Australia.





**ROBERT FREW, 1 Funda Pl, Brookvale, NSW 2100.**

Talking about sexism, Lyn's article sure copped a roasting, (on'ya boyz). Just goes to show narrow minds soon get cranked wide open when exposed publicly in TM. Somehow, it wouldn't surprise me if that article was written by Bill Congreve, Chris Masters or (God forbid) Ron himself under a pseudonym to stir reader reaction. That's sure what it did. Rod Mitchell and Brent Lillie's cover, and Kirstyn McDermot's article were the perfect reply to such an opinionated point of view. She would have had a stronger argument if she said penises were the same shape as missiles, so all men must be evil....

I extend my deepest sympathies to John Tipper. Forty years is far too long to wait, no matter how you try and justify it.

I was pleased to see continuing good sci-fi in the pages of TM #89, and Ben Peek's story was a fine example. The poetry was enjoyable too, although Peter Brody's "Haiku" theories were a little beyond me. Fewer issues of TM with Sci-Fi and poetry are better than lots of issues like TM #86. Hopefully most readers would agree - maybe we can get one of those polling worms happening?

Ron, you're a braver man than me exposing your personal library, especially with such a bizarre collection of books. What, with a touch of "Seven", with Dante and Nietzsche, a touch of the sexual deviant with "Love in Action", "The Sexual Behavior of the Human Female" and others, and a touch of the kid with your Biggles collection, where would a psychologist start? (13.2.96)

*[Most of that collection were acquired in my late teens and early twenties and some, of course, when censorship was dropped in 1972. - Ron.]*

**JOHN J. ALDERSON, Havelock, VIC 3465.**

From the beginning of my writing and research career, I have been afflicted with censorship. Not the sort one usually thinks of, four letter words and all that. That's a mere minor detail though I still have editors who want to change words, and even mis-spell them. The very first piece of sociological research I did, and never bothered writing up because no editor would have accepted it, concerned the drift from the land and the fact that the women were the moving forces. Years later when the flight from the cities came to be studied it was found that women were the moving forces, but this was respectable. I didn't write that essay. Taboo subjects have multiplied since that time.

Time was when, if a communist wished to write (or talk) he, or she, was expected to use a special jargon; special words and words with special meanings. The same has happened since feminists came on the scene and we are afflicted with non-words like chair-person, alder-person, fore-person and a host of other ghastly collections of letters, all rampantly sexist and anti-male and anti-human and ethnologically nonsensical. Syntax is twisted so that the feminine precedes the masculine rather than the simple form preceding the complex. There is sound reason for saying "men and women" and "ladies and gentlemen". Snoopy, I believe, says "dogs and cats" and Garfield the reverse and both would be right. None of this has made me very sympathetic to the feminists.

Perhaps this would not have cut so deep if my line of studies had not taken me to fundamental man and woman relationships. Obviously the facile arguments as to why girl babies are drowned or whatever in certain countries, or at least so we are told. Certainly the wanting of a male heir to bear the father's name is unlikely; in most parts the children don't take the father's name, certainly not in Australia or America. In India a boy (one boy) is needed to carry out the father's burial ceremonies. So too in China. Presumably with those owning land the son is needed to carry on the farm, but there seems to be no reason for having a daughter, yet India swarms with little girls and they are lovely little things too. But China is a different kettle of fish. There the land is vested in the daughter and her duty is to marry a good sturdy man and bring him home to work the farm and keep her parents in their old age. The farms are now so small that a second girl is a calamity. Boys don't matter, they go out and marry some other girl and work her farm. To me it seems quite obvious that in an over-crowded country, if any-one is drowned at birth, it would be best be the girl because they will produce more children. I don't hold with drowning children and believe the best solution would be for them not to be conceived in the first place. But how reliable are these stories of killing girl children?

In Tibet, a poor and arid country which cannot support a large population, the men seem to out-number the women about five or six to one, and I have not come across a single rumour that girls are killed there. Whilst one boy always became a monk, the others married, and being a polyandrous society a landed women would normally have four or five husbands, also normally brothers. I mention this as a matter of interest, that where a society is polyandrous the woman normally marry brothers, yet the reverse does not apply. There is a taboo on a man marrying sisters, so much so that it is usually not permitted even when the first has died. It would be interesting to know how the Tibetans manage to produce so many more boys than girls.

If I may thump another fallacy. I was once staying at a hotel in India, and two Swiss social workers arrived at the same hotel. They promptly said that if I could afford to, to sponsor a girl to go to school. I never questioned such a worthy cause. However, after being confronted every day with streets filled with little girls in school uniforms the Swiss couple sponsored a boy to be educated. It seems general in the cities I travelled in that girls at school outnumber the boys about nine to one. It may be an illusion but it is certainly about five to one. In lucky cities like Agra, the boys from about eight years old upwards are to be seen working. (23.2.96)

**STEVE SNEYD, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, W. Yorkshire, HD5 8PB, England.**

Great cover [on #89]... witty, and multilayered enough to induce thought afterwards - "We have met the enemy and he is us" (Pogo).

Intriguing for Rudolph (or indeed Rudolph) to turn up in Pavel Viaznikov's journey account re Prague... seem to be in a phase where Rll keeps popping up, most recently previously in account of John Dee's time at his court.

Peter Brodie managed to get a useful account of haiku-senru across in a very brief space, without getting embroiled in the attempts at rigid regulation and exclusion many Western haikuists seem to go in for.

I also enjoyed the Ben Peek story ... interesting and believable setting, plenty of action, and an ending poised for a sequel. I did feel a slight sense of overload, though, so much information and action in comparatively, a short length; it deserved more room to develop in terms of words, I think, as a self-contained story - as a scene-setter for a novel, or flashback chapter within one, that wouldn't matter in the same way.

A lot of things to enjoy (that word again) in the poems, particularly Bridh Hancock's elegantly detached CLOUDS, much of her MAD HOLLOW MOONS, the unexpected among the letter-meanings of John Haines' SPACEMAN'S ALPHABET, and the neat way human nature survives technological change in his SNACK DISPENSER.

Another recent example in the media bearing on the question of whether life would be more "civilised" with women in positions of power - the current chaos in Bangladesh caused by the "war of the widows" - a woman as President, a woman as leader of the Op-



position, and between them, by lust for power and unwillingness to compromise, in truly male fashion, according to the report are rapidly undoing what small gains the country had made economically etc in recent years. Of course, the argument could be posed that women in power act like that because they follow male examples, rather like the defense of Marxist states that they became dictatorships because their early leaders had been brought up under, and tainted by the anti-morals of, capitalism. It would seem to be safest to assume that all who want power, of either sex, are a dangerous, at least potentially, and the endorsement on Sergeant Bilko's file WHC ("Watch Him Closely") - should always apply.

If John Alderson wants to keep track of UK "big cat" sagas, one of the best ways is to get WEARWOLF mag (exceptionally cheap in the UK.. 50p incl post - overseas I seem to remember is \$3 US, no idea what Oz price is.) Anyway, one of curious phenomena editor Kevin Byrne tracks is those big cats... address is PO Box 77, Sunderland SR1 1EB, England.

Like the idea of a "travelling review column" in Bill Congreve's piece... nice way of breaking up the reviews... you could extend the idea to reviewing each item in the city or town where it's published, to get the full ambience, but that I suppose wd be getting truly anorakian. (25.2.96)

**RODNEY LEIGHTON, RR#3, Pugwash, N.S. CANADA BOKILO.**

I don't know whether to offer you congratulations or condolences on your daughter's wedding.

Excellent article by Kirstyn McDermott. There's a lady with her head in the right place. Probably everything else as well. James Verran's account of setting up his new computer was hilarious. But also a little daunting. I know this guy who is constantly threatening to ship me a used computer system from Toronto. Since I'm completely computer illiterate... I've never so much as turned one on... and I don't have any kids to set it up for me, what will I do with the thing if it every does arrive???

Ah, this fanspeak business is never ending and also a matter of personal preference, I believe. Thanks to all who commented. Since I've lately been reading some Piers Anthony Xanth, I guess mermaids would be found in a swamp and therefore Catherine the Minx would be right at home (I hope she doesn't mind my silly teasing!). I was amazed to read that an alligator was found near her. I had no idea the things got that far north.

It occurs to me that my opening statement re Peggy Ranson's cover on TM #88 could be misleading. Not to mention conceited. Although I am madly in love with the lovely Peggy, we do not know one another in any way. I just like to tease her occasionally and she had a sufficient sense of humor to understand this.

Intiguing statements by John Tipper. I have no idea how old he is but it appears he started screwing at age 40 and is not doing it from time to time. I lost my cherry somewhere around my 18th birthday and at age 42 or thereabouts, I said to myself: "Hell, it's cheaper and lots easier on the nerves and emotional entanglements to beat off once in a while and forget women." And did so. However, my sex drive has greatly diminished in the past few years. Apparently, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome can do that to a person and since I've been battling that for about 7 years now. Mind you, I still look at my 30 something hot bodied neighbour and thinking I'd like to fuck her. It never goes beyond that because I don't need the hassle.

Well, is such illustrious fans use fans and not fen, that closes the matter for me.

**VICKI ROSENZWEIG, 33 Indian Road, 6-R, New York, NY 10034, USA.**

The cover [of THE MENTOR 89], while well executed, was as predictable as its characters consider each other. Or maybe I'd just heard this joke before?

I find it odd that your main library contains Virgil but not Homer. Do you by chance read Latin? I consider it entirely possible that Virgil loses a great deal in English translation; Homer loses some, but is well worth reading even if one has forgotten, or never knew, Greek. I recommend Richmond Lattimore's unrhymed verse translation.

[I bought and read most of my library when still at high-school, when I had more time to read and there was less SF around (only English publishers were available). Nowadays I have trouble

finding the time to read the SF and the odd fantasy I receive as review copies. The only time I can give myself for reading is the half hour on the train going home, and at morning and afternoon tea at work. And no, I don't read any non-English languages. - Ron.]

Kirstyn McDermott is blaming feminism not only for the excesses of individual women (which is fair enough, though nobody seem to care that anti-feminism boasts equally excessive men - and a few women), but for the actions of its opponents. Blaming feminists that women are still expected to do all the child-raising, or at least be responsible for whether it's done well (a father who changes his child's diaper is widely viewed as "helping" the mother, rather than doing his fair share of caring for his own child), is about as reasonable as blaming the environmental movement for the fact that oil tankers still leak onto wildlife refuges. And the "cultural logic" that she blames female infanticide is a profoundly sexist one: if Chinese culture and policy didn't systematically favor males over females, women would be as capable as men of supporting their aged parents, and men wouldn't be able to demand large dowries when they married a woman. People will do their best to survive within a cultural matrix, but that doesn't mean all cultures are equally valuable or blameless.

Part 2 of Darren Goossens' history of science is a delight.

I'm also continuing to enjoy Pavel Viaznikov's travels, with their delightful if bizarre images, as in "tampax (batteries not included)." And it's nice to hear from a visitor to New York who wasn't scared off our subway by the propaganda (I sometimes think the news should cover the deaths and injuries from driving in the same detail as they do train and plane crashes, but then they wouldn't have time to mention elections or basketball games) and found the system useful. Pavel, if you come back to New York, I'll be happy to show you another park or three - Central Park is as nice as you've guessed, with bird-watching, ice skating (in the winter), a carousel, and plenty of room just to walk or cycle. The steam rising from the streets is widely considered decorative (movie companies call the electric company and ask where it is this week, so they can use it in their movies), although it's basically practical: it's co-generation of energy, meaning that after they burn fuel for electricity, they pump the resulting (now slightly cooler) steam through a network of pipes to buildings in the southern half of Manhattan for heat (and, I think, to power air conditioning in the summer). A little bit leaks out, but only a little. It seems to work well enough that I wonder why other cities don't use it. Maybe New York is unusual, if not unique, in having a power plant close enough to a densely populated area for this system to be practical.

Pavel is absolutely right that the American relationship with cars is weird. New Yorkers walk, though. Yes, some of us drive, and many of us take the subway or the bus, but most of us walk at least a little: even the dedicated driver soon discovers that there isn't always a place to park, and that it's simpler to just walk down to the corner for a quart of milk than to go half a block to the car, drive to the nearest supermarket that has a parking lot, buy the milk, drive home, and look for a new parking space. There are some decorations in our subway system, but they tend to be small and easily overlooked: the IRT lines have little mosaics in the stations, for example, and there's one station on the F line where a supporting column has been painted to resemble an apartment building, complete with cheerful curtains and residents looking out the windows: but that's one column out of many. Other than that, well, a map helps, and many of us will be happy to give a visitor directions and answer questions.

I like Peter Brodie's haiku article and examples, but it seems to me that many of the examples don't live up to his stated standards, because the season work is missing. Maybe he's expecting too much common experience, and it would be clear if I knew the place he's writing about, but where is the seasonal reference in "The train's sound, after/I see half" or "The little girl tugs/as she hold tight to/her grandmother's hand." For me, the latter suggests summer, but that's when my grandmother took me to the playground, but for someone else it could as easily be a winter day, or any time in between.

I have no idea if drakes actually kill female ducks during sex, but they certainly don't seem interested in listening to the female's objections: last summer, I chased off a drake that was clearly

bent on having sex with a female duck, said female being followed by a brood of very young ducklings and interested only in them. This isn't the easiest neighbourhood for a duck to raise young, between the rats in the rocks and the hawks overhead, and it didn't look like this mother duck needed more trouble, or to be separated from her brood long enough for something to decide they looked like lunch.

Without more information I can't say if the store where Matthew Rayner worked as a cashier, which had 4 or 5 men and 15 or 25 women in the job, was discriminating. How many men, and how many women, applied for those jobs? If three times as many women as men apply, and the women are as qualified as the men, giving half the jobs to men is discrimination against the women.

I've never seen poetry printed in the way John Haines suggests - maybe this innovation never made it to the US. In any case, while metrics can be subtle, if a rhyme scheme needs to be pointed out in this fashion, there's probably something wrong with it, imho. And how would this system deal with internal rhymes?

Sarah Groenewegen's letter on feminism makes a great deal of sense to me: it is people who do things, when we aren't prevented by people who see us only as members of a category. That's not just something that hurts women, either: a man who stays home with his children will be hassled at least as much as a woman like me who has chosen not to have children.

David Tansey is spouting prejudice. I don't believe that men are "sexual predators," as he claims - but if I did believe it, I would do everything I could to avoid being their prey. (That's one of the easy metaphors, if you don't think about it, but the defining characteristic of a predator-prey relationship is that one party is trying to kill the other.) Sexual opportunists, maybe, but so are some women, and there's a world of difference between a one-night stand and rape. I am, in any case, deeply suspicious of any sentence that begins "Men are" or "Women are" or "White people are" or the like. Even seemingly innocent ones with no political intent, like "Men are people with one X or one Y chromosome" or "Women are people who can bear children" usually turn out to be false. (Most men have one X and one Y chromosome, but there are people with three sex chromosomes, and some of them are considered male. The second example would define sterile women, including anyone past menopause, as not a women.) I also wonder, Ron, whether you let anyone use the insult "Nazi" in your letter column on any topic than feminism. I do find it amusing that those who insist on calling women who stand up for ourselves "feminazis" tend to be men who accept that Nazi idea that women should be concerned only with home, children, and church.

*[There isn't much censorship editorial cutting in the R&R DEPT for reasons other than what I consider reader interest - political terms aren't one of them. Actually, the first time I heard the term "feminazi" used was by a woman, and she certainly couldn't be described as sweetness and light. - Ron.]*

Pamela Boal's comments on censorship use an all-too-common rhetorical manoeuvre, of confusing the commission of a crime (rape or child abuse) with the sale or pictures or stories. If someone is travelling to a foreign country, raping a child, and selling pictures of this action, you don't need anti-pornography laws to prosecute them: all you need are the existing laws against rape and child abuse, since this person has provided evidence of the crime. (If British law doesn't allow for the extradition of British subjects charged with rape in another country, that law should be changed.) If, on the other hand, someone is writing fiction in which an adult has sex with a child, or using his or her imagination to draw a picture of a naked child, we may consider that reprehensible, but no actual child is being harmed by it. If pictures and written descriptions were the same as actions, we'd have laws against murder mysteries.

I haven't read the anthology Bill Congreve is reviewing, but it would be nice to see the whole sentence, or even the whole paragraph, that he quotes from Le Guin, to see if he's representing her viewpoint fairly. In the meantime, all I can do is state that women do not always have all the power over a pregnancy: they may in Australia today, but in too many places contraception is unavailable, and some times women can't even find out how to prevent a pregnancy, let alone get the materials necessary to do so. Here in the US, the same forces that are doing their best to keep teenagers from having

contraceptives (because it might encourage them to have sex - such is the theory, backed by no statistical or other evidence) also push for laws prohibiting abortion if the sex was consensual and the pregnancy won't kill the woman. (Some, in fact, want to prohibit abortion even for rape victims.) Yes, a woman with money and resources can travel to a state with more liberal laws, but few poor teenagers have that option. (24.2.96)

**JULIE VAUX, 2A Oliver Rd, Chatswood, NSW 2067**

What a passionate response to a simple rhetorical question! I was under the impression that Lyn Elvey's article was a generalisation in its rhetorical form of setting a theme for further discussion. Let's see if it's a rhetorical question if a man uses a generalisation but sexism if a woman uses this technique according to many of your readers? Mmm.

Your first correspondent hasn't spent any time around male uni undergrads lately, since her opening paragraph unintentionally describes many of their characteristics with accidental but unfortunate accuracy. I have no doubts while not being responsible for all the world's evil they will add to more woe to the world if they haven't changed their attitudes by the time they're let loose from uni. Some of them are truly frightening.

I guess I don't get out enough! I haven't met any of these feminists who claim females are superior to men. Mind you there are quite a few women who J-O-K-E... that's joke... in private about it. You have to be either ironic or paranoid about such issues and most of us prefer irony to paranoia especially after events like the great photocopying saga... (a tale I refuse to tell) but possibly some of our readership might be [in] trouble recognizing irony by female writers judging from the LOCS in this issue. It certainly is tempting sometimes to assume we're the superior gender... very tempting.

I'm afraid I must particularly draw attention to Mr. Tansey's remarks. I prefer West's definition of a feminist being a woman who has opinions that distinguish her from a doormat. I have no delusions of superiority over any lifeform. I live with a tyrannical Abyssinian cat who thinks she is a superior lifeform. Mmm. Does that mean our cat is a feminist? She's female and considers herself superior to men, other cats, dogs, birds, and her "owners".

Men are hunters. Therefore women are not hunters? Errr... go shopping by yourself a lot? Women do hunt. We stalk specials and bargains and the best vegetables and interesting books in second hand stores and the latest zines in newsagents and that good book in the library....

Women don't hunt! Oh yeah and we never use logic and always have children and are never ever aggressive and are always sweetness and light. And worse if we differ we're feminazis!

Feminazis is a term I find particularly annoying. I have not met or read any feminists inciting genocide? What feminazi usually means in my experience is some male whingeing cos some aspect of overall male cultural patterns was criticised by a feminist.

I don't like porn and I find it insulting the way "mens' magazines" are next to the computer and science magazines. Apparently real women don't buy magazines for the news content? Does it make me a feminazi if I think porn shouldn't be on public display. I don't want to see pictures of models of either sex thrusting their muscles or appendages in strange postures at me. I want clear titles accurately describing the contents of what I might buy.

Am I a feminazi if I say using the f-word or smoking in public isn't nice or acceptable or sensible? Think about it. Would you shoot up drugs in public yet people light up cigarettes and never ask if the person sitting up to them on the railway platform is a non-smoker. (And for the disbelievers passive smoking can cause asthma and bronchitis attacks! So it is my business if you smoke in public and add to the pollution!)

Am I also a feminazi if I criticise the use of the F-word? Apart from showing an appalling ignorance of grammar it also creates the impression that many teenagers and mostly male ones apparently believe it's cool to have Tourette's syndrome? Nope but it does display your small vocabulary!

(Adjective deficiency! Now that's a subject for an article! The adjectivally challenged young male of modern times!)

The sheer amount of cliches appearing in the LOCs was... well my reaction swerved from amusement to disgust. I frequently find myself thinking the reason there are still plenty of feminists de-



spite the abuse they receive is simply cos there aren't enuff true gentlemen.

Next issue I may present a possible model for detecting true gentry of either gender.

Please no laments of I'm a gentleman cos I treat my women nice... I've heard men claim that and invalidate their claim to be "gentle" men by being rude to any female who's not one of their "women", immediate family, present girlfriends, or member of their own ethnic or age group. (5.3.96)

**ROD MARSEN, PO Box 19, Spit Junction, NSW 2088.**

Interesting cover [on TM 89]. Rod Mitchell's still got a way to go as an artist. Nice story idea from Brent Lillie.

Good on Kirstyn McDermott for putting Lyn Elvey straight. Of course she wasn't the only one. Darren Goossens decided to have a good go at Lyn Elvey's mindless generalisations about men. Probably the greatest and most destructive attack came from Sarah Groenewegen - a self confessed Lesbian Feminist. Does she support Lyn's position? Hell no! She comes across as too rational for that. She can appreciate Helen Garner's *THE FIRST STONE* and feels that a human being should be regarded as a human being what ever gender they belong to. No, David, Lyn's not a Feminist. You're right the 2nd time. Lyn is most definitely a Feminazi. There's a few of them in the public service with blinkers on, fat pay cheques and mouths moving without much sense coming out. There are, of course, male equivalents.

Read Pamela Boal's missive of 2nd September '95 and it is obvious that, in her own small way, she's advocating the tightening up of Censorship to "protect" the "vulnerable". She may not know it but Hitler and his lot used similar arguments to burn books and persecute authors and regiment society. To let the government, any government, decide who is "vulnerable" and who needs "protection" is very, very dangerous.

*[Private enterprise does not have a good record here, either, Rod. The Mafia is well known for offering "protection", also. - Ron.]*

I agree with you, Pamela, that Paedophiles should not be allowed to abuse children and if photos turn up of a paedophile doing so then said photos should be used in court as evidence against them. Taking responsibility for what you see, read and contribute to is a bit different from imposing your choices on others. It's a pity, Pamela, that can't see that. I, for example, would not force you to read *AMERICAN PSYCHO* but would be very angry if you stopped me, an adult, from reading it. Censorship is fundamentally wrong. The Americans wrote an amendment to their constitution because this is so.

Say Ron, the drawing on page 14 is a bit reacy for *THE MENTOR* isn't it? I like it but you could get your fingers burnt. A naked damsel in chains? Ron, how could you? (snigger!). *SEX IN SF* by Andrew Darlington was a good read. This is, and always has been, strange territory. I'm not a big fan of John Norman's "Gor" novels but I respect where he's coming from. I think if Edgar Rice Burroughs put full descriptions of intercourse in his *Warlord of Mars* stories, at the time they were written, he might well have run into censorship snags. Nudity was one thing, and a very nice thing, too, on the cover of a lot of early SF mags, but sex was somewhat risky - especially with some editors.

Darren Goossens' *HISTORY OF SCIENCE* continues to be entertaining. Still I feel I should correct Darren on one point. Sure, the Church did preserve some science during the Middle Ages but they were also responsible for destroying a lot of scientific info because it had been written by pagans and Jews. The Moors should get a mention here. They preserved early Greek science and helped to develop maths. Without their contribution man might not have landed on the moon this century. Sure, praise some of the Christian monks for doing the right thing but also praise the pagan Moors, the Jews for their insights into medicine (e.g. Nostradamus) and the ancient Greeks for their continuing usefulness. Don't forget that, though European monks may have mourned the order for the burning of the great library at Alexandria, the Church gave the order for the burning of the great native American libraries in South America. Man, wouldn't you like to roast a few Conquistadors over that! And a few of their god damned monks!!

Read Mark Ortlieb's letter. *Star Trek Pornography?* Melbourne fans will never get away with it. Still it would be nice to see them fry.

Read Joe Fisher's letter. We'll have to differ on the Doctor's companion, Mel. She was a bit of a screamer but no whinger. I personally hate whingers.

*PROHIBITED MATTER 5* will be out soon and available at *Dymocks*, George St, Sydney and *Galaxy* near Town Hall. It contains, among other things, an article by Don Boyd on Nanotechnology. (12.1.96)

**BUCK COULSON, 2677W-500N, Hartford City, IN 47348, USA.**

Aside from the Vardis Fisher Books, I'm not sure there's any duplication in our non-stf library and your. Oh well, a thesaurus or two; I have an 1852 Roget that John Brunner sent me years ago and which is falling apart (and was when I got it), and Juanita has thesaurii, dictionaries of various languages including Tagalog, Gray's Anatomy, and so on. On the other hand, we have 9 overflowing bookcases of history, and 2 (admittedly small) of biography, originally purchased for entertainment and now used for reference (and now and then re-read for entertainment.)

Kirsten McDermott is right, but perhaps overly vehement. The ratio of bitches to bastards may be 1:1, but I've met more males that I disliked. This could be due to the fact that I've met more males, period, of course, but I'm not positive about that. I suspect that males tend to be more unpleasant because more of them are in positions of power where they can show their unpleasantness without being called on it.

Matryoshka Ninja Turtles - who said we don't yet have a global economy? Agreed that Socrates Brandy is a bit much. (The herb was hemlock, which might well be available in the area...) Interesting column. If Pavel ever gets to Marion, Indiana, instead of Marion, Ohio, he could give us a call.

Darlington fails to mention the more sexual magazines of the middle period of science fiction, such as *PLANET STORIES*. Sex was never described, of course - or shown - but the hero was chasing the girl more frequently than he was the secret formula, as far as the text went. Leigh Brackett was probably the magazine's top writer, and her stories generally involved love and/or lust, frequently between Martians and Earthmen. The illustrators - who included Emsh, Kelly Freas, and Earl Mayan (who drew primarily for the slick magazines of the era) generally included scantily-clad females, either in exotic "alien" costumes or normal Earth clothing that had been shredded in the spaceship crash. (Oddly, the males always came through the crashes with clothes intact - presumably due to their superior mental processes...) The other interesting fact about *PLANET* is that there were more women writers in the letter column than there were in any other stf magazine of the time.

Nice to see Mae Strelkov's column; I hope you last long enough to get the entire mss. published. Just had a letter from her recently which mentioned some of their present problems, including a totally inefficient mail service.... They weren't getting letters that they knew had been mailed, and so on. (The letter made the oft-abused US mail service sound marvellous.)

Letter column. Okay, Steve, *YANDRO* was a long-running fanzine that published verse now and then; we didn't call it poetry, and it was usually at the bottom of a page as filler. A fair amount of it was mine, which Juanita eventually set to music and put some of it on her filk tapes. Robert Asprin wrote a novel around one of my efforts; the verse was included in the pb edition, though not in the hardcover. (I got credited, but not paid.) The best verse we published was by L. Sprague De Camp.

Pigs eating people isn't restricted to fiction. Juanita mutters that modern audiences don't understand the scene in the movie "Wizard of Oz" where Judy Garland falls into the hog lot and everyone rushes around to save her; it's not because she might have been damaged by the fall but because the hogs might eat her. Our landlord at one farmhouse we lived in never went into the hog's area of barn or field without carrying a hammer to discourage them if they suddenly felt like having a snack. (Hogs also eat rattlesnakes, and wild hogs have been busily wiping out the bears in the Smoky Mountains National Park.) Like us, they're omnivores.

I'm sure Matthew Rayner's comment on all-female check-outs is discrimination. In the US it's a low-paying job requiring a lot

of stamina, but *not* requiring the muscles necessary for handling the equally low-paying stock-boy job. Aside from stamina, it requires dexterity, which is a female attribute. (Oh, there are women who could be stock-girls, and men who could easily handle checkouts, but on the average they appear to be sex-linked jobs, physically rather than discriminatory.)

Welcome to the club, Andruschak. Had any heart attacks yet?

Having spent my entire life in small towns (or in farm-houses more or less close to small towns), I can agree with Trent Jamieson that they're "close minded". But that's what books and fandom are for. And the residents of small towns, at least in the US, are quite tolerant of differences as long as one doesn't insist on expressing one's views in public. I'm not a crusader, I'm a cynic, so I get along fine. (Retired postal clerks stop me in the supermarket to ask how I'm getting along, as do former co-workers.)

Oh, we survived the conventions on consecutive weekends; we just didn't do much in between. Load the car, drive to the con, drive home, unload the car, relax a bit, and it's time to load the car again. Neither of us has a regular job now, which probably helps. On the other hand, we're up in the "old fart" category now.

No, Brent, Lyn provided an either-or question, which indicates that she was *not* implying that feminists meet all the wrong men. 21.3.96

**YURI A. MIRONETS, Oktyabrskaya St.2, Apt.15, Vladivostok 690000, Russia.**

The front and back covers of this issue of THE MENTOR [#89] attracted the eye immediately and I think both the art and the story published there were quite a hit. And the contents of the magazine itself were as usual interesting and informative.

Now a few words about life in Russia. You've probably heard over the radio or TV that the school teachers and University professors in many regions of Russia went on strike in the end of January, because they weren't paid their salaries for several months. I consider myself lucky - I wasn't paid my salary for only two months.

But not everything is so gloomy. On the 4th of February I had my birthday - I'm 52 now. As the date wasn't "round", I didn't make any special celebration, just invited 4-5 old friends and we had a small dinner-party in my one-room apartment. As usual on such occasions, we drank a bit and talked about the current situation in Russia. I think now nobody can predict the future of Russia with certainty. Much depends, of course, on who will be elected the President of Russia in June. Even now there are already several dozen candidates for the Presidency. As the living standards of common people are dropping lower and lower, the influence of the Communists is steadily increasing, and their leader Gennady Zyuganov is one of the favourites for the Presidency.

Meanwhile, my course of lectures in English-language SF & Fantasy is progressing. The attendance of students at my lectures is quite good, I think it's because they find there some release from everyday worries and troubles. (9.3.96)

**MAE STRELKOV, 4501 Palma Sola, Jujuy, Argentina.**

So you've a grown-up daughter going to be married next year - and in a church at that! It must be a formidable experience, having such a determined daughter! Do you escape from such serious realities into another reading of THE TESTAMENT OF MAN series? They're very good, aren't they? Some errors, but very sincerely written and researched. Everything said about Christendom's past is well deserved by our pious forebears (till now, alas). I was sent in the 1960s by a fan of Seattle's *CRY*, A GOAT FOR AZAZEL, VALLEY OF VISION, MY HOLY SATAN, and a couple more. I've held onto four of the series and often re-read. (I left by accident several others when we moved from Cordoba to here. I'd have brought a ton or two of papers and books but couldn't bring all, and my textbooks took first place, naturally.)

Very clever front and back covers. That Brent thing of the oddest things. (Well-drawn illos too). But frankly, the back cover raised my hackles. We live amid huge spiders, and never a season but they do try to find cracks to get indoors past our window-screens. (It was all too, too real!) And last summer (January 1996 this same year), our 16-year-old grandson on a month's holiday

here, became spider conscious. There was this huge spider sitting watching some little children, (ours and their cousins), playing in the sand. Every now and then, the biggest little girl would tell the grown-ups, "There's a big spider right there", and resume her game in the sand near the rocks. Not at all alarmed, and no doubt the spider watched fascinated.

Finally the grown-ups got curious enough to "come and see". Poor spider - instantly bottled and brought here for exhibit. Our blessed 16-year-old leaped, "For me, for me!" and appropriated our bottle of medicinal alcohol (for cuts, Ron, we don't drink it or chew coca to accompany the beverage). And he poured the alcohol in. (We were out of alcohol for the next [few] weeks till I nagged and nagged, "Remember to buy more", and got a positive result. You do need alcohol for cuts, and cuts are plentiful in our family where kids run wild. (Derek Pickles mentions I have 3 sons "all dead". God forbid: our Danny died in 1976, age 30. Our Robert died a couple of years back age just 50. They lived fascinating lives, very individualistic, but too hectic for their hearts. Vadim has high blood pressure too, but takes care.)

All fine. But when the bigger grandson went back south with the spider neatly preserved, (taxidermy may be a gift he inherited from Vadim who was into entomology till lately - one day I blew up at last and cried, "No more spiders to be welcomed on our bedroom walls!"), anyway, he took it back still looking very alive. And how his teenaged peers all want similar spiders. (None that far south!) Now that Vadim has sworn off this type of entomology to please me, after all we're just two oldsters entering our eighties at last, we certainly shan't practice this sort of taxidermy or go spider-hunting in the wilds (or at home where we do crush them on sight). So, kind Carlos, Sylvia's husband, says he did promise the boy to send him more spiders. Result? Carlos crying, "Don't crush that spider," and Vadim - aware of my phobia - quicker still. Squash! Flattened-out remnant left.

Actually, what really turned Vadim off all the dear little and bigger spiders was a bite from an unidentified and probably littler spider several years back that produced blood poisoning. He nearly lost an arm before the medical treatment cured him. I went through that years earlier, one summer evening lying on the grass on a blanket with our kids and Vadim back in Buenos Aires. I kept walking, then limping, to my well-paid job in Buenos Aires for the next two weeks, till a friend who's a doctor visited us. She took one look and cried, "Lie down, for heaven's sake lie down. You've got blood poisoning and may lose your leg if we don't cure you instantly, it's that far gone". So I had to lie there swallowing "modern new medicines" till I recovered perfectly. (Or the leg recovered. Me? I'd never viewed it as "serious" till told. I'd felt fine enough.) Vadim, similarly, kept chopping wood for a week or so, before even acknowledging his hand hurt. Only when very swollen, he had to agree he must "see a doctor".

Ah, to have reached the stage of "wizen little ladyhood" and still have my four limbs intact (and all the rest of it)! John Tipper, you're talking out of the top of your head. Nobody has more fun yet than this wizened, but over-sized old lady"! And lots of other old ladies have great fun still too. (If we learn to laugh... and we do! Weeping's better for the truly crushed, but the storm passes, and we inflate anew, somehow.)

"Unrealistic expectations", had we? Mine were to build a perfect big house to house our seven children, who varied from age 21 to age one, years ago. Well, I do have one photo of all seven - I rounded the grumbling pack up in Cordoba one day while they all protested it was "crazy", and Vadim drove us down to the photographers in "Jesus Maria", and the photo came out tremendously fine. They all looked so smug and secretly amused by the ridiculous idea of being photographed "like all the stupid people like to have their portraits done", in a double-row of the 7. The baby was nearly two, on a sister's lap in front. He's our strapping Karateka now! And two of the handsome teenagers are dead.

I seldom have glanced at the picture. (It's just stuck away with its memories glad and sad, and I have tried to make each surviving child accept a copy. They stuck their copies away too.) We just don't like posed photos. Snaps of action, that's all they care about, all they believe in, maybe. A family posing and looking proper is to them practically offensive to try to preserve as a "memory".



See? We're all touched by the same bug that touched me back as a child in Shanghai.

Oh, they're skilled at being "tremendously proper" in public. Seldom do they break free from convention's strictures, for they have a streak of "being proper" too. (From my missionary Baptist mother's side, probably. I culled it out of the real "me" long ago.)

Imagine such long-windedness about spiders. Enough! Brent, let's have no spiders in your next creation or story, okay? I might avoid looking at same when same appears, but the temptation will tear at me till I look.

People go crazy around us, that's true. The coca-chewing pure-alcohol-swilling tribe of doddering oldsters has suffered beyond your or my comprehension from the day we moved in and stymied their plans to cut down every last (till now unreachable) cedar at the top of this property - and you, Ron, are pubbing the story, written while it still was happening. They no doubt tried spells, novenas, etc., in vain for a while more. Or their women did. We went on blithely, by our own muscular efforts, cutting down thorny jungle and creating paddocks and corrals and beautiful lawns around our house here in the valley, below the still tumbled wild jungles of the hills. The more we know them, the more we see how dangerous they are. Cliffs you can tumble down before you see them in the tangles. Snakes. Some while back a favourite horse brought from Cordoba, a real old friend, vanished right near our valley, higher up across the highway. We searched in vain till someone thought to look into one of the deep narrow pits dug by land-surveyors years ago. There it still lies. The depth of the pit? I'd reckon about ten or more meters down. I once, over ten years back before I had the pancreatic attack, tried to fill one of the two pits so near us. I started throwing in all the cut-down branches of the loggers, who were preparing the land for replanting it with saplings of pine and cedar. (The eucalyptus by the river towers today, planted by us some 11 years back. The huge logs serve for fences and walls, and the eucalyptus trees grow up anew, you know. A permanent source of lumber we can cut without grief. The trees don't mind. They love it here, I bet.) Well, all afternoon I dragged to the lip of that pit all sorts of branches and rubbish, angrily. I got covered with ticks and I said, "Who cares, dammit!" I was possessed with hatred for pits right then. Soon after, maybe a week, I was driven to that Jujuy hospital, dying of pancreatitis (that had been coming on but I'd scorned symptoms), so I could lie in peace there while my skin recovered from all the bites. (Ticks already removed before that, by an indignant me.)

The pits are still there, two that we know about. Yawning.... "Black holes" pocketing our bliss, shall we say? Just knowing I can do nothing about it and that they're again hidden by all the new undergrowth. It's beyond this dithering old lady to attack. Mutters amongst the younger folk do occasionally reach me. "They'll be good for throwing rubbish in. We should load the tractor from our rubbish heap and take the stuff there. But first we'll have to cut out a road through the undergrowth." (One day). The new undergrowth had reached tree-height, and the prickles are terrible and piercing. Our grandson from the south got a prickle in his hand (from a lime tree, he insists), and when he got back home he had it lanced.. and again lanced... by doctors. And more lancing ahead, they say. Huge prickles keep waiting their turn to be brought forth into the light, poor lad. And he wants "more spiders". (Preserved in alcohol, then dried out to look alive anew!. Carlos keeps promises and the boy trusts him. We hope against home the project will be forgotten by all concerned.)

Okay... I was talking about our aged coca-chewing, alcohol-swilling brigade of bygone heroes all around us... (Hey, Darren Goossens, you're right re "Mae's meanderings", oh, indeed! A kind remark. The best critic is der old Chris Masters when he's not just uttering incoherent damns. All he says re my nuttiness is *true*. I am stuck with it. I *am* nutty, always was, but came to terms with it early. The clown of my British Girls' School in Shanghai I was. Teachers hated me for the uncontrollable girlish laughter that surrounded me wherever higher education was being crammed desperately by sane teachers down our throats. I saw everything funny, even what might make a body weep. I guess I tried early to develop a "Cosmic view". I may not be "in tune with the Universe", but I supply the "rhythmic disharmonies", I guess.)

So I'm "fabulous" now, dear Walt Willis? Fabulous is the

never-never land I inhabit, yes. (Not South America. Not China either, formerly. Rather: the land of souls and the crazy things they take seriously... religions, causes, what-not. And "let's kill our enemies". So I laugh. At them, with them, and sometimes I do too weep; but raise no guns, and utter no curses. Jesus said "bless them... pray for those who despitely use you." I try. Crazy? Does dear Chris Masters squirm every time an angel - the bright type - passes near his trundle-bed when he sleeps? MY BLESSINGS REACHING THE DEAR BOY?) I don't actually pray for the lad's salvation, but he's so cute I long to hug the lad sometimes, like I hug children who stubbed their toes and snarl at the pain.)

Most important and significant is Steve Sneyd's mention of "Cow gate". Of course. Tapirs don't rove wild and probably never did in human memory in Britain. Gotta be cows replacing them, of course. Tapirs and rhinos its been said date back to eopyppus, more than horses do, I've read. They're really prehistoric. Our baby tapir, rescued from the coca-chewing sons who hunt them not to turn their own cattle into barbecues, has grown so huge I can handle her no longer unless I murmur such sweet nothings and tickle her back so she collapses and falls blissfully asleep, waiting to be scratched on the bulging belly. (Fills one's fingernails with dirt and dust, too!) Otherwise, she comes at one, long quivering snout down and piggy-eyes peering upwards, ready to practice snuggling - love bites included. So Vadim's taken her over. She whistles - the only sound she makes - he hears and rushes out to do her bidding. More cut-up apples we must obtain constantly. Getting moved to another location she has to be tied on a long rope so she'll not wander next door and be snapped up for a "barbecue". But once she reaches full size (300 kilos) we'll leave her untethered and hope she'll be a match for any dogs set on her by the tapir-eating, coca-chewing, brave brigade.

Actually, I don't want to go again into the sad story of our latest tussles with the proper citizenry who think higher education is for their dogs, not humans. (Ignorance is the mother of devotion, you know). We have corrupted youth. The girls now dress like Sylvia, in shorts and bare-backed all the long hot summers. They insist on going to high-school in Palma Sola where Sylvia teaches English. They are difficult to seduce behind the nearest bush, more and more. They're "hep". They model themselves after Sylvia, more and more, while all the lads, (also off to high-school, stubbornly, instead of helping the old folk steal another cow from a neighbor or vice versa), try to be like Tony - and like Carlos now too. Reread Part 4 of A PLANET MUCH LIKE EARTH. Replace "trees" by "cattle". Delete "Mudwall"... he died of overdoses of alcohol with coca chewed simultaneously. Just dissolved into flabby mindlessness and faded away in Palma Sola in the odor of sanctity, at least. Blase is still causing awful problems over boundary lines again. He's organised the "resistance" on all sides. Of course, his inspiration derives from our successes... our grown-up foursome have become such graceful dancers of gaucho-style folklore, they're been on the Jujuy T-V, and viewers apparently fell especially in love with Tony. (Female viewers, as we've learned). Tony's wife, Graciela, danced with him in the *samba* (I saw it on video here), and they dance it for me on our terrace too sometimes. I swoon with delight as they make those yearning, loving gestures and forget the natural irritation of married life and in-laws pestering.

Our four little former toddlers, (now "leapers-off-of-heights-to scare-me") dance too. Especially Sylvia's boy, whose footwork (*zapateando*) attracts all the crowds at fiestas everywhere, and Tony's and Graciela's six year old girl dances beautifully with her troop at fiestas too. So gracefully!). But even such popularity might be pardoned. Worse occurred.

Graciela's father made her a present of a plot of our south, almost adjoining. (Mudwall's denuded, abandoned, forgotten ravine separates that piece and ours, but there's a crossing between the cliffs and the grazing's wonderful for animals, on the heights everywhere).

Meanwhile, worse still, Carlos's clan bought pieces from a dozen or so inheritors of the land to our north, also adjoining ours. His mother and elderly aunt started building the house - simple and unpretentious - where they hoped to retire. Suddenly, the entire vast mountain-range was ours - or our clan's. All we had to do would be fence in the southern edge of Graciela's piece, and no more. The

northern portion is fenced by the property of the big wood-cutting firm I mentioned in the story [told in the column] (written some ten or so years back). The "Morla" in the tale turned out to be the brightest start in the cabal out to annex our wood while we ate his wife's goodies happily on their front porch. But he's aged and in another town today in a wheel-chair. Too much coca and alcohol does tell its own tale in a body's stronghold finally. Anyway, his bosses sold the place to the lumber-firm, and were furious to learn of all the money he'd made selling their wood on the sly.)

Oh, and delete "Bernan". Delete also "Massachessi", who died in Buenos Aires earlier. (Really, don't chew coca is you want to reach the age of 80, is my advice). Bernan had troubles with Blase, lost money, borrowed some from us, drove off and died, too. Poor fellow. His heirs sold the land to the guy who still owns it, but he was using it to hide stolen cars for some bigger gang till the police descended. He fled in the dark through thorny *tusca* growths down there and crawled over river boulders till he reached out land. He slunk up to us begging protection from the police, in the dark. We offered to arbitrate but meanwhile the police drove off. The fellow rushed back to his own car and high-tailed it to his more respectable center afar, where he still exists in the odor of virtue if not possibly sanctity. You gotta wait to be shriven for the "sanctity" party, I guess. He's the one who used to hide his mother in the tumble-down hut surrounded by a thorny hedge and she used to take her precious chickens and piggies to bed with her each night because "all the neighbors are such thieves". Who doubts it?

Ummm... so the mysterious "Lopez" I mentioned apparently sold his bit of land to another really decent guy but what happened then, is beautifully illustrated by your front and back covers. While he tried to study the cute little spider in front of his nose, a huge monstrous spider rose up at his rear. He did escape this "Blase-type arachnid", but barely. He rushed to the canny half-Arab dad of our Graciela here (wife of Tony). He begged him to buy at any price that property he needed to be rid of.

So... "meandering away", I continue, *ho hum*, Darren Goossens, and hello to you all - all fandom really - who disgustingly agree with him and me! ("Mae's crazy").

Anyway, that's the property Graciela's father-in-law put in the hands of competent lawyers for the title-deeds to be sorted out unhurriedly. Once done, he gave it to Graciela with an off-hand shrug. (*Just a little "nothing". Hope you can use it!*)

Gosh, it was tangled. All our affairs are, when all I asked of Our Father was a tiny hut in the wilderness far from mankind's meanderings into wars and "world conspiracies" as la BUSSWARBLE-Michael Hailstone style. (High and Hi, MoM!)

Well, the Lord refuses me that peaceful end. I'm embroiled alongside Vadim, in watching our kids "go forth to battle" with the coca-chewing gang finally, face-to-face. (Gunless, true, but lawyers in the offing).

What happened is this: the poor old dodderers dreamed up a scheme with a corruptible minor official (and perhaps the gang that buys cattle from our lands, on the sly). False witnesses abound - "dreams coming true" from their point of view. It was alleged that we'd been "stealing for years" all their unmarked cattle (they "steal" from each other...) on our huge range, where we never go (or never went save to check on trees occasionally and clear trails, etc. And lately, protect the few surviving tapirs in their deep ravines, so we saved at least one stranded young-un, our leading pet here now.)

They must have suborned a certain Miller (to translate his name) in the police in the nearby little "town" (P-Sola). He produced a masterpiece of ingenuity, demanding that a vet come to take blood-samples of cattle, to be sent to Buenos Aires to check. (Some magazine article must have inspired our dream-laded gang.) The vet duly came and disgustingly said, "Why should I take a blood sample of this animal you supposedly stole? (It was available in our corral, chewing cud peacefully). One takes blood-samples of large herds of cattle, not just one." Our boys chuckled: "Besides, it happens to be branded with the mark of our good friend, Oliver. (A nice lad we have liked from the start, and I just loved his grandma when we visited her years ago).

Well, Miller was so certain he'd sealed our doom, great buzzings set up around us. That order for "Instant capture" was demanded from the Law in distant Jujuy town, for us "criminals,

mistreating the helpless Christian populace around us, since we arrived 13 years ago. So disgusted were the minions of the Law there, they most virtuously slipped back into the mood of so many citizens when the invasion of the isles in the South Atlantic occurred in 1982. "Down with the gringos, godless ever one of them! Immoral too. And proven robbers and exploiters, as this report makes clear."

Well, our Tony and Carlos and our lawyer daughter-in-law Graciela went into quiet action, contacting all their friends in the towns afar (lawyers, judges, stalwart citizens, some of them even taking lessons in English - just a few).

Urgent orders were sent forth to countermand the orders of arrest. To the shock of the coca-chewing gangs around us, our kids continued appearing at sports and dances, as usual, with our local younger generation undergoing corruption still, by our presence.

Blase was the inspirer, (still sore over the surveyor's conclusions which he'd hoped would be forgotten once everybody who contested same fled in terror or died.) He was not in the fore, no way to point to him. But there were his underlings, one let's call Simple-Simon, or S-S, and another a baldhead but young, who had lived on the proceeds of handling the business end of supplying cattle on the sly to some gang with big trucks who considered our mountain range a steady source of illegally-obtained-and-sold "beef". On Graciela's Southern border, we'd put up fences where there were crossings. (Mostly ravines served to cut off that land). Blase ordered them torn down. He drove up and told us coldly the land was his and he scorned "lying surveyors" and feared not the law. We didn't get frightened, so off he drove to continue behind us - for his gangs to lose all that mountain-side (1000s of hectares, I suppose) could not be accepted. Who'd pay for everybody's coca and alcohol if we cut off the access to the unbranded cattle? We'd demanded unofficially (with a permit from the police) that all cattle there must be branded. Any unmarked we'd henceforth take over by right. The cattle were unbranded on the principle of "Finder's Keepers". You needed a cow? You took one without telling competing neighbors. They were "nobody's animals". The law puts it thus and we've our family lawyer and her volumes to study. (Graciela, I mean, mother of 3 of our cute grandchildren - who leap and tumble from heights incurably all day long a home.)

Meanwhile, S-S had refused to sell his share of that property to our north, owned by a "succession" of heirs. So he clung to his bit - 6 meters on the highway's edge and 7 kms to the top of the ridge. Served him as a highway to our range. But his rightful bit wasn't where he had it but down near the cemetery adjoining the bigger property formerly managed by that Morla. (Nobody wanted the cemetery-location. Spooks, you know...). The other members of the clan happily had pocketed the monies paid them, legally done, and settled nearer the towns where their families lived. Just this S-S and one or two more refused to sell, you see. They had and have the right to still own the big piece with the cemetery awaiting them so gently alongside.

That they didn't want. They were gifted squatters wherever they wished. S-S squatted wherever he found an abandoned shack, or where he managed to scare off some hut's residents so he could move in. I could tell story upon story of his former successes right in Palma Sola. But to make my story brief, this time his boasts that he'd see on have us all locked up and all our land would be his, the houses included, though some may have titillated our neighbors (for fun is fun), fizzled out, and now the same neighbors are creating great jokes with roars of laughter. Stories such as "You S-S, are the big *toro* but along came Carlos with a lasso and you fled right down to the river. In you tumbled head first and here came Carlos right behind you." (Like Brent's big spider? From S-S's point of view, I'm sure).

For our citizenry it's better than a video. (Videos can be rented from a nice couple in Palma Sola lately. I'm glad our family diet of cowboy movies is now supplemented by *real life* fun for a change. More healthy, anyway.)

Meanwhile, the Miller sits on his copy of the documents here our many sins were detailed to stir up distant authority. We want a copy so we can start our lawsuit against him; we need the copy, and can't yet get hold of it. (They sit on it and shit in terror, I presume). Ah, well, God is the judge. (He (God) is a terror. He created a lust in the gonads of the male pig of our second "enemy" -



ah, I'll not label him for he exudes virtue and avoided the dangers of being caught in any legal snare. Anyway, this champion of honesty and virtue, the undergrown macho piggie, scented from afar (two kms, or more away) the luscious scents of our beautiful fat sows forever eager for new wild orgies with our *enormous* male pig, very docile, and friendly to us, in the same coral below us, (out of smell's reach save when it sometimes rains too much.)

The enemy pig arrived and tried mounting the nearest sow twice his size. (We work at keeping our pigs plump. Our neighbors trust god and no doubt the virgin so they'll find good grazing everywhere around). Well, even our pacific poppa pig, Sebastian<sup>19</sup>, got a bit bored over this runt's ineffectual efforts to add his genetic mix to our pure-blooded 200 choice pigs of all ages. He finally intervened with a gentle push. Invading piggie-male rushed to the nearest good fence and couldn't quite get through. His hind-edge got stuck and along came Sebastian and tried helping. He push didn't succeed, save to break the other pig's back (a bit - he still could limp around). Our boys rushed to intervene, having heard all the squealing, and locked away our "enemy's" injured pig safely and gave it food and water, hoping the unknown owners would appear so we could express our regret's over Sebastian's uncharitable, ungenerous macholinity. The owners, as we soon learned, were the coca-chewing band, shuddering in terror at the thought of our two Karatekas waiting for someone to take the injured pig away and free us from maintenance day after day. At last, the owner, (call his "jug-ears", that'll do to avoid discussing "absence of hair on scalp and chest"), jug-ears arrived protected by his woman and timidly asked whether he could take his pig away. "Of course," said Carlos. Tony didn't even bother to appear. "Sorry it got a bit hurt before we could rescue it from Sebastian. But we've fed and watered it, and it can still move around though maybe no longer fuck successfully." (*Cojer* is the word in Spanish).

"We'll take it away," squeaked our hopeful jailer (who's dream didn't come true). He and she returned anew with a crowd of relatives of all sizes down to babies, and somehow between them all they manhandled the little runt back to their pick-up and "goodbye". Vadim came in to tell me and I howled. "Oh, Father, how naughty you are!" I laughed and laughed, for truly my Father in Heaven has funny ways to deal with everything in our lives.

I could add more funny stories, but really *enough*. Oh, I'll find fun in dying when it's time, believe me. Maybe God hasn't got feet, but I'll sit at those hypothetical feet anyway, and laugh happily.

(13.3.96)

**BRIDH HANCOCK, 28 Truman St, Spotswood West, VIC 3015**

Concerning "New Spelling" - "new spelling" must be a development on the old; the present. "Noo-spellun" based on mispronunciation of poorly understood words traditionally spelled is almost criminal. Respelling shall happen, and is happening separately and variously. People from non-English-speaking backgrounds are only some of the people eager for a more sympathetic English language and alphabet, an alphabet which shoul hav letters for all the vowels, and maybe some of the vowel clusters, and all the consonants, possibly with an indicator for the voiced and unvoiced forms of the same sound. Yet we must allow for regional variations and for further developments too, I believe. I am working on this for post-graduate honors.

Punctuation is for 1/ breaking words into gramatical groups, to sentences and phrases, for example, so that the reader better makes sense of the words, and 2/ to give something of the writer's belief in the best way to say it, even if only silently to oneself. For all this we use a few dots, strokes and commas! I notice that "2/" is rising in importance tho it is almost irrelevant to appreciation of writing, presupposing one knows gramma which in very colloquial speech is presupposing too much too often.

I think that within future-oriented S.F. literature (writing), some useful, exploratory, experimental writing coud, and shoul, be attempted.

#89. Most of Peter Brodie's haiku missed me, however his introduction piece was excellent. I still shudderingly recall be pre-

sented with a "haiku" collection written by an rather witless poet-of-sorts who only knew that haiku were written in 3 lines. Of his Japanese counterpart, someone wrote:

There was a young poet from Japan  
Whose limericks would never scan.

Asked why 'twas so,  
He said, "I don't know,  
But it might hav something to do with my trying to fit as  
many words in the last line as I can".

Ben Peek's THE OLD WORLD - ONE RACE CONSPIRACY or OLDWORLD'S ONE RACE CONSPIRACY had me hooked from after the almost irrelevant introductory paragraphs to the end when the real problems were waiting. Talent! But: where or how far out in space is deep-space? Can one be unprotected and not vulnerable? 'When I came too' shoud hav read 'when I came-to' or 'regained consciousness'. "A text had been left from me" was a typo, surely. "Which she would spend at least a month recovering in bed from" woud be better. 'which would have her spending at least a month in bed recovering', or even with the split infinitive. "... for you, as your ship implies, seem to of cast of the burdens given to you" is a nonsense to me. But althru the story we hav the plural of Saquarian rendered as Saquarian's. This error, whatever the original, should hav been corrected.

When checking copy, I use the gramma-checker because it is thoroging, even if it is a little silly sometimes, then I get another person to check my work; this a very necessary safety technique.

(4.4.96)

**LLOYD PENNEY, 412-4 Lisa St, Brampton, ON, CANADA L6T 4B6.**

Congrats to you and your daughter on her impending nuptials, even if the expenses might put you in the poorhouse for a while. When Yvonne and I decided to get married, we saved up and did it ourselves. My folks put nothing into it; her mother's present was the wedding dress and dresses for the females in the wedding party, and her sister's present was the catering for the wedding, including the cake. A wonderful day, one that didn't start our married life in a sea of debt.

Bravo to Kirstyn McDermott on her article. It's a shame that Lyn Elvey's reaction to the sexism of some men is to be sexist herself, which only reinforces her opinion of all men as sexist, a dangerous loop indeed. The attitudes of superiority of one sex over the other are pure arrogance, not matter the source. There is oppression from men against women in many ways... wife abuse, both physical and mental, deadbeats when it comes to paying child support or alimony, pornography, and many others, and the way to solve these problems is through education, not hatred. After all, we learn from our parents, and our children learn from us, and men have the chance to learn better ways of treating women so that their children won't perpetuate these behaviours. The hatred of one group, whether it's defined by sex, race or religion is also a self-perpetuating behaviour, and a destructive one, too. I'd like to see Lyn's reaction to all this negative feedback on her article. I don't think anything will change her mind, not even Kirstyn's article, but it will be interesting to see what she says. Instead of expecting bad experiences from men, Lyn, try being positive, and good experiences will come.

James Verran may not have intended his article to work this way for me, but it shows me that modern technology tends to be exclusionary instead of inclusionary for many people today. There's still plenty of people who still have 12:00 blinking on their VCR, and we don't make the effort to make sure that everyone who has a VCR knows how to use it. Modern software, and hardware presents a similar problem... there's still too many who have no access to these modern tools. Their chances of learning these software applications are getting slimmer all the time, especially when new versions of software come out, forcing the public to buy new hardware, software and peripherals, and keeping the poorer among us from getting the computer literacy we need to get ahead. Modern technology is wonderful; the way it is marketed for maximum financial return at the expense of the many is not.

Pavel Viaznikov is thinking of hemlock when he tried to remember what Socrates poisoned himself with, and I agree. I wouldn't like to drink a hemlock brandy!

<sup>19</sup> "Not "Sebastian", "Santiago"" says Tony. Probably Mike Resnik's "Santiago" (a book we loved).

It's good to see a SFnal filmmaker like Jack Arnold remembered. I wish he'd gotten the recognition today's SF filmmakers get, or even contemporaries of this own, like George Pal get, but perhaps all we can do now is read and enjoy articles like this one.

Andrew Darlington shows that extremely sexy covers, containing among other things the usual sexy, busty space maiden in the bullet bra being threatened by the always-malevolent chunk of protoplasm, cover up many SF novels with setting[s] that are sexless or have done away with sex. Those covers sell, but often disguise or totally misstate the contents, which means you *cannot* judge a book by its cover. Since those days of the BEMs, there have been sexy stories, and stories that may read as clinical studies, but have a nudge-nudge-wink-wink layer underneath, but they still don't or can't match the illustrations that often accompany them.

Buck Coulson says that the "heat index" where he lives hit 116 degrees Fahrenheit. I know of what he speaks; one day last July, the humidex (heat and humidity factor, as Buck said) in Toronto hit 51 degrees Celsius, or about 134 degrees Fahrenheit. It was stifling, the smog layer stayed low, and people were advised to stay indoors.

Roger Zelazny was indeed a modest man. He had not ego to speak of, at least, none that I could see. He didn't seem to like the spotlight, and was happiest when he could melt into a crowd, which wasn't often. I've just heard of the death of Elsie Wollheim, who was to be a guest of honour at the L.A. Worldcon.

To Sarah Groenewegen, I recommend two books on women and television SF. *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* by Camille Bacon-Smith, who now has two books of fiction out in North America. This book is published by the University of Pennsylvania Press, and examines the role of women in Star Trek and other media fandoms, including art and fanzines. Also, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* by Henry Jenkins. It's published by Routledge Books, and is about TV show fans, and their depth of involvement in their fandoms.

For the Doctor Who fans in the local... the newest instalment in the 30-year saga of the Doctor is now in post-production, having been filmed in Vancouver. Paul McGann is the new Doctor, and the movie is a co-production of the BBC and Fox Television.

(3.4.96)

**SYD BOUNDS, 27 Borough Rd, Kingston on Thames, Surrey, ENGLAND KT2 6BD.**

I have been unusually busy; and attended a health check where the practice nurse diagnosed asthma. This had meant visiting hospital and the nurse again and the chemist's. I now have five different inhalers (and hope to collect the full set).

like the cover comic. In your list, the one author who jumps out at me is Vardis Fisher. I remember reading one of his years ago.

The funniest item this issue is by Verran. A time will come when all computers are sold complete with their own child experts.

Pavel was interesting on Prague and made me feel like visiting the place. And I liked some of Peter Brodie's haikus.

Andy, as usual was interesting; but who can compete with Mae? I have a theory that neighbours only argue over boundaries when they buy, not rent, property; my new neighbour is arguing over a few inches!

Buck Coulson reminds me we're all getting to that age when old friends go one by one; this is the most depressing part of getting old.

Ben Peek's story was interesting but, I felt, too compressed to be convincing. It gave the impression of containing a novel that was struggling to get out.

An update on my local library. Following the sf exhibition, which I didn't think much of at all, they held an sf festival, with guest speakers. Suddenly, somebody in authority realised the library didn't have all that many sf books to satisfy all the new readers to be expected. I suspect they got a grant from somewhere. Overnight (it seemed) the library shelves filled with new sf books, some by new authors I'd never even heard of. There are now more new sf books than new books in any other category. Must be a moral there somewhere.

I liked Bill Congreve's tour of Australia; more, please. (9.4.96)

**THE MENTOR 90 page 34**

**JOHN TIPPER, PO Box 4876, Strathfield, NSW 2135.**

Have you read the majority of your non-sf books? For the past couple of years, most of my time has been spent reading reference material, but I've finally made the move to catch up on the general fiction collection. Brian Callison's seafaring titles have provided hours of excellent reading. They're the type of book I can devour in one sitting, all 200-plus pages. Not a wasted word or expression. For a change of pace (and how) I pulled out Ayn Rand's *THE FOUNTAINHEAD*. This, I expected, would require some effort. Not so. Rand's words grab you by the throat and never let go until night falls and you have to quit. Turn on the light and the spell is temporarily broken. The ideas in her books must have been rather overwhelming for readers back in the 1940s. I'm now reading *THE PASSION OF AYN RAND*, a biography by Barbara Branden. Very heavy going but interesting. Rand's life was the stuff of which nightmares are made.

*[I've read the majority (90%) of my non-sf library. I read THE FOUNTAINHEAD (and ATLAS SHRUGGED) in my early twenties, but didn't keep a copy in my library. - Ron.]*

Kirstyn McDermott's article provided a good counter point to Lyn's. There's nothing else to be said on the subject. I'm kidding myself. James Verran's amusing piece brings to mind a not too surprising fact noted in a recent news report: it's not true that the older generation are more afraid of computers than those of school years. We - well, me, the older gen - regard the computer merely as a good and only learn what we have to. The youngsters think they need to understand everything their pc can do so they don't get left behind. Maybe that explains why the last 750 pages of my pc manual has remained unread. The thing is, until I read the report, I thought I was missing out on something. Now, well, I feel rather relaxed about the entire thing.

Andrew's *SEX IN SF* was a tad disappointing. I thought it was going to be a male response to Lyn's article. Just joking, Andrew. It was up to your usual standard. Glen's article on Richard Arnold was okay, but why the sudden arrival of the middle initial, Glen? Hoping it will give you entry into the US market, perhaps? The letters were interesting. I've taken another quick trip through them but nothing required a response this time. Oh, the cover strip. Bloody horrible artwork though smart storyline. As usual, your reviews are the best of the content. (18.4.96)

**MICHAEL HAILSTONE, 14 Cecil Rd, Blackheath, NSW 2785.**

Mae Strelkov can count herself lucky, living in South America, being able to take cats into the bush with a clear conscience. We can't do that in Australia, which is the only continent vulnerable to the depredations of cats. People here in the Blue Mountains seem fairly conscientious about this, as I have not seen a single cat since moving here. Contrast that with my short situation in 1989 in Sherbrooke Shire, apparently with the most vulnerable area to cats in Australia, where I shared a house with a fanatical greenie, who showed his love for the environment by often going away for long periods, leaving no fewer than four cats to fend for themselves.

Mae reacts to my apparent labelling of her set as the "blue-haired brigade" and later again as the "blue-haired vicar-entertaining, etc." That was not my description, but rather came from Chris Masters, whom I was quoting. But then she describes us aging hippies as "silly, sad middleagers." Touche, but fair enough. After all I put out a sad and silly fanzine. Which is okay, as far as I'm concerned. Dare I suggest though, hopefully without sounding blasphemous, that, had Jesus lived into middle age, he might have ended up sad and silly himself? There's something to be said for dying young.

But I must own up to a mistrust of elderly people. The women I find prim, proper and disapproving, and I expect an elderly man to open his mouth and make some stupid remark. Recently at Central Station I felt I had to move from the seat where I had sat down to eat some lunch, take my jumper off (after coming down from the mountains) and reorganise my stuff, because an old geezer opposite me was staring hard at me. However, that's the situation here in Australia. It could be different in South America. I haven't been to Argentina, but I don't remember feeling this same mistrust in Peru and Bolivia. The only bad experience I remember there was in the bus-station in Nazca, where some elderly man sat opposite me and



stared nastily at me, but that was different from the kind of vibes one gets from the elderly in this country.

Now on to #88 and the heavy stuff. In your review of BUSSWARBLE you say that there are "lots of fans out there who don't like some of Michael's expressed opinions (or their reading of them...)". I don't disagree with your statement, as I have been aware of this, but I feel moved here to lay it on the line with those fans about which opinions of mine they don't like.

Do they object to my views about the second world war? I felt moved to comment on this a little before Christmas, on reading a short review in the SYDNEY MORNING HERALD'S television-guide of the film, A NIGHT TO REMEMBER, which ABC TV screened in the wee hours of the morning of 13 December. Doug Anderson wrote in part: "And while the tragedy is of a suitably immense scale, a triumph of Nature and chaos theory over the big-is-better mentality of high-tech engineering, it was dwarfed by the man-made disasters in the closing days of WWII. The liners Wilhelm Gusloff and Goya were sunk in the north sea with more than 6,000 dead each instance, along with the General Steuben (3,500 casualties)." This is not to trivialize or belittle the story of the Titanic-disaster; on the contrary I think it is unique amongst the world's great sea disasters, not so much for the loss of life (a ferry crash in the Philippines a few years ago took more lives), but rather for the peculiar circumstances. As a schoolboy I was so moved by the book and the above-named film that shortly following it, that I was inspired to write my own latter-day version of the story (set in the southern Pacific in 1965), a tale I have no intention of inflicting on anyone.

The loss of the Titanic was an accident. There may have been gross criminal negligence and folly, but it was definitely no deliberate deed. The sinking of the Lusitania three years later was though. Never mind the skulduggery on the part of the British and Americans behind it; it was deliberate, and so there were cries of great moral outrage, although it was a clear act of war, not to mention a good source of hate propaganda against the enemy. That much was understandable, but only twenty-odd years later, by World War 2, such morality had taken a nose-dive, so there was no longer any place for such moral outrage. Hence those ships torpedoed in the North Sea (and Baltic?) with the death of thousands of refugees, and nobody gives a damn; we hardly know anything about those allied atrocities. I knew nothing about them until early 1988 and still know very little. We all know about the fire-bombings of Hamburg, Dresden and Tokyo and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, so I need not go on about them.

I don't like to trot out all the points I've made in past warbles (as you'll see in the latest issues, I've sworn off writing any more on this thoroughly hateful subject); I just want to show up the utter hypocrisy of those fans to take such offence. Let me lay it on the line here: I reject utterly the notion of World War 2 as a moral crusade by the Allies as the goodies against the Germans as the baddies. There were hideous atrocities committed on both sides. Now, if some folk disagree with me about this, that's okay; it's not disagreement that bothers me. I'm not concerned here with defending my case but rather with the right to discuss and question the received wisdom about the second great European war. Note that I say the *European* war; there is no such problem with the war against the Japanese, nor any other war in history. And, if it is acceptable to ask questions and probe the truth about genocide in East Timor, Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia, why isn't it so in the case of Poland and the Ukraine? Why is it that I am putting my head on the chopping block by even asking the above question?

While I don't feel inclined to express myself in the same way as Chris Masters, I do somewhat understand what he has been doing in deliberately stirring those readers of yours, whom he describes as "straight and tight-arsed". I would describe such folk as so utterly puffed up with self-righteousness and moral outrage, so holier than thou, so full of hatred. I need not name anyone here; those who answer that description will know who I'm referring to. I can understand a lot of folk having strong feelings about environment concerns such as global warming and the so-called ozone-layer, as these matters concern not only your present but, even more weightily, our future well being. But World War 2 is over, for God's sake; it's been over for fifty years. Haven't some people heard the news? It's a different world now. Why are they still God-

almighty (to take a word from D. H. Lawrence, who was writing about the general attitude towards the first World War - while it was still on, not fifty years in the past) about it? The peace-movement is especially hypocritical. Oh yes, those folk are so strongly against nuclear weapons and war in general, but scratch them about World War 2, and you'll find they think it perfectly okay to burn civilian men, women and children alive in Germany or Japan, because the Allies were right and they were Wrong. Or rather, we were good and they were evil. So it's perfectly okay to commit the most hideous atrocities, as long as you're right, and anybody who disagrees with this attitude deserves the most vicious slander and libel. So, if that's what all those offended fans are offended about, they can all get well and truly fucked.

Oh by the way, on that thoroughly wicked and obscene subject of revisionism, on Europe of -50 years, I have never (at least to my knowledge) quoted a revisionist source as truth. When I have wanted to make a point, I have quoted the orthodox history, but those bloody idiots can't even get that right. No, they don't want orthodox history; they want only the junk served up from Hollywood and Madison Avenue, their nasty little hateful myths. And, if I dare to correct them, what happens? I get dropped off a mailing list. How utterly woeful. And petty.

But maybe some of them are offended by the conspiracy theories. Again, it doesn't bother me if they think the conspiracy theories are silly, paranoid or whatever, but some folk do seem to find them offensive. Why? One problem some folk do seem to have is accepting the reality of evil, malice and power-lust out there in the world. Environmentalists seem to think that everything will be hunky-dory if we can just educate those basically decent but misguided people who are ripping all our forests out to mend their ways. It's not like that, I'm afraid. If some folk have trouble understanding and accepting this, well, that's their problem, but to take offence at these ideas - well, how utterly woeful. But at least this matter is thoroughly safe beside that of the European war between 1939 and 1945.

But maybe I'm just bashing my head against a brick wall about this. Appeals to reason are probably to no avail. John Alderson sees that "the no-go areas are vastly larger now than in 1948." If there ever was a no-go area, Europe between 1939 and 1945 is certainly one. Why are there now more taboos, vaster and larger no-go areas, then there were 45 or 50 years ago? What kind of society are we moving into, if that's the case? I feel (along with Chris Masters) that Australians nowadays are more brain-washed than they've ever been. As I've said before, the society of the nineties is utterly pathetic. But I guess a lot of fans don't like that expressed opinion either, so I'd better shut up.

While Lyn Elvey has a point - a lot of what she says is probably true - I wonder what limited circles she must move in if she can't find a single man who talks about anything besides work. Hell, Australia is crawling with men who can spend all day talking about cricket, footy and other sports; where has she been? I think her interests are too narrow, if she expects to have "intelligent" conversations about "Thai, Indian and seafood". To me food, however exotic, is something to eat for godsakes, not to talk about, intelligently or otherwise. I'm not into sport myself, but I can handle intelligent conversations about lots of other things: black holes, faces on Mars, conspiracies, history and (ahem!) even politics and religion. Maybe some of the men in Elvey's life can handle such topics too, but evidently she can't. So whose fault is that? (Mind you, I found it just about impossible to have an intelligent conversation with the Melbourne Mafia, which is why I stopped going to K&M's on Friday evenings. I have no regrets about leaving that mob behind.

As for the world being a better place if women ruled it, lots of women say that, including my mother, herself no feminist. They have a point. It is pretty stupid the way men make wars. But who has (or had until very recently) go off to get killed in them? Not the women, who (at least during the first world-war) smugly stay at home handing out white feathers to the men who don't want to go.

What really gets me though is that a woman like Elvey can write such an article like that really sticking it up men, and it's unlikely anyone will get very upset about it (I'm not upset myself), but if a man dared to write something critical of women, how long do you think he would last? He would be soundly condemned as a sexist

pig and other such vile epithets. If that's not unfair discrimination (sexism, gender-bias or whatever you want to call it), then I don't know what is. Indeed I'll go so far as to ask: If men can take criticism but women can't, then which is really the superior sex?

I found Bill Congreve's column very interesting this time when he got away from books for a while. I never knew the Burning Mountain was such an interesting place to visit. I've known about it just about all my life - I'd say at least since I was eight. I know it's a place called Wingen, which prompted my father to make a snide crack at me on probably the only time he ever drove us up that way - which must have been way back in 1951, his only visit to my mother's sister's family at Gunedah. Had I known as much about it in 1988 as I do now, I would have definitely had a look at it on the way back from my trip up north that year. Now that I no longer have a vehicle that goes, nor am likely to have another, I don't see how I'll ever get to see either the Burning Mountain nor Mount Kaputar. (At least I have visited Siding Spring.) What really beats me is, how does an underground fire like that keep burning for hundreds or thousands of years? Where does it get the oxygen?

It's good to see that Bridh Hancock is into spelling reform including some SR1, but then that seems to be a prerogative of poets (such as John Masefield, who used SR1 in his poem about sailing ships.)

Odd to read R Laurraine Tuthasi's comments on her earthquake. I was in Los Angeles less than ten months after the earthquake, yet I saw no damage anywhere nor heard a mention of it. Where were all these wrecked freeways? I even visited Universal Studios, overlooking the San Fernando Valley, not far, I understand, from Northridge. Before my visit I read in some fanzine that the townsfolk of San Francisco were pretty upset, because Los Angeles's damage was repaired much sooner and more quickly than that in their own city.

Chris Masters has a point in calling Vol Molesworth a "dweeb", though I wouldn't use that word myself, since I don't know what it really means. (All I know is that it's used in that awful film STARGATE by the general to describe the archaeologist in the early part of the film, before they all end up palsy-walsy in that sickening American way). I have said this before, but, necessary or at least important as Molesworth's history may be, it just doesn't make interesting reading. Yes, it is dry, as others have remarked. As dry as the Sahara desert, in fact. The man must have been an arch bureaucrat. Unhappily, he wouldn't have been alone in being like that. This dry bureaucratic mindset seems to run through fandom, extraordinary in a subculture that's supposed to be imaginative and creative. I'm buggered if I can understand fandom. Why couldn't I have intelligent interesting conversations with the Melbourne Mafia? Molesworth would have done far better to write in the first person and put in some of his personal feelings about all that stupid feuding that went on. In all fairness to him though, I should point out that the society of his time was a lot more formal than that today. Thank God for that at least; the bureaucratic mindset is still very much evident; how much worse it must have been back then!

Referring to Don Fitch's comments about the word "fen" for "fans", I don't give a damn myself, but I'd like to say here for the first time in my life, that one of my pet hates is "words" with capital letters in the middle, for example FanSpeak, InterCap, StarGate (the most badly written book of that dreadful film) and, most absurd of all, seaQuest (which is one reason why I don't bother to watch that show). As far as I'm concerned, capital letters should be used only at the beginning of a word, usually on the first word of a sentence or a proper name. (I share your irritation about "Wise Men" and so forth. Usually I find that such needless capitalization shows that the writer doesn't really understand what the word means.)

Mae Strelkov seems to have developed an unhealthy obsession about Satanists in her old age, seeing them everywhere, just as I see conspiracies according to her. A bit like the Reds under the bed of the McCarthy-era. She even suspects me of Satanism now, something I'm not too keen on. How is it satanic to write about a satanic conspiracy? I think that says a lot about those who so label conspiracy-theorists.

I'd like to announce here that I have begun work on a complete copy of I WANT TO LIE ON THE GRASS, especially as it's once more that time of the year - the anniversary of that episode of

my life. I plan to send it out to those on my current mailing list. If anyone else not on the list would care to get it, I am on to expressions of interest. (19.4.96)

**DEREK PICKLES, 44 Rooley Lane, Bankfoot, Bradford, W. Yorkshire BD5 8LX, U.K.**

The front and backcover strip, John Rickett, being arachnaphobic, would like this...

Your editorial - I couldn't attempt to list my books, even though I have sold several hundred in the past year, mostly sf and detective. I have about 400 I'm trying to shift but no interest from dealers. I'll probably take them to a car boot sale this summer and flog them 4 or 5 for a £1. If I do sell them I will have cleared three shelves in one bookcase, only leaves about twelve more shelves in the bedroom/study plus the overflow on the shelves in the garage plus the bookcase and shelves in the sitting room.

I await James Verran's second article on PCs, informing us that they depreciate at approximately £50 per month. 386s are selling (in local newspaper classified advertisements) for £150 - £200, 286s for £60, 486s for between £300 - £450 depending on accompanying software. I saw an ad in a national daily for a band-new Pentium CPs with £500 discount from list price.

I liked Darren Goossens' BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME Part II. The Dark Ages were called that because so many of the nobility were killed in battle and returned as ghosts that they were known as *knightshades*, hence Dark Ages.

The cinematic biography of Jack Arnold very interesting. I hadn't realised how many of the films mentioned were ones I had seen. I disagree with Glen's verdict of OMEGA MAN as being "nondescript". I thought there were some stunning scenes and a genuine malevolent atmosphere was created. The final act of crucifixion was moving.

Steve Sneyd's letter. First he mis-spells my first name, wouldn't mind but we must exchange 12/15 letters a year; second, the "soap-box like central object" in my photograph is not a soap-box, it is the official sign saying "The 1951 Festival Science Fiction Convention" which I had liberated from the entrance to the hotel conference room.

*[That spelling would be my typo (or reading Steve's handwriting... - Ron.)]*

Of the seven of us in the 1951 photograph four are still in contact with sf fandom. Walt Willis still writes fascinating letters to fanzines and attends convention, Vince Clarke is very active and holds, for posterity, a 7,00 plus fan-mag collection, I unfatiated a few years ago after a 35 year break, Ken Bulmer is still in touch with people although he is now into table-top war-games. Bob Foster faded out in the mid 50s (I think), and I don't really now what happened to Mike Tealby and Fred Robinson although I seem to remember that Fred passed STRAIGHT UP on to another fan. Ken Slater is still active with his book-business, attending European Conventions and has recently revived General Chunterings (originally in Operation Fantast magazine) in Terry Jeeves ERG. Age and ill-health have affected us in different ways but, God willing, we'll all carry on for a long time to come. (20.4.96)

**HARRY CAMERON ANDRUSCHAK, PO Box 5309, Torrance, CA 90510-5309, USA.**

... I went on a 2 week vacation to Italy in February. So obviously I read Pavel's article with delight, even though I have little to comment on. My own report of my Italian vacation should be published in the next FOSFAX.

And now a quick book recommendation: DINOSAUR IN A HAYSTACK by Stephen Jay Gould, his latest book in a long series of collected essays concerning evolution, and keeping up the high standards of the previous books.

Looking at the loc of mine that you published, I note that I seemed to have been the only one to acknowledge that the subject of infanticide of female babies was mentioned in Lyn Elvey's article. I suppose it can be an upsetting topic, right up there with female mutilation, the cutting out of the clitoris that is still tragically common in many parts of the world.

As far as the topic of sex in SF goes, I have been thinking lately of one situation where there was none, yet it would have been obvious. I am thinking of Niven and Pournelle's MOTE IN GOD'S



EYE, where male humans are paired with motie mediators who are female, naked, available, friendly, and trained to identify with their fyunch(click)s. A bunch of navy crew with no sex urges?

Meanwhile, since I last wrote to you I have also been to Norman, Oklahoma twice for Post Office schools, and last October a friend of mine with a car was also in the school. So we went to Oklahoma city to view the site of the bombed federal building. Gave rise to many thoughts. And I am fully aware that many of those who approve of the bombing probably think Post Office facilities are legitimate targets.

I was again in Norman earlier this month. The two schools are related to the new RBCS system the Post Office is installing nationwide. I doubt if Australia has anything like it, since you do not seem to barcode your mail. (30.4.96)

*(As far as I know our mail is coded by infra-red (ultra-violet?) ink for the machines to read after they are sorted. - Ron. )*

**PAMELA BOAL, 4 Westfield Way, Charlton Heights, Wantage, Oxon OX12 7EW, UK.**

Interesting how many people writing in the R&R Dept [in TM 89] echo Kirstyn McDermott's article, that is if you can echo before the sound is produced. I certainly agree whole-heartedly with Kirstyn, I would say I wished I had written the article except that I do not think I could have put the case so well.

James Verran's article was most smileworthy and oh so true! At least he has got into the technological age before he has a five year old grandson around to select the correct key with a look of pity and amazement. Oh well, if I can't get cartoon characters to jump over missiles, at least I can hold said grandson (now seven years old) to a draw at noughts and crosses.

Between Pavel and Mae you certainly do your bit for the one ism that I approve of, internationalism. Both their articles, as ever, full of interesting information.

As for Darren Goossens, I can only hope he has several more parts to give us of his history. Really chuckleworthy and it certainly gives one a new perspective on the whole subject of history.

I found THE OLD WORLD ONCE RACE CONSPIRACY a little disjointed and difficult to visualise. I think if the pseudo science doesn't work the author needs to give a strong visual image of his or her world/worlds so that the reader can get on with the what of the story without being distracted by the how. Once into the story we are told that each of the bubbles had developed differently at their own pace. It might have helped if the opening had not been in a mid twentieth century time warp. For all its problems the story did grab my interest, like so many short stories I think the problem is too much content for the length. If the ideas were clarified and developed there could be a good novel in there.

Thanks for Andy, Buck and the poetry, the latter (as others have mentioned) the better for clear print.

I sometimes think it would be really neat if I could throw a party just for the writers in your R&R Dept, there would be some fascinating, and possibly explosive, discussions going on at such a gathering. I think Lloyd Penney is reinforcing my point that SF fandom is unusual, if not unique, in that a hobby taken up in puberty or early adulthood (perhaps less so today) remains part of the true fan's life rather than dropped with the discovery of sex. SF is generally found by the individual, rather than the peer group and unlike say, football (which may start young and go through life), the SF fan can become fully involved at once rather than just cheer on the sidelines. Indeed it was the young that started fandom, not establishment figures or commercial interests. (7.5.96)

**BRENT LILLIE, 10 Cherub St, Togun, QLD 4224.**

In his enlightening and humorous, WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, James Verran fails to mention the down side of a computer-literate younger generation - namely, the ability to ignore the advice of their over-cautious, uneducated elders (me), and then trying to install a double-space, memory-expanding program that constipates the entire start up. Just another of those 'sorry, Dad,' things. A trip to our local computer doctor ensues. The problem is repaired, but all memory is lost: my wife's TAFE assignment, which she didn't save on a floppy, a couple of my stories that I didn't save on floppy, and most important of all, a LOC that I was all ready to mail.

So now I have to start all over again and try to remember what I wrote. Here goes. In THE SCIENCE FICTION OF JACK ARNOLD, Glen R. Chapman makes mention of THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN. Seeing that movie was a pivotal turning point in my life, instilling a love of SF at an early age. T.I.S, ROBINSON CRUSOE ON MARS, FORBIDDEN PLANET: I saw all these movies at either the Regal or the Capital, two picture theatres in Coolangatta that were torn down a few years ago to make way for a multistorey shopping centre. My father took me to see T.I.S.M., at the Capital (I think). The Regal was the posh theatre, with it's own shack bar, expansive tiled foyer and winding stairs that led up to the balcony. The Capital had a balcony, as well, but whereas the downstairs section of the Regal had fold-up seats, the Capital had canvas ones. When your parents took you to the movies back then, you always sat in the balcony, away from the riff raff occupying the peanut gallery, or 'finger stalls', below.

When I was a teenager, going to the movies often had little to do with what was actually happening on the screen. It was an excuse to misbehave in public, and to indulge perchance, in a bit of hanky-panky. You had to watch out for the usher, because she would drift down the aisle like smoke. Torchlight would explode in your face, and if you were doing something wrong, which you certainly always were, you'd be out on the street. People farted loudly in the quiet bits, and wild laughter would ensue. The 'smoke thing from under the green exit light' would magically appear and the flatulent one would be cut from the herd and ejected. It amazed me how she always knew who it was. She must have used some kind of detector.

One night, a mate of mine called Mutts walked down the aisle to the toilets. Back then, the dunnies were situated next to the screen, so everyone could watch you go. If you were too insecure you just had to whip it out and do it on the floor if you couldn't hold it any more, or simply piss your pants. Someone had left the wick of a double bungler (firework), lying across a burning cigarette. It exploded just after Mutts entered the toilet, temporarily deafening him. The usher was in there like a flash.

Picture the sequence of events in your mind for a moment: a solitary figure makes it's way down the aisle to the toilet, watched by a dark theatre full of curious, luminescent eyes. He enters the dunny. The door closes. A pause, then a massive detonation. Hilarity ensues. Pandemonium. The smoke thing rushes to the toilet and emerges with the deafened innocent, ejecting him from the premises. Meanwhile, somewhere in the canvas seats, the Mad Bomber chuckles evilly to himself as he plans his next caper.

Shit like that happened all the time. People fell asleep in their seats and stayed all night. You smooched, fell in love, kicked the arses of the people in front and lobbed Jaffas in the air so they'd hit people on the head, twenty rows away. Roll them along the floor? What a waste. I have never rolled a Jaffa down the floor, nor have I seen anyone do it. It is a fallacy. Maybe someone did it once, but they would have soon discovered that it is much better fun to throw them. Pictures theatres, sorry, cinemas are so elegant nowadays. So formal. So boring.

A MATTER OF SEXISM will no doubt go over a lot better than Lyn Elvey's contribution, but both articles were commendable. Elvey's more so because it created so much reaction. Enjoyed most of the contributions, although Ben Peek's fiction lost me after a while because it took so long to get going. A good short story has got to be a black hole, sucking the reader in right from the first paragraph. Easy to say, but not so easy accomplished. I always enjoy Buck Coulson's column and IN DEPTH. The haiku didn't particularly grab me, nor did the poetry. Goossen's science lampoons could become a regular feature, although the latest wasn't as good as the first. And if this issue doesn't come out until next Christmas, as you suspect it might, Ron, then Merry Christmas, everybody. (10.5.96)

**TERRY JEEVES, 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough, N. Yorkshire YO12 5RQ, UK.**

Cover/bacover a bit too messy for my taste I'm afraid, but I really enjoyed Kirstyn's piece and agreed with all she said. People is people and there are saints and sinners among both sexes. My own pet aversion is the canard that "Men hate an intelligent woman". I suspect that was created by the kind of intelligent woman that men do hate - the kind who must keep flaunting their wit and ability.

However men also hate men who do the same. It isn't the intelligence that is hated in man or woman, but the show-off attitude occasionally shown by such people.

James Verran also put his finger on my hooray button in his piece about unpacking and installing a new PC. Great stuff, but he forgot one other crafty ploy. The one where you have a guarantee form to return - and unless you make a separate note of the address - you'll not find it anywhere else on the bump if you need to contact the maker.

Haikus (and 'verse') Yeck! Sorry but here's a hideous haiku (or non-u):

I wish I knew  
Why a haiku  
makes me spew.

Andy Darlington's piece on sex (not) in SF was also interesting - I'd love to see FLESH GORDON, will it ever get on TV. Andy missed out on MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES which had a lot of soft stuff - and a lead story in DYNAMIC which hinged on one man taking numerous wives to re-build America.

To be fair, the minimal sex policy was not by writers' choice - and not the editors either. Publishers didn't want to offend the great buying public which the pulps enjoyed, the same applies to more 'mainstream' magazines. The attitude was 'don't rock the boat'. Personally I'd welcome more of that attitude today. There are plenty sex and porn mags around for those who want 'em. I don't and it turns me off to be reading a yarn only to have to descend to steamy sex which has no link with the story line.

I've just finished re-reading Clarke's FALL OF MOONDUST where he handled a sex sequence beautifully and didn't let it de-rail his story flow. is better kept for bed than books. (7.3.96)

R-LAURRAINE TUTIHASI, 2567 Plaza Del Amo #209, Torrance, CA 90503-7329, USA.

I'm not exactly a fan of fannish fiction, but it is still nice to see some back in your zine. It makes for a pleasant change of pace from other fanzines that I receive.

My response to Lyn Elvey is that she must be hanging out with the wrong men. Yes, I have had experience with the kind of men she talks about. However, I have also met a number of men who are not at all like that. she has spent the past five years looking for "that impossible man". Maybe she hasn't been looking long enough. I finally met the man of my dreams at age forty-seven. I'd say I'd spent a few more than five years looking.

Darren Goossens's THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE was very amusing.

The answer to Chuck Ross's question is Stephen Robinett. Tak Hallus is Persian for "pen name." (30.12.95)

I object to the use of the word *gender* in Kirstyn McDermott's A MATTER OF SEX(ISM)! *Gender* is a grammatical term and is not applicable to the English language. What she wants is *sex*. In her discussion of female infanticide in China, she mentions the sons carry on the family name. Actually, I thought in China that the women didn't change their names in marriage; but I could be wrong. Also it's possible that the children of a marriage always have the father's surname. Nothing in life is simple.

James Verran gives himself away in WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS when he mentions the PS/2. No wonder the computer owner he's talking about has so many problems; he's using an IBM clone. I am currently still hobbled with one but will soon be upgrading to a Macintosh. I am also recommending one to my sister who is completely computer illiterate. She needs everything to be as easy as possible.

[Actually, the PS/2 is an IBM machine, not a clone (IBM make them here in Oz). I think that the liking by some people of the Mac has a lot to do with the TV generation and their preference of images, rather than words in their whethers... - Ron.]

Buck Coulson implies that the schools in the Midwest have air-conditioning. If they do, they are ahead of most of LA, where I believe air-conditioning is more important. Only the newest school[s] here are equipped with air-conditioning. We don't have snow days here, but occasionally there is a heat day. This is a particularly serious problem in the many schools that now have year-round classes.

Re the letter from Darren Goossens, I have been using sf, as opposed to SF, for science fiction since about a dozen years ago when my SF was misinterpreted to mean San Francisco. Clarity is important to me in communications. (25.5.96)

## SHORTIES:

ANDREW DARLINGTON, 44 Spacroft Road, Teall St, Ossett, West Yorkshire, WF5 0HE, England. Have you noticed the bizarre way they reviewed the Tom Hanks movie APOLLO 13? They write about it as SF. They compare it to 2001: SPACE ODYSSEY and STAR WARS. Which surely misses the whole point. The Moon voyages are events lodged firmly in history. More distant in our collective past than the Fall of Saigon, the Opec Oil crisis and "Crossroads". APOLLO 13 is a historical drama. Yet it's now seen as a piece of FX SF. It's as though the entire Space programme has been shunted sideways from real-time into fiction, and is now indistinguishable from the action in stories from THE MENTOR.

Strange and stranger yet. (17.12.95)

MARIE-LOUISE STEPHENS, PO Box 1, Monbulk, VIC 3793. Now look what you made me do: I burnt the mushrooms for my husband's breakfast. As this only happens once when it is full moon, I won't say anything, just take some more and start again. And you know what I was doing? Reading WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS by James Verran. He described me - that's what would happen to me, if I ever buy a computer-word processor. Everyone said: you must have a computer - I use a portable typewriter - I am looked at as something terribly old fashioned, but, when I edit, I read aloud to hear if everything hangs well together, cross out and then retype. Of course this would be done quicker, if I could just shift the paragraphs around - but it gets done. I am one of the funny women, who doesn't drive. I was taught once, in the Dark Ages, but when I begged our driver in India to let me behind the steering wheel, I drove straight across the Roundabout (mind you it was just an inch above the pavement and not marked). The driver took the wheel and said: "I thought, Missaji, you said you drive..." Lovely article, beautifully written.

Contratulations to your daughter's nuptials. We were in the same state, when the kids decided, everyone was going to help and it would be affordable. And it was and it was a beautiful wedding in January, years ago, and out in the open. (27.2.96)

WAHF: Rod Williams, N. Ananieva, C. R. Ross, Jason Belt, John Light, Ivan Fowler, John Potts, Kim Huett, Andrew Lubensky, Bill West, Shane Dix and John Millard.

## CONTENTS TM 90

EDITORIAL - Ron Clarke	page 1
CONSTITUTIONS - Brad Row	2
FANCON - Sergey Lukyanenko	4
THE YANKEE PRIVATEER - Buck Coulson	8
NOT THROUGH THE FLOWERS - Marie-Louise Stephens	9
LIFTING YOUR GAME - Jim Verran	11
A PLANET MUCH LIKE EARTH - Mae Strelkov	13
POETRY, TOO - Bridh Hancock, Bill West, Andy Darlington	18
THE REIGN OF DARE - Andrew Darlington	19
IN DEPTH - Bill Congreve	21
THE R&R DEPT. (Letters)	26

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