

THE MENTOR Magazine

● Starship Hint

NEW YORK, Saturday.—A space official predicted yesterday that the United States would start work on a spaceship to explore the stars by the end of the century.

A member of the National Aeronautics and Space Council, Mr M. D. Hunter, said such a vehicle might travel at a maximum speed of more than 600 million miles an hour—but would still need 10 years in flight to reach the nearest star. (A.A.P.)

Where have the dreams gone? The above is a clipping from a Sydney newspaper dated 20.4.1963. That was at the beginning of the Space Age, and six years before men landed on the moon. Several decades later when space exploration seemed to have no horizons, it was concluded that, if the graph of speeds that had been achieved by that time

was extrapolated, then by the end of the century they would exceed the speed of light. (Something like the graph of the speed of computer chips that are talked about nowadays). Of course that former graph has flattened out; not because of technical difficulties, but economic ones.

What does the future hold?

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HE WHO WAITS

by Brent Lillie & Marcus Amiet.

GINGERLY, TEMPLE HOLT lowered his 140-year-old frame into the briny belly of the ping up guts, bright reds and yellows. He thought of his father's large, hairy hands gripping a favourite cleaver, and coal black pupils staring fixedly from severed heads.

"Much like Jonah," he intoned as the dark water engulfed his shrunken, cancerous gonads. "Descending into the belly of the whale."

"I beg your pardon?" the nethertech said, leaning a little closer as he helped Holt into the tank.

"Never mind. Am I your first today?"

"The first, yes, although we anticipate a rush later in the afternoon."

Holt nodded. The water was deliciously warm.

"I suppose people tend to grow more morose as darkness falls."

"Not so much the darkness, as the end of the day."

Soft music came from somewhere: *The Shepherd's Song*, as requested. The nethertech could not hear it.

"It's so peaceful," Holt murmured. There were lights: reds, greens and yellows in primary colours, suspended in the darkness above the point where Holt's shrivelled toes broke the surface of the black water like ten ghostly seals, perched on submerged rocks.

By now, Temple Holt had grown weary of most things in life, including human interaction. They were all dead: his wife, siblings and the friends he had truly loved. Well, he had loved, and that was something. There had been no children. Temple Holt had not been prepared to risk the distractions he suspected they would bring.

"Everything's working perfectly, Mr Holt." The nethertech tested the level of buoyancy by pushing lightly on Holt's protruding ribcage. Satisfied, he ran one finger around the edge of the cranial band. "There. All the hardware is fully functional. Whatever you wanted will happen, but logically, realistically. After all, you paid for the very best."

"You are excellent at your job."

The nethertech seemed pleased. He

flotation tank, the smell reminding him of the fish markets he had wandered as a child, scooped and glanced from side to side.

"Mr Holt, I dabble in the market myself, you know. Nothing like on your scale, but..."

Even now, lamented Holt, as he casts death's lure into the murky waters, the little bastard's fishing for tips.

All at once, he knew the meaning of the lights. A smile smoothed the old man's countenance. As a child, he had owned a miniature set of traffic signals.

"I am going to a place where the telegraph poles have sails, and winds move islands." Holt gazed up at the face of the nethertech. "You want good advice? Well, here it is. Being a citizen simply means paying for the right to be told what to do, and when to do it. There is an eleventh commandment Moses made sure he broke off and threw away. It said '*Please ignore all of the above*'." The seals were lapping at his ears with wet, salty tongues, setting up a roaring and a thrumming so loud that he could barely make out his own words.

Holt did not know who spoke next: himself, the nethertech, or no one at all.

"The real world was sweet agony. The next will be better."

Through a moist haze, he watched the nethertech close the hatch.

* * *

"You'll experience a spreading warmth," Charles Hanover explained. "I've heard it described as being similar to lying in a tepid bath and turning on the hot tap – then feeling the heat climb up your body, not on the outside, but the inside. From all reports, it's not unpleasant." Hanover offered Holt a cigar, which he declined.

"My weakness," Hanover admitted. He put the cigar in his mouth, but did not light it. "You're a major stockholder in Customised Conceptual Realities – have you read the literature relevant to the process you'll be undergoing?"

Holt shook his head: "I'm quite up to speed

in the financial aspects. I'll leave it up to you to explain the technical details."

"Very well. Let me begin by stating the obvious. The science of neurology has taken amazing leaps forward in the last 20 years. In many aspects, it's outpaced all the other sciences." Hanover made an all-encompassing gesture towards Holt. "Take yourself. All those artificial body parts and operations that extended your lifespan. Pure thought could have cured your cancer years ago, before it outpaced your transplants."

"I'm hardwired," Holt said simply. Death and taxes. Fear and profit. Five decades spent wielding - yet, at the same time - snared in, corporate mandibles.

"I understand. I understand." Hanover sighed. "So many think they are."

"I'm well aware that modern thinking suggests that I could have cured my own disease with positive thoughts," an obviously rankled Holt shot back. He adjusted the woollen blanket around his knees. "I suppose I had my own reasons for not delving too deeply into my own consciousness."

Hanover studied the moist end of his cigar for half a minute. Enough time for Holt's guilt to surface, take a breath, then settle back down into his subconscious. The company doctors handled the philosophical arguments. He was here to explain the process.

"Modern thinking? Far from it. This 'new science' is not new at all. Conceptual reality has its roots in arcane practices like karate and meditation. It has merely gained validity from a modern scientific viewpoint." Hanover's stubby fingers drummed a complicated little rhythm on the desktop.

"Arnold Schwarzenwhatever made a movie called *Total Recall*. You remember. Good. Conceptual reality is like that. It can take the form of a holiday, or pleasant euthanasia. In your case, I suppose, it's a marriage of the two. You will climb into a tank and live in your conceptual world until you die."

Holt nodded, noting that the man was as blunt as his cigars.

"Conceptual reality creates visual effects. An infrared beam carries thoughts that correlate with the visual stimuli. A patented chemical, neurorapid, causes the brain cells to link at an alarming rate, creating neuronets that receive the incoming thoughts. Are you following this so far?"

"Only just."

Hanover raised a finger.

"Keep in mind that the brain is merely a receiver-transmitter of consciousness, not the creator of consciousness. Once the brain has

collapsed the infrared beam neurologically, the hypothalamus produces a peptide - a hormone which is given to the cellular mass as the true elixir of life: emotion and feeling. Subsequently, the survival centres of the brain shut down to allow the spirit to enjoy the more pleasurable realities of the physical body. You will spend the remainder of your days in a world of beauty, peace and joy."

"As specified," Holt grunted.

"Exactly. But in *this* reality, social consciousness is still living in the 1900's. Ninety-five percent of the world's population has no idea what Einstein's theory means, let alone grasp its implications. Humanity continues to cling to Newton's understanding of three-dimensional space. We know that consciousness, the soul, if you like, is a cosmology that defies time, distance and space."

"Energy has to exist with time, but consciousness exists beyond time. It *created* time and therefore has dominion over time, and henceforth, energy." Hanover smiled. "Simply put, Customised Conceptual Realities, and companies like it, have mass-produced spirituality. Within three years, CR will be available to the general population. I foresee huge profits."

"That looks like a fine cigar"

Hanover chuckled: "My brother, Edward, sent them to me for my birthday. Edward's in charge of the unified field project in Australia. Are you familiar with the current advances within the area of the unified field? From what we hear, the implications are amazing."

"Sorry, that's about all the technical information I can take on board for one day." Holt turned his head slightly. A male nurse strode over and grasped the handles of the old man's wheelchair. "I'm tired. Take me to my room, Peter."

"I'll see you in two days time, Mr Holt. After your first round of tests."

"That you will. Goodbye, Mr Hanover."

"Goodbye."

* * *

Holt gazed out upon an endless vista of conical hills; all shaped identically, some large, some small; a landscape forged long, long ago in a childhood dream.

The hills were tightly bunched and a brilliant green. No trees or rocks marred their smooth sides and the grass was soft and springy. Temple Holt rolled his arms in the warm sun, examining his skin; he watched, fascinated, as the muscles moved and realised he was young again, straight, tall, and strong.

He took a deep breath, and then began to run. Down he went, faster and faster, then up, down again, up, a perpetual machine with always just

enough energy to gain the crest of the next hill.

Holt ran like a human roller coaster, leaving his stomach behind in every trough, taking great gulps of air each time he gained a crest, sometimes launching off the tops of smaller hills to soar through the air and land half way down the slope, still running.

When he was done, Holt flopped down onto the ground to rest. Snapping off a blade of grass, he chewed on it contemplatively.

Here was a good a place as any for a house. Before too long, he knew he would wake to find the hills draped in a thick mantle of snow and a pair of skis leaning on the wall outside his front door. How fast, how far he would fly then. It had been sixty years, but the hiss and crunch of fresh powder snow was something not easily forgotten.

"Mr Holt?"

Holt spun around. A man stood not five feet away. He wore a royal blue suit and a gaudy tie.

Holt spat out the grass: "Who in the hell are you?"

"Brendon Parry. I'm your local surreal estate agent." Parry strode over and thrust out a hand, which Holt utterly ignored. Eventually, Parry gave up, smiled gracefully and hooked a thumb in his belt.

"Lovely views," he said, with an expansive gesture. "Position, position, position. Now, what kind of place did you have in mind?"

* * *

"Coffee?"

Parry's office was small and neat, like the man. The view out the window encompassed, naturally enough, hills.

"You weren't supposed to be here. Nobody was meant to be here except *me*."

"Well, you did want things to be as realistic as possible."

"Nobody mentioned anything about company, or companies. I want you out of here, now. You and your real estate office."

"That's *surreal* estate, and the people you paid to put you here are really not to blame. The imposition of taxes and charges within CR domains is a new government initiative. You see, for someone in your situation, Mr Holt, time tends to go a little awry. One hour in a CR world can be days, weeks, or even months in outside time. What's more, the doctors have slowed your cancer almost to the point of remission. You've been here much longer than you think, and you know what they say about death and taxes." Parry

shrugged. "My presence has everything to do with the latter. You're not the only one affected."

Holt swept an arm across Parry's desk. Pens, folders and paper clips flew in every direction and clattered across the floor.

"Get out of here," Holt rumbled, after the stationary eventually became stationary. "And leave me with my world."

The surreal estate agent threw up both hands.

"Please, Mr Holt, relax." Parry bounced out of his chair and started bobbing round the office, picking up a pencil here, a rubber band there. "Look, I don't blame you for being upset. Nevertheless, the program is in place. My advice would be to just go with the flow. You can still have all the things you want, it will just cost a little more."

"Will I still be able to fish?"

"Tell you what, there's a beautiful lake, not eight miles to the west."

"There's something you should know, Parry."

"Oh? And what's that?"

"I hate fish."

"Well, I..."

Holt sat down and leaned back in his chair. He wagged a finger at the man in the blue suit.

"You're the pug-faced nethertech who put me in the tank."

"No I'm not. And I'm not pug-faced!"

"Your superiors were well aware of my aversion to fish, but you wouldn't have been privy to the information. My guess is you came up with some kind of program that allows you to invade the netherworlds of poor, terminal bastards like me and bleed them for money."

"*Rich*, terminal bastards like you," Parry responded, picking up the last pen and jamming it back into its holder.

"Give it up, Parry, or whatever your name is," Holt said, stifling a yawn. He wanted to get back to his hilltop. "It's a lost cause."

"Then I'll turn your paradise into a desert."

"How wonderfully melodramatic! Go right ahead. Even if the doctors have slowed the disease, which I doubt, no one lives forever. You can come up with all the nightmare scenarios you want, but at least try to make them entertaining. By the way, how did you plan to get the money? Don't tell me it had anything to do with secret combinations and safety deposit boxes because I don't think I could stand it."

Parry plucked a large rubber band off his desk and proceeded to stretch it between his fingers.

Meanwhile, Holt's attention strayed beyond the window. Distracted by the verdant undulations, he experienced that odd sensation of being soothed

and flustered at the same time. Then, dousing all thoughts as a sodden blanket douses a flame, came an image of his wife, Renee, in a low-backed, white cotton blouse with thin straps, her back turned towards him, so that he could see her delicately boned shoulders, whose contours he had traced (how many times?) with sight, touch and tongue.

It was the denim shorts Renee wore, however, that gave the image its eerie air of breathtaking authenticity.

He had completely forgotten about those shorts, or thought he had, and Holt suddenly realised just how jaded and overused all his other memories of his wife had become, in comparison to this one, so rare, keen and bittersweet.

The next thing he knew, he was back on the hilltop, speculating upon whether ghosts found his new world more accessible than the real one, lying on soft grass under a warm sun.

* * *

That evening, Holt went for a long, looping run, and as he returned he noticed the house, perched on his hilltop: a cabin constructed of split logs, with a chimney, and pale yellow lanterns glowing in the windows, spilling their soft light upon the grass.

By the time Holt reached his back door, the first stars were out. He went to sleep eager to awake, much like a child on Christmas Eve, but instead found himself walking toward a brilliant, white light. Strange mists encircled him, lingered, and then moved on, retaining his shape within their essence. Through arched windows, he witnessed the march of human-shaped clouds beyond the craggy peaks of distant mountains. One of the clouds was Holt: the shape the mist had stolen.

At last, Holt reached the source of the light: a great, domed room, its entrance inscribed with the words *'Assembly of God'*. Pillars, decorated with trumpeting angels, flanked the archway.

Within, two giant mechanical cranes were in the last stages of lowering a head upon the shoulders of a towering figure, seated on a throne. The assembly of God. Naturally, God wore a royal blue suit and a gaudy tie.

"My office, 10am tomorrow morning," God boomed.

* * *

"You gave me the idea yourself," Parry said. His chair scraped across the polished wood floor and he walked over to the window "When you said that no one lives forever I got to thinking

- how will Holt know when he dies? Then I thought - how would he know if he's not dead already?"

"Things are as I wanted them to be."

Parry clasped his hands behind his back and sucked at his teeth.

"You can't be sure. Nobody knows what happens when we die."

Holt looked out the window. He was wasting time. All he wanted was to be alone in his hills.

"All right," he sighed. "How do you want to do this?"

The nethertech beamed and strode over to the desk.

"Okay, here's the deal. I'll come and visit you every day."

Holt reached across the desk and picked up a notebook, then showed it to Parry, who nodded.

"The day I don't show up..."

"I know. I'm dead. You will receive a bit more information each day. I don't trust you, Parry. Do the right thing and by the time I'm gone, you'll be a very rich man."

"You won't regret it."

Holt growled, deep in his throat. His only real regret was that there were still some people in Parry's world that he hadn't sued.

"Make the most of it, because someday they *will* tax conceptual realities." Holt grunted.

The pen refused to write.

"An oversight," Parry said, with a hint of annoyance. "Those pens aren't functional, but it doesn't matter. Your internal hardware is so sensitive that it can record the movements of your fingertips and transfer your written word back to the real world."

"I still need to see what I'm writing."

"Of course. Here, use mine." Parry removed a silver fountain pen from his shirt pocket and slid it across the desk.

Holt almost wrote *'Quit your job, copyright your software program and sell it to the highest bidder, then collect the royalties,'* but changed his mind and gave Parry a few insights into the stock market that fell short of insider trading, yet would still prove to be mildly profitable.

Nobody likes to make things too easy for an extortionist, and Holt was no exception, but the idea of knowing if he was dead – now *that* intrigued him.

Awareness of his own termination would be like a voice whispering, just after he'd fallen asleep, *'you are asleep!'*

As scheduled, four feet of snow fell on the hills. The sheer splendour of the next few days exceeded Temple Holt's wildest expectations: so much so that he almost thought he'd died, and gone to heaven, but of course, he knew he hadn't.

Maybe.

"HAMMER OF THE SPACEWAYS": HAMMER HOUSE OF SCIENCE FICTION

by Andrew Darlington.

There's a radiation-seeking Blob which melts flesh on contact.

A timeless intelligence from subterranean depths 2,000 miles beneath the earth. One that breaks through to terrorise the surface every fifty years in cycles determined by the planetary alignments of the solar system

And it starts with Cockney Corporal Webb - played by sometime Pop Star 'Idol On Parade' Anthony Newley, cold and bored, trudging through a moody desolation of mud and water somewhere on the Scottish coast, his Geiger-counter clicking with monstrous menace. And in 'X -THE UNKNOWN' you just know that Webb is going to be swallowed up by an exploding fissure, at the very least ...

Hammer. And Horror.

The words are synonymous. They go together. But Hammer Science Fiction?

There is a tenuous argument to be made for drawing *even* Hammer's most Gothic proto Slash 'n' Gore into the SF genre. 'THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN', the movie that began the studio's cycle of shockers in 1957, was, after all, based on the Mary Shelley novel that Brian Aldiss, among others, nominates as the first genuine work of Science Fiction. The novel that, in one seismic shift, advanced the cutting edge of literature out of Gothic supernatural fantasy and into the realm of physics illuminated by the palely flickering light of electricity. And DRACULA - which followed from Hammer a year later, making Christopher Lee an overnight (Dark) Star? Well - the SF utilisation of Vampiristic themes is long established, through Richard Matheson and on up into the recent works of Brian Stableford, Brian Lumley, and Storm Constantine. So a case could very easily be made for subsuming *them* into the genre too.

But happily, such special pleading is not necessary, because alongside their straight Horror output the Hammer studios managed to produce a series of unique early SF groundbreakers. In fact, within the history of Hammer there are two ... or possibly even four categories (or perhaps that's two categories, each with related sub-categories?) of Science Fiction. More specifically they can be

reduced down to their Hard SF and related 'Quatermass' movies (or quasi-Quatermass spin-offs). Plus the Lost World and the related Prehistoric Romps, movie themes which also have points of merger and cross-over. While in total, the studio went from adaptations of fiction by then-contemporary writers William F Temple and Charles Eric Maine, to rewrites of classic Rider Haggard and Dennis Wheatley novels, to the landmark trilogy of films featuring Nigel Kneale's charismatic TV boffin Quatermass

But first, it's worth considering what, exactly, is the point of remembering these relics of filmic archaeology at all? They're darker and more downbeat than the rubberised monstrosities of their Teen-Flick 'I MARRIED A MUTANT SMEAR FROM OUTER SPACE' American counterparts, but they portray an unrecognisably lost Britain, more remote and alien now than the strangest realms of fantasy. The character's portray dated 'Tommy Atkins' Squaddies and a cosy Elstree 'PASSPORT TO PIMLICO' Englishness, with concerns that hardly touch us. Their world is no longer ours. It's not even possible to argue that Hammer's SF output forms part of a vital continuity link that takes us through to the Multiplex digitally-enhanced 'STAR WARS' Special Edition. Because they don't. Or even that they're unfairly neglected genre classics. Because, for the most part, they're not. As satellites of Hammer Horror's main business of putting shivers down the spine they do form a significant sub-section of one of Britain's three great cinematic institutions - along with the James Bond's and the 'Carry On's. But beyond that they're little more than curios and oddities for SF cultists. Surely?

But at least that makes them worth a little investigation ... ?

"At precisely 04:17 this morning, a little before dawn, we launched the first experimental rocket to ascend into interplanetary space and remain there in preparation for the exploration by mankind of the moon and the planets the solar system itself. This is but the - er - the first hesitant step on the stairway to the stars..."

(SPACEWAYS the radio script)

The roots of Hammer go back as far as November 1934, when the company name was first

registered. It was always a tight family concern, and from those earliest days a dynastic affair too - founder William Hinds was followed by his son Anthony, while original chairman Enrique Carreras was followed by his son (Sir) James, and eventually by his son Michael. It was an opportunistic project too which prospered through a series of fortunate accidents. Although merchandising hardly existed as a concept in those days, it's easy to see early Hammer product functioning as little more than that. The studio existed, in part, as filmic blow-up extensions for big Radio and TV successes, and as the available media channel-range was monolithically narrow-band, those successes were national phenomena in ways unimaginable today. Hence the studio's earliest output includes such low-prestige oddities as a series of films bringing radio detective Dick Barton : Special Agent to the big screen. There were vaguely fantastical elements to his filmic exploits, a villainous doctor threatening to destroy England with germ bombs in the first (1948), and foreign agents using sonic weapons in their final confrontation on Blackpool Tower in 'DICK BARTON STRIKES BACK' a year later. A tie-in comic-strip adds to the nominal SF content, when a space-suited Barton and his assistant Snowy face 'THE FLYING SAUCER MYSTERY' on the colour cover of 'COMET' (11th April to 13th June 1953) and then go on to face 'PERIL ON THE MOON' in the shape of giant lizards and the evil master-crook Phansigar (20th June to 1st Aug 1953). Another Hammer film series, based around the Dixon Of Dock Green style investigations of 'PC 49' also made it into comics, joining Dan Dare on the pages of 'EAGLE'. But it was the Radio and TV originals that were of central importance. Their comic-strip and cinema manifestations were cash-in by-products of more or less equal commercial usefulness.

Closer to true SF genre identity - but not quite, is 'A STOLEN FACE' (1952), an 'Exclusive' (an early Hammer aka) movie in which an obsessed plastic surgeon remodels the face of a psychopathic female convict into the replica of the won= he loves. It's mostly melodramatic tosh made barely palatable by its stars - Paul Henreid, Lizbeth Scott, and future 'Quatermass' Andre Morell, and the story concentrates on the emotional developments as her criminal tendencies resurface, and his original lost love returns to say she's changed her mind. But it's also notable as an early vehicle for director Terence Fisher to try on moods for his future Frankenstein films.

And while 'SPACEWAYS' (1953) becomes the studio's first real SF venture, with Fisher there again to oversee production chores,

there's a reversion to spin-offery for its initial lift-off momentum. Charles Eric Maine had been an extremely active part of pre-War SF fandom, and soon became one of Britain's brightest new writers in the years following his military demob. 'SPACEWAYS', with its tight thriller premise - a scientist suspected of murdering his wife and placing her body aboard artificial satellite 'AS2', began as a radio play, its success prompting Hammer to pick up the film options. For the Light Programme it had been a 75- radio drama billed as 'A STORY OF THE VERY NEAR FUTURE', and broadcast on the 30th January 1953. Then a screenplay adaptation was prepared by Paul Tabori (himself a novelist of note) and Richard Landau, not always to Maine's approval. The posters announce its Cinema arrival as 'EXCLUSIVE'S GREAT BRITISH THRILLER - DARING DIFFERENT - EVEN GREATER THAN 'ROCKETSHIP'.

"Ever since I came to Deanfield I've had one idea in mind" says Dr Mitchell dramatically, "and that's to design the first rocket ship to carry a human being. With what we know now I'm confident we can do it". They construct the ship. There are some quite advanced shots of a turning Earth-scape. But inevitably, things go wrong, and the rocket spins out of control. "There is no way back!". But of course, there is.

In an article for 'AUTHENTIC no 41' (Jan 1954) Maine somewhat bafflingly explains "the first thing the movie people did when they got hold of the script of the radio play was to change the names of the characters ... McCabe, the computing officer, is now Lisa (Eva Bartock) still a computing officer, but his sex is changed so that Mitchell (played by Howard Duff, and formerly called Hills, hero of the play/film/book) can fall in love with him (her) and so provide additional love interest. Besides, Lisa has to go up in the rocket with Mitchell right at the end of the film so that they can have a brief love scene in free fall"! Maine did - however, approve of the limited use of special effects, the film is quite effective, and uses some good stock shots of rocket launchings to create authenticity. Two newsreel sequences which will be familiar to STF film addicts are mixed in with the action - the one of the mice in free fall, and the superb shot showing the booster unit falling away from the main rocket body during flight". Despite the limitations this implies the movie did bring Maine considerable career kudos, 'AUTHENTIC' editor H J Campbell even nominating it "his most successful creation", perhaps due, to a large extent, to the conspicuous lack of home-grown Movie opposition.

Yet already the same team were working on a film adaptation of William F Temple's novel 'FOUR SIDED TRIANGLE' (itself expanded from the cover story of the November 1939 'AMAZING STORIES' with Fisher this time sharing screenplay

writer credits with Tabori, and guest American actress Barbara Payton starring alongside Stephen Murray and John Van Eyssen. This time the plot dispenses with rocketry and orbital love sequences in favour of a tangled romantic cross-plot with vague suggestions of bizarre troilism involving a machine capable of duplicating human beings. Graduates Bill and Robin devise the machine. Bill then uses it to make an identical copy of Lena, the woman he loves, who just happens to be married to Robin. Unfortunately his ingenuity is thwarted when the duplicate also falls for the 'other' man.

But again the writer was not entirely happy with the results. Temple, a one-time flat-mate of Arthur C Clarke and a luminary of the pre-War British Interplanetary Society, had begun publishing fiction as early as 1935 and Science Fiction in the prestigious British pulp magazine 'TALES OF WONDER' a few years later. The germ of the idea for 'FOUR SIDED TRIANGLE' goes back to this period, and a deliberately contentious article he wrote critical of the movie tradition in which scientists acknowledge 'there are boundaries we aren't meant to cross'. "In future" he wrote, 'we demand cinematic scientists who realise that it's their duty to 'meddle'". Hence, in "the first scenario ending of the film" the girl 'artificially made' - unlike other Horror film creations, is intended to survive. "The book ending allows her at least the possibility of survival. The first film scenario swatted her like a fly. I protested, and others agreed and managed to get my climax substituted, and filming began on the new script. I might have known I wouldn't get away with it". In an article for 'AUTHENTIC no.31' he explains it all with an edge of mildly subversive humour, "down came the censor's axe and my creature's head rolled. It had to. There must be no question about a creature unnaturally born ever surviving. We are not the masters of life and death, pronounces the censor, and we must not assume that power (except in war, it seems)".

Nevertheless, while early Hammer benefited from its TV / Radio tie-ins, it was astute enough to draw on these pure SF activists to provide valuable introductory texts to SF credibility. Filmed just three months apart, and with their cinema release separated by a mere seven months, the two films came from the same core production unit, and would very quickly lead to greater things.

"Three men went into outer space, only one of them came back, came back a strange distorted creature haunted and possessed by something beyond human understanding ...

(cinema trailer voice-over for 'THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT')

Professor Bernard Quatermass is the complete embodiment of William F Temple's 'Meddling Scientist'. Brusque, irascible, and a compulsive interferer, it was he who almost accidentally elevated Hammer into Box-Office escape velocity. He deserves (and will receive) more detailed attention in a separate feature. But it was the success of the QUATERMASS Movie trilogy (or at least its first two instalments, the third and best didn't arrive until a much-delayed 1968), that helped finance the studio's most decisive step into the cinema mainstream. Hammer were already playing with the idea of quickie reworks of the Universal series of 1930's Gothic Horror shockers, when the American success of Quatermass helped fund that project. The final catalyst in the creation of 'Hammer Horror' was provided by Universal's injunction prohibiting use of any of its 'unique characteristics'. It was then somewhere in a combination of the necessary legal escapology and the fabrication forced on them to distance the new colour model from its black-and-white progenitor, that the elements we associate with 'Hammer Horror' were conjured into existence.

But it was Quatermass who made it all possible, taking off from the crude rocketship science of 'SPACEWAYS'. Quatermass began as the central character of three BBC-TV series written by Nigel Kneale, dating from 1953 through to 1959. To Walter Willis writing in 'NEBULA no.15' (January 1956), the first of them was the best piece of Science Fiction we'd ever seen on a screen", a serial which 'held us enthralled' "right from the opening with the crashed spaceship to the climax where the hero has his back to the wall in Westminster Abbey, while the horrible vegetable alien rustles its fernlike tentacles all around him". It might not sound too enticing in precis, but Quatermass was to become Britain's first important TV / Movie SF watershed. One that would legitimise SF as a viable adult medium for the future While 'QUATERMASS AND THE PIT' is not only Hammer's greatest-ever SF movie but quite possibly the most accomplished British SF movie of all time. Budgetary and technical limitations are far less important than the use of imagination. And while Quatermass remains Earthbound, he's progressive. That element alone was of vital importance to all those dissatisfied with, and seeking to escape the drab conformity of post-War England

Beyond Quatermass there was 'X - THE UNKNOWN' - which still operated under Hammer's original aka 'EXCLUSIVE FILMS PRESENTS...' Its release followed the first Quatermass movie, and is a 'semi-sequel' generally considered to be the missing fourth part of the trilogy. In it, Dr Royston, a hairless dome-head Boffin with a walking stick, plays the perfect Quatermass counterpart. He's

initially working on 'neutralising' atomic energy releases - as in A-Bomb explosions ! ("we only try to create, not destroy" he protests), before he's called out to investigate the black blobby radiation-seeking Ooze From Inner Space. 'What are you getting at ? they demand. 'I'm not getting at anything" Royston responds, "I just don't know". But despite such protestations there's a generous amount of pseudo-scientific doublespeak intended to persuade the viewer that what they were seeing makes some kind of technical sense, and there's some passably convincing effects to terrify the socks off actors Dean Jagger and Leo McKern.

Next there was 'THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN' (1957), a movie not quite as dire as its title would suggest. Based on an original Nigel Kneale teleplay ('THE CREATURE' broadcast on BBC-TV on 3rd February 1955) it follows Dr John Rollason's Yeti-hunting expedition to the Himalayas, which brings him into conflict with his human colleague Tom Friend (played by Stanley Baker in the TV version). This small-screen version was directed by long-time Quatermass producer Rudolph Cartier, and it succeeds in treating the Yeti, seldom seen on-screen in their entirety, sympathetically. Peter Cushing takes the scientist role, and even talks of the Yeti in enlightened evolutionary terms as being "man's successors". The movie succeeds in capturing Kneale's intentions remarkably well.

Perhaps the final *genuine* contribution to Hammer's Hard-SF cycle is 'THE DAMNED' (retitled in the USA 'THESE ARE THE DAMNED'). Based on a novel by Henry L Lawrence called 'THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT' (1960), it was adapted by Hammer as a black-and-white vehicle for the brooding young Oliver Reed in 1963. The action, filmed around the Weymouth coastline, centres on two young lovers seeking to free sixty-two children who have been raised in a secret Government project where they've been irradiated to enable them to live after nuclear war. The children, their Keeper, and their doomed would-be rescuers are skilfully depicted and the careful imagery remains impressive. There are heavy totalitarian overtones as motorcycle Biker Reed assists one of them to escape, but is pursued by a helicopter and sinister radiation-suited heavies. The escape bid fails. The children are re-sealed into their 'bunker'. There is no happy ending. The movie is clearly intended to be an anti-nuclear political and moral metaphor and is a powerful early example of the talents of expatriate American director Joseph Losey who had been blacklisted, because of his Left-Wing sympathies, by the rabidly anti-Communist Senator Joe McCarthy. Losey also made uncredited contributions to 'X THE UNKNOWN',

and the controversial nature of the later film's subject matter initially so unnerved its distributors that they sat on it for two years, only releasing it eventually following a series of cuts.

Unfortunately, for Hammer, its Science Fiction output was to be curiously mixed in the years that followed. And seldom as impressive.

*"Was there ever a greater civilisation than the Egyptians?
And where did it end ? In this volcanic crater ?
But my world will not end. It will begin again. Here"*
(*'SHE'*)

From the black-and-white minimalism of the 1950's, the more extravagant Technicolor expectations of the '60's took Hammer into the lucrative realm of what 'Fangoria's' Jeffrey Frentzen called 'stodgy costume epics'. And he blamed the 'big-budgeted empty-headed' 'SHE' for initiating the move.

Inherited from its more fantastical story-telling progenitor, the 'Lost Worlds' theme is one of the oldest plot devices in Science Fiction. And it's one that is far from played out, as recent Jurassic regenerations indicate. Conan Doyle wrote the classic prototype as early as 1912, but his isolated Matto Grosso ecosystem already came complete with the monstrous dinosaurian ingredients that subsequent incarnations would regard as essential to any self-respecting 'Lost World'. And Hammer more than played its part in continuing that tradition. H Rider Haggard, was a close contemporary of Conan Doyle's, and just as important a part of the quasi-SF pulp adventure genre of the time. He wrote the original 'SHE' as early as 1887, setting his Lost World of Egyptology in Africa as a heroic Theme Park for his proto-'Indiana Jones' protagonists. "Finding an ancient ruin or unopened tomb is one thing, but a fully occupied city is quite another" exclaims the heroic Leo Vincey (played by John Richardson). "By Jove" agrees his companion Peter Cushing. "Blimey" adds their batman, Job (Bernard Cribbens), to emphasise his lower-class status. And yes, perhaps Frentzen is a *little* too harsh. The movie is not entirely without its impressive moments.

And its success set Hammer on a course that led to 'ONE MILLION YEARS BC', a 'dull amalgam of pterodactyls, cave men in loincloths and animated special effects', based on an original 1940 screenplay. The chronology is absurd, humans and dinosaurs share the world. The anthropology is questionable as 'Shell' and 'Rock' tribes feud. Clothes are minimal, fur bikinis are de rigueur. The dialogue is intentionally incomprehensible. But it was *great* BoxOffice. It was followed by the 'slick but dumb' 'WHEN DINOSAURS RULED THE EARTH' - with a screenplay by the young J.G. Ballard (who later commented "I'm very proud that

my first screen credit was for what is, without doubt, the worst film ever made"!) and 'CREATURES THE WORLD FORGOT' in which Hammer apparently 'forgot' to include any prehistoric wildlife at all, and substituted Raquel Welch with Julie Ege as one of the grunting Stone Age tribe disrupted by volcanic eruptions.

Another 'Lost World' variant with Horror-Comic plot-lines is 'THE LOST CONTINENT' with its bevy of rubberoid monsters'. Supposedly legitimised by literary origins in 'UNCHARTED SEAS', a 1938 novel by Dennis Wheatley, the movie follows the misfortunes of Captain Eric Porter and the motley crew of 'The Corita', a ramshackle tramp steamer carrying a contraband cargo of Phosphor B high explosives, which becomes lost in an eerie Sargasso Sea of dead ships ("like all the ships in the world have come here to die"). The Ship of Fools includes a heartbroken Hildergarde Neff, and a struck-off doctor played by Nigel Stock - who can be glimpsed reading a Dennis Wheatley novel in one scene. They find themselves trapped in a place where wonderfully grotesque monster crustacea and predatory seaweed do battle, and soon the adventurers encounter Dana Gillespie who 'walks' on water suspended on helium balloons. They become variously enmeshed in seaweed, attacked by a giant crab, a giant lobster, and eventually by a tribe of time-warped Spanish Conquistadors! It's an entertaining romp perhaps, but does little to bolster Hammer's reputation as a purveyor of respectable Science Fiction.

The studio was to take one final shot at straight SF with 'MOON ZERO TWO', a swashbuckling Space Opera which came in 1969 featuring Warren Mitchell and Adrienne Corri. It was a project launched by Anthony Hinds and Michael Carreras - who also wrote the screenplay, but where its respectable effects budget puts it way beyond Maine's 'mice in free fall stock footage' in production terms, its quasi-Space Cowboy premise makes it seem oddly less interesting. Its 1950's Hammer progenitors had, or at least gave a passable impression of being 'ahead of the game', of providing sneak previews of tantalisingly close tomorrows. By now it was merely regulation consumer Sci-Fi. It had lost its 'cutting edge' sense of percipience. Critic John Brosnan accuses the film of being "one of the hoariest of pulp Western plots dressed up with a lot of colourful space hardware". And yes, the story-line concerns a poor but honest Space Pilot / Cowboy who is compromised by a gang of villains into capturing an asteroid of pure sapphire. But eventually his principles triumph and he overcomes their evil schemes. John Burke, a writer with as long an apprenticeship 'm fandom.

as either Temple or Maine (with whom he'd co-produced a 1930's fanzine called SATELLITE and a long-term anthologist of Hammer-related fiction, wrote the novelization.

But by the mid-Seventies Hammer had been swallowed up by the EMI group, where corporate politics decided to revive the studio's earliest strategy of producing wide-screen adaptations of TV successes. Unfortunately they missed out on the two 1965 Doctor Who movies (which went to AARU Film Productions instead, adding insult to injury by using Hammer's Peter Cushing as the Time-Travelling Gallifreyan!) in favour of dire ION THE BUSES' comedies. While rival Amicus was making all the Box-Office running. They began fairly well with 'THE LAND THAT TIME FORGOT' (1975), adapting an Edgar Rice Burroughs 'Lost Worlds' theme, and even getting Michael Moorcock and James Cawthorn to do the screenplay for it. h's success inevitably led to further cinematic mutilations of ER Burroughs, a sequel 'THE PEOPLE THAT TIME FORGOT', then Doug McClure versus pterodactyls in the 'Pellucidar' cycle movie 'AT THE EARTH'S CORE'.

While Hammer ceased to exist.

So now, in the late 1990's, what exactly is the point of remembering all those mildewed elegies in black-and-white from an unrecognisably lost Britain. All those flawed and frequently inept relics of filmic archaeology strewn across the decades from 'SPACEWAYS', through the Quatermass movies, down into 'MOON ZERO ONE' 9 Well, for a kid, growing up through the chaos theory of the 1950's, living without fantasy would have been like living through surgery without anaesthetic. Troubleshooting Space Scientists like Professor Quatermass provided a counterfactual present more powerful than all that drabness. A step into an imaginary alternative 1950's that wasn't ... but just *might* have been. For those prematurely afflicted with Teenage Techno-Lust and impatient with the stultifying dullness of the 1950's, the future would be outrageous, the stuff of impossible dreams. And Hammer SF briefly provided tantalising glimpses of that future.

And I - for one, still enjoy them.

That makes them worth a *little* investigation. Surely?

- ANDREW DARLINGTON

(Continued p.13).

AMERICA AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT

by Graeme Clarke

The first day was a timetable. The rest I wrote as a Diary.

Day 1.

6:30 AM - I woke up.
10:00 - I had my shower and started getting ready.
10:30 - Had breakfast (eggs on toast).
11:30 - We started working, hiding stuff and packing up.
12:43 - We left for the airport inside a very hot van without A/C.
2:53 - Arrived at airport.
3:25 - Tim (my brother) and me went duty free shopping.
4:00 - Tim and me had lunch (Pizza Hut)
4:30 - Started for plane through the Gate.
5:20 - On the plane and prepared for take off.
5:57 - Plane started and heading for runway.
6:05 - Take off.
6:20 - Exited Sydney Altitude 8100 m Speed
 1007 km/h
 Outside temp: -32°C
 Time till LAX 12h 29m
 Distance travelled: 182

km

1st movie on the flight was *What Rats Won't Do*, which I didn't see.

I played Lynx and Tim played his Gameboy

Until 9:30 Australian time: everyone tried to go to sleep but my brother was still playing poke'mon yellow.

7:50 - Australian time: we arrived at LAX

8:30 - Australian time: Outside LAX Airport waiting

for bus.

2:50 US time: got to the motel and bought a coke, which tastes like a Macdonald's coke.

6:00 - Had dinner. Pizza ordered from Dominos - meatlovers, supreme, vegetarian and Hawaiian.

7:00 PM - Went to bed.

Saturday, 27th November, 1999.

Had to wake up at 8:30 AM to go to Disneyland for the first time. The first thing we did was take photos of the statues of Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse, then we booked in for a table at the Blue Bayou restaurant for lunch. Then we went onto the Indiana Jones Ride, which was excellent.

Then my sisters Eleanor and Evelyn, and Tim, Josh (Evelyn's husband) and me went to the Haunted Mansion, which was all right. Then onto Splash Mountain which was really good. Next we went on to Star Tours which was pretty sucky.

Finally, we went to lunch. I had a fried sandwich, which had ham and cheese and breadcrumbs all over it and an apple, which I didn't eat. But I did have the strawberry jam on the sandwich... the jam melted over it and was great.

After lunch we went onto the Matterhorn sled ride, then to Big Thunder Mountain which was a roller coaster in a train. Next we went on the Mark Twain riverboat. We didn't do much there, except go around an island.

Then we met up with Mum and Graham. We went on the Indiana Jones ride again and saw the Fantasmic Show.

After it, on the way out, we went back on the Indiana Jones ride once more before it was closed to be serviced. I bought a churro to eat, and we left to go to the Hotel at 11:30 PM.

Sunday, 28th November, 1999

We got up around 7:56 am and got picked up by a taxi which took us to Hollywood where we went looking for Planet Hollywood for two hours until we gave up and found my Mum's friend, Jodi, and went to a café called The Hollywood Café. After we had a very late breakfast, we went to Frederick's which is a lingerie shop where Eleanor got her Year 12 Formal Dress and Evelyn got a suit.

After that we browsed through a toyshop for a while. After that Eleanor bought some sunglasses and a good Chinese dress. Then we went to the Hollywood Wax Museum.

After that we got some ice cream and met Bob Miller who is the Storyboard Artist for the

Simpsons, who gave us a tour of the studio where they make the Simpsons, called Film Roman. We found out that the creator of the Simpsons, Matt Groening, doesn't do anything towards the Simpsons and it usually takes around six months to make one episode of the Simpsons.

This is how they make an episode:

1. The episode is scripted
2. The actors do the recording
3. Bob listens to the recordings on a cassette and draws the storyboard
4. Then the storyboard goes to the three designers – Characters, background and props
5. Then the designs and storyboards go to the artists who do the key frames
6. The key frames are shipped to Taiwan to do the individual painted cells
7. These are shipped back to the USA to be animated (filmed) and edited and the music added.

After meeting the Director of the Show and the background designer as well, we went to Dennys Restaurant where I got the Sampler for Starters and a cheeseburger and Coke. Then we went back to the motel.

Monday, 29th November, 1999.

We got up around 7:30 am and got ready to go to Disneyland for the second time. Once we got there, we ran to Space Mountain. It is a huge roller coaster in the dark. I had butterflies, but when you're in there, it's just a huge hill that you go up and then into the dome where it's all dark and with sharp turns and when we got off, we got straight back on. It was that good.

When we got off the second time, my sister Evelyn went to Brer Fox and got a photo with him, then to Pluto to have another photo, but Brer Fox kept following Evelyn around.

Finally we all split up: Evelyn with Josh; Mum with Graeme; and Eleanor and me.

Eleanor and I went to the Haunted House again and then to Splash Mountain. Eleanor bought a photo of us going down the mountain and I bought a T-shirt saying that I survived Splash Mountain.

After that we went to Space Mountain again and did a different sled ride on the Matterhorn mountain. Then we went to ToonTown to do Roger Rabbit's Taxi ride which was all right, I guess. Then we got a photo of Mickey Mouse. Whilst we waited for the photo, we went to the Rocket Rods, then to Main Street

to browse. There are a few good shops there. We got a hand buzzer and an invisible dog on a lead.

Finally, we met up with everyone at the Mickey and Disney statue after we got our photo developed.

Once we got back together we walked back to the motel and then went to bed. We had take-away Chinese. Tim got back late after going for a long walk to some toy stores.

Tuesday, 30th December, 1999.

Today we had to wake up around 6:00 am to catch a bus which is going to take us to Universal Studios. We had to get dropped off at the bus depot, then picked up by another bus. Our driver's name was Victor. He was very nice.

Once we got to Universal, we got some photos of the sphere outside the studios, then we went in and went straight to the Terminator 3-D ride that was excellent.

Then we went to the Back to the Future ride that was all right. Then we went to Backdraft, which was about an old movie and fire.

At 11:00 am there was a 3.5 earthquake, but we didn't feel it.

We ate at the Hardrock Café, then we went on the ET Ride, then through the tram tour through the studios.

Afterwards we went shopping more before going back on the bus, back to the hotel.

That night we ate at Tony Romas Ribs. I had a burger and chips. I ate the burger, but not the chips. They call chips, French fries here.

Wednesday, 1st December, 1999.

Tim left to go to San Francisco this morning. I got dressed to see him off, but he just left when I got there.

We woke up at 6:30 am and got dressed and set off to have breakfast at IHOP, which means the International House of Pancakes.

Then we went to Disneyland, one last time. We did all the mountain rides twice, Splash Mountain four times, and Rocket Rods once. Then we went into Innoventions which was a building where you play with computers.

We were supposed to meet Mum and Graeme at the Disney and Mickey statue, but they were very late and the park was closed. They got stuck on the Rocket Rods. I said they were probably on a ride that had broke down, but no one believed me. But they were.

After that we went back to the hotel and went out to have Chinese dinner with some friends of my Mum's. We had it near Knotts berry Farm. Then we went back to their house and watched Star Trek Voyager before going home.

Thursday, 2nd December, 1999.

Second last day.

We got up pretty early, around 7:00 am, and got ready for a bus to take us to the San Diego Zoo to see the giant panda. We got dropped off at the depot and picked up by another bus. I fell asleep after I heard it was going to be a 2-hour trip.

Later I woke up and we got off at the Zoo and we went in and look at almost all the animals. Had lunch with a peacock peaking through the fence at my sister's lunch.

We saw a mother hippopotamus teaching her new baby to swim, and the panda and an Avery full of hummingbirds.

Finally we got picked up at 5:00 PM and we were dropped off at our motel.

We ordered pizza for dinner from Dominos again.

Friday, 3rd December, 1999.

This is our Final Day in America.

We got up at 6:00 am and started packing our bags and getting changed. At around 7:30 we got everything and went to the Front Office to check out. We left our luggage in one of the offices.

Then we waited outside for the VIP tour bus.

After a while, it came and took us to the depot again and we caught another bus, which took us to Los Angeles. The driver, whose name was Doug (as in the past tense of Dig), had tones of jokes to say.

The start of the tour was all about the building in Los Angeles. The skyscrapers can only be built on bedrock because of the many earthquakes. The tallest building will sway 8 feet during an earthquake but not fall. The driver pointed out buildings and places used in movies.

Then he took us to see a lot of star's homes and let us go shopping on Hollywood Boulevard where we saw Leonardo de Caprio's girlfriend get pulled over by a motor cycle cop. Finally we went to the Farmer's Market where we had lunch, which was lasagne for me, and another bus picked us up to take us back to the motel.

On the way to the Market, we saw Donald Sutherland who was shopping on Rodeo Drive.

Once we got back to the motel, we picked up our luggage and we caught an airport bus to LAX airport where we had to wait for three hours for the plane.

For once, I was able to sleep for a few hours of the flight. Whilst either my sister, Eleanor, or me was playing on the lynx of listening to the music which was repeated, but I watched one movie called, Mystery Men.

Once we arrived at Sydney, my sister and I saw the business class and first class seats and they basically had bed seats and double the legroom than pacific class. Once we got our luggage, my bagged got picked out by the sniffer dog, which was a beagle. I had had two apples in my bag, but left them on the plane, which was just as well as they searched my bag.

We went through Customs, and Luke, Eleanor's boyfriend and his family, my Uncle Chris and Auntie Jessica and Mark, Chris' friend who gave us a lift back home met us.

I was very glad to be back somewhat, but I wanted to stay at Disneyland some more.

- Graeme Clarke

(Cont. from p. 10)

HAMMER HOUSE OF... SCIENCE FICTION ?

- (1) A STOLEN FACE (1952) Dir: Terence Fisher
- (2) FOUR-SIDED TRIANGLE (1953) Dir: Terence Fisher. Screenplay: Fisher/ Paul Tabori
- (3) SPACEWAYS (1953) Dir: Terence Fisher. Screenplay: Paul Tabori/ Richard Landau
- (4) THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT (1955) US title 'THE CREEPING UNKNOWN' Dir: Val Guest. Screenplay: Richard Landau
- (5) X - THE UNKNOWN (1956) Dir: Leslie Norman
- (6) QUATERMASS 2 (1957) US title 'ENEMY FROM SPACE' Dir: Val Guest. Screenplay: Nigel Kneale
- (7) THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN (1957) Dir: Val Guest
- (8) THE DAMNED (1963) US title 'THESE ARE THE DAMNED' Dir: Joseph Losey Screenplay: Evan Jones
- (9) SHE (1965) Dir: Robert Day
- (10) ONE MILLION YEARS BC (1966) Dir: Dan Haffley. Screenplay: Michael Carreras
- (11) SLAVE GIRLS (1966) Producer 1 Dir: Michael Carreras (a 'Lost World' of voluptuous blonde women, enslaved by ... voluptuous brunettes in fur bikinis)
- (12) QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (1967) US title 'FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH' Dir: Roy Ward Baker. Screenplay: Nigel Kneale
- (13) THE VENGEANCE OF SHE (1968) Dir: Cliff Owen
- (14) THE LOST CONTINENT (1968) Dir: Michael Carreras. Screenplay: Michael Nash
- (15) MOON ZERO TWO (1969) Dir: Roy Ward Baker Screenplay: William Hinds (aka John Elder)/ Michael Carreras
- (16) WHEN DINOSAURS RULED THE EARTH (1970) Story: JG Ballard Screenplay & Dir: Val Guest
- (17) CREATURES THE WORLD FORGOT (1971) Dir: Don Chaffey.

A Planet Much Like Earth

Part 9

by Mae Strelkov.

Wasn't the last Chapter the most insignificant one? All on the loves and hates of mere hens. Then why did I include it? It states my preoccupation with the mystery of "mere birds", from those sparrows that don't fall without the Father (not just knowing it", like some vast computer keeping statistics up-to-date, but actually gentling the fall of each tiny bird) and even the Insects the hens pick up so eagerly have their cycles in the Sun. The Whole, the tremendous, overwhelming Whole of Existence is what preoccupies me more and more. ("Father, what does it all mean?")

And the answer remains, "look at it with more attention, for the answers await you as you study it all!

When we lived in the Islas del Ibicuy, (in the Argentine Delta of the Rio Parana), I had a *chaja* that we rescued half drowned from the icy river one morning and it became a sort "mate" to me, in the sense that it wanted to invite me to make a nest it would help me guard. (I'd been weaving willow-wands Into big baskets for the bread I baked and it sat beside, me instructing me on how to weave the fronds.) It became such a guardian of us all - and our two tiny daughters back then - there never was a more brilliant, sensitive bird. During an illness of mine when I was absent from home for a long spell in 1958. I'd had a crack-up. (In-law problems had reached a crisis). Electro and insulin shock and new drugs fixed me fine in two months. I came forth ready to do battle, never again "turn the other cheek" docilely to the poor old folks and though kind to them still. But no more fawning at their feet humbly as a "Christian". It flew back Into the sky (higher and higher, for they're "ski birds"), and never returned. But from that friendship I know "bird-thoughts" and "bird-feelings" and even "bird-bliss" unique.. (Years later, during a visit to the aquarium of Vancouver, Canada, an Interlude spent in "chatting" with a beluga whale in captivity there opened for me the Intricacy and

mystery of "whale-minds" ... a special thrill such contact gives one!).

I always remember the story about Solomon, when offered to select a gift or gifts from God. He asked for understanding, and it pleased the Father well. What better gift still could anyone ask? To understand, as it says he did ... (I Kings 4:33):

"And he, spake of trees, from the cedar that is
In
Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth
out of
the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of
birds,
and of creeping things, and of fishes."

For God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart ", Note it: and what was this wisdom? The lore of all Nature evidently!

No, I shall not apologize that the topics of "mere hens", and other little and larger wild creatures also of these jungles, are to me, as important as the most crucial discussions between Washington and Moscow right now may seem to be. If a Solomon found mere birds and beasts so fascinating to discuss. I've a precedent there, haven't I?

I've come to feel that every single grain of the Universe, every atom and Electron of it, is of tremendous value, and forms an integral part of the great forward surge, to push away the Void, the nothingness of non-existence one might phrase it. In our modern way of putting things: the Ecological "Whole" is what concerns me more and more, And I look upon all that flickers or flies, crawls or leaps, with Intense attention. 'Life is so unbelievable, existence so impossible", we should never let it seem just an, everyday thing to be taken for granted, even scorned.

Right now as I type this. certain big river-birds are singing their special. song, a chorus of different cries blending together harmoniously. People say when they sing thus, "It will rain". But

this morning the skies are cloudless the sun ferocious... in nearby provinces a terrible, drought has gone on and on... they had to close the schools for the summer a month early ... 45° centigrade was the usual heat they were facing and no one could be out on the streets by day. We here are daily having 36° centigrade in the cool, breezy shade under the old carob in front of our house.

Some fifty or so pages of the former draft remain to be "re-processed", but the present version has "gone another way", and the "mood" is another... it is very hard to fit in what was told in the earlier telling, I find. Especially on this steaming hot morning, with the *cochapoya* birds singing right nearby. (*Cocha*, Quechuan for "lake or sea, *poya* obviously for "bird" ... compare the Spanish pollo, "fowl". It may be a borrowing. Quechuan and Spanish fused, I don't in this case know.)

This is so much a part of life ... rephrasing each happening, really "reshaping" it in "memory" ... one finally doesn't know where the Truth of the Past lies as Time goes by. Outside of our wide front window, now, Tony is making a mix of cement and gravel, for putting in a better floor in our little back porch, just now walled in by him, these last days. (And then we'll screen it in.) Vadim and he are discussing the task and how it can best be done. Beside mop our blue-eyed "Sea-blue" kitten - a year-and-a-half old, sits as usual. (Whenever I'm typing, she wants to be on the papers as they pile up.)

Apart from the sweltering heat right now, it's another "perfect day" ... seductive, lazy. The jungles around, the clean brisk breezes that sometimes sport by, the gurgle of water in the *acequia*, the brilliance reflected from every blade of grass and quivering leaf ... why should I be here at the typewriter and not just outdoors? I am here partly to communicate and share with friends loved and well-known, my stories which they continue to ask for. I do, this also so as to receive in return their welcome, fascinating replies and responses, so understanding!

"Science-fiction fandom has always seemed just the right size, for my needs in the Past. (Lately what with Star Trek and other s-f-fandoms swelling the ranks, "comifans" included, it can be confusing, especially at actual Conventions where thousands throng at once, pushing past each other constantly to get "somewhere". I was at such a World Convention in Washington D.C., in 1974, invited up - expenses paid - by fellow-fans so I'm speaking of something I too witnessed personally.)

But the "fandom of fanzines" remains unchanged, basically, since I first became part of it back in 1961 or 2. Some individual or other gets

a yen to "publish" buys stencils, inks, paper, and somehow acquires or borrows a duplicator, and a new fanzine is born. There have been through the last many decades countless hundreds. Always new young folk arise with the same yen. Their new zine will be "the best". (Old hands often label such new zines "crudzines", but I love to get them, for such crud-zines of beginners often develop into most beautiful, and thoughtful, publications with time.) And I love the sector on "locs" - all the letters-of-commentary. It's like attending a party of most interesting folk, each time! Opinions exchange, arguments continued... To illustrate, right now in Western Australia, a boy is beginning to publish my language study (comparing archaic Chinese with Quechuan). Another part of it will be appearing soon in a British fanzine. My letters on life here have been steadily aired in fanzines, thus, the world over) and by this medium I've had the pleasure of getting to know through exchange of letters, many hundreds of fellow-fans, both very young and some quite old. (Few as old as I am is by now. The older fans, weary, "drop out". I somehow haven't, yet...)

Of course, periodically, I "drop out of fandom ... for months I lose touch - every time one of our Great Postal Strikes inaugurated again, out here to "prove" that the Argentines don't plan to knuckle under. Under Whom? The rest of the world, apparently, beyond the confines of our territory, and so we thus render ourselves incommunicado this way. No letters reach us, no letters we might try to mail got sent. And when, months later, the post-offices sluggishly get back into operation, they are barred from action by literally "many millions of pieces of mail", in bags unending all over their depots. What do they do with all those old missives? They certainly don't send mine out -- I neither receive anything nor do my friends abroad, till we manage to pick up the thin and easily-cut "threads" again. But gradually for a few months anew, some of our mail does get sprit back and forth. Not all of it, every alas. It can make one quite embittered, as one looks around at these pitiful masses, (a population that is in many regions half-starving of late), and know that we've gone wrong not just "from the top but "from the bottom up", too. And I for one cannot fail to a lot of pin the flaw down ... any religion that employs a lot of cant and rote with big dosages of superstition ruins a people finally. Alas, alas, alas! And I loved the elegant rituals of the Church so tremendously... I grieve, indeed I do!

* * *

We are not, after all, working with Blasé in clearing out the cut lumber beside the river here, below. His promised truck did not show up, and worse, he ran off with two of our workers who'd undertaken to clear some land at so-much a hectare,

and we'd paid half in advance; then off they went without a "by-your-leave". That Blasé! He cannot shoot all his neighbours down openly, (though he'd have loved that best), but he has so many "enemies" he detests on every side, he would do them all in, at least in little ways, when he can manage it.

However, there's a little fellow with a little truck from Palma Sola, (whom we met through some *evangelicos* who buy wood for their carpentry shop – though they too are so often broke it transpires we've been giving them precious titbits of *quina* free, poor dears!), and he is now eagerly helping us out, and right now – with Tony and our four men still with us loading the truck constantly – he's going back and forth ferrying the wood for the Paper Mill as far as the roadside here above our house. It's nice to feel we're not totally dependent on Blasé to get this sort of a job done. (Turns out this trucker was padding his bill and making such good money we found ourselves with mere centavos left; on the last trip he made, somehow. It happens to agriculturists too. They send off their peppers, tomatoes, good ones! Then comes a big bill for all the expenses the buyers incurred and they, the producers, must pay the buyers, not the other way around. An example of Argentine Vivez!)

Later, one of the many huge trucks-with-trailer will have to stop by, (when we let the Paper Mill know the wood is waiting), and yet again all that great heap (about 100 cubic metres) of big and little "soft-wood" branches will have to be loaded on it by us in the same way. One makes only enough to cover all the work, (and a bit over, but we owe the Paper Company for the power-saw and gas and supplies and so on, which they quite eagerly got our kids to sign for at the start, on Blasé's advice, for the duration of the work with the bulldozer and his crew. Months later: the Paper Mill sent a loading machine with their trucks so it came out better for us.)

Our kids have learned a lot out here. They used to say, "As soon as we sell those 8 *rollos* of *quina*, we'll do this or that". (And now that *quina* has disintegrated with the floods and mould and all.) Or they'd say, "When we get a hundred *cubos* of cedar and pine down, we can start doing the swimming pool and *quincho*." (A *quincho* out here is a wide, big, open hut thatched with palm fronds, and is about the coolest place where the heat can be escaped. The *gauchos* here built their own *quincho* recently where dances are occasionally held, and all the folks who go there are out kids' good friends.)

What our kids are learning is simply this: "You can't count your chickens before

they're hatched". We kept telling them so, for we too had to learn it from sad experience. No youngster wants to face that sad fact, but the process of growing up requires it, alas.

I mentioned above our four workers at present still with us. Their combined salaries per month will come to over "three *cubos de cedro*", (if we were getting more *cedro* down right now, which we aren't), or – say, 6 or 7 *cubos* of *nogal*, for walnut, and so on. Till we have the 10 hectares for the future saplings all, all, clean, we just have to have workers in to help out (mid 1986 – Ten hectares only? We'll keep at it, for the Paper Firm this year are desperate for *fibra corta* and don't want more pine for pulp. They've too much right now. And our mountain side is full of *fibra corta* ("short fibered" woods) which we will gradually replace with cypress, pin and other good trees). Tony and Sylvia couldn't formerly visualise what a huge job it would turn out to be. (After all, some four or five hectares by now are already cleanish, just with new *tuscas* or thorn trees growing huge meanwhile for all they're worth!) "We'll have it done by January", they were saying, at the end of last year.

"I hope so," I'd say gloomily, for in my mind's eye, I saw it would take "endless time and effort"! Endless! (And before you reach the end of the task, back where you started cleaning, the land will again have turned into young jungle, densely overgrown, unless all the new saplings are in, to control the territory. I'm so sick of thorny tangles and ticks. I'm all for the new saplings now! (Mid may 1986). Really, to tame such wilderness, (and I, so wild at heart myself, wonder if it's worth it? I guess it is, after all), you don't need to replace the natural vegetation with these imports from other lands ... eucalyptuses whose ancestors came from Australia, pines perhaps from Europe or the States (I don't know the origin of their ancestral trees); and other tame species, that will be planted in ranks so closely together the natural "army" of the jungles will hardly recoup that lost territory even with its most terrible spiny and thorny weeds, vines and trees. (The "soap tree", for example, called *coronillo*, has long, poisonous thorns; it has its uses... it pods are used – after boiling – as a soapy foam for cleansing. People wash their hair with same. And there's the *garabato*, (it, I believe, is "useless"), with very fine but clinging barbs,

that wrap around you wherever you try to walk in the jungles.)

I don't usually think it a good idea for elderly parents to live on with their grown-up children. I've consistently refused invitations from my daughters-in-law to spend months at a time with them, though they may be a bit hurt (and I feel bad about it) because I insist I don't think any good can come of oldsters and youngsters living together under one roof. With the best of good will, oldsters lecture; we even say "I told you so" while trying to save our youngsters from learning by their own mistakes, which is the best way, I'm certain.

Well, our older children have always lived their own lives, once they went off to marry and have jobs of their own. It's just our youngest two, still stuck with us till now. Sylvia may marry, or she may choose single bliss to the end. Tony supposes he'll eventually marry and stay her to keep on running the place. And we? Well, we won't live forever, and when there's less of a rush to get things done, we'll vegetate more and more, probably. (Though I've still those ten volumes – half-done already – on a forgotten Stone-age religion and speech that gave us our oldest root terms the world over, to complete.)

A neighbour I mentioned, Berman, dropped by the other day to arrange to purchase some sticks (already cut) for supporting his beans, etc., and Vadim called me out to chat with him on the front porch about Chechua and Aymara. He'd lived in Peru and Bolivia for years, it seemed. He told me that a linguist in a University there told him Quechuan and Japanese are quite alike, and we discussed also the Jomon culture that has left its traces in the Americas (Central and South). I told him, "Yes, it is true that the Quechuans have that final vowel added to monosyllabic words the Chinese knew, just as do the Japanese in similar cases. But I'm thinking now of the Japanese word for a camel, *rakuda*, I think it is, and the old Chinese words for a camel were *klak* versus *to*, and R and L are interchangeable, so an older Krak-toi or the like turned into *rakuda* in Japanese, but I recall that the old Hebrew word for "camel" was *kirkarah*, or the like... KRK again, you saw?

"Quite a speech, but he followed it. (I longed to run in and fetch my books to be more exact, for my memory is vague where vowel-sounds are concerned.) He then asked if I agreed with the theory of "colonisation" (colonists coming from the Old World to the New) and I said, "It is older. It has to go back – these shared old root terms – to the last Glacial Age. It was a northern religion that left its traces in root terms found everywhere still."

He asked me if Christ was an astronaut. (Shades of Von Daniken, even here?) I said, "Rather, from a higher dimension. You do know that multiple dimensions can co-exist?"

Yes, he knew it. In short, we had a very lively chat! I thin tried telling him some of what I've told you, (re the "about 2000 Gadarene swine of Legion", one per year.)

"Our Bibles don't have all that," he complained. "You must have a special Bible. The Vatican has lots of books telling the truth of our past but they won't let anybody see them." (He got onto that topic next, declaring he's himself a good Catholic, he has his special saint, he just isn't pro-clerical. Most Catholics – barring all the dear old ladies who dote on their priests – are that way, out here! But it's the dear old ladies that count, I guess. Old ladies, like myself, however! So there *are* a few who query still, too!).

I explained to this friend that the actual stories I was discussing *are* in the Bible. (An *evangélico* friend had got rid of a stack of Spanish-language New Testaments on us – he gets tons of bibles sent him regularly by the Gideon outfit, and can't find enough recipients so he looked to us for aid.) So we gave this friend one, and he looked so disheartened. "Have you some light literature to lend to pass the time?" "We've Westerns and SF novels." "Oh, that'd be find." "But in English". "Oh, too bad. I don't know a word of English". I teased him: "Try reading that!" (Pointing to the New Testament). His face fell. Heavy reading ...

"But it's fun," I said, "if you also know archaic Chinese, you'd find all the stories in the Bible available for study in far older old Chinese symbols, which is why I enjoy it so".

Naturally, he doesn't read archaic Chinese either, so the topic was shelved, meanwhile.

Well, Berman seems to be shaping up as another entertaining, decent friend – one we can truly respect. When I first began writing this

"book" (it's first draft, months ago), he was practically a stranger to us. I, for one, had never chatted with him. As for his problem over boundary-lines with Blasé, we don't discuss it with him: we know he's waiting till his lawyer gets back from holiday to have the whole business cleared up, that's all Berman and Blasé have much in common as far as "type" is concerned. Both are young and handsome, dynamic and brilliant; hardworking and strong. But Blasé detests all that has to do with being "proper" and Berman takes it all so seriously. Blasé would like to win a feud by bullying or even by a gun. Berman turns to his lawyer, unhurriedly.

Blasé would rather "squat" till he gains "by possession" the desirable trees and *aquadas* of his neighbours' lands, than go off to work his own new vast holdings, so far distant, where feuds will be few and far between. (For any neighbours lurking there will be very simple types and easily cowed, not equal to Blasé's mettle.) Berman glories

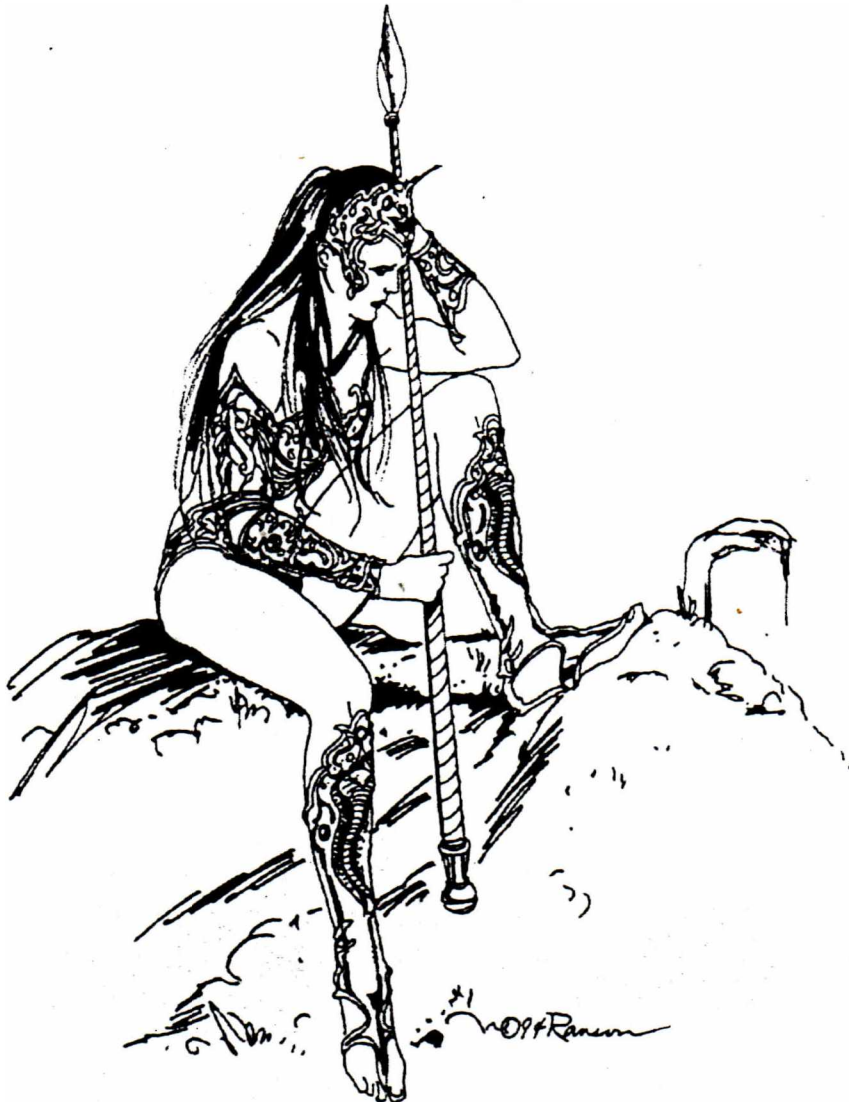
in watching things grow. His humble peons are content to have steady good and shelter and a bit of spending money too. They stay with him: don't go job-changing.

Once when Blasé tried to get Berman angry enough to fight with him physically (but Berman held his temper), Blasé boasted,

"I'm an old *maderero*." (Lumber-man). So I know best."

"And I," replied Berman unruffled, (we heard this story from others, listening in), am an old *tomatero*," (tomato-raiser). How I love that distinction: *maderero* versus *tomatero*! Lumber-man versus agriculturalist! Those are the two leading types you find everywhere out here! Throughout the country-side and all the way to Bolivia, they compete. In the terrible heat of towns further north, also, like Oran and Yuto, that to people here are "quite close" to us, the *madereros* and *tomateros* jostle their ways.

- Mae Strelkov.



Poetry, Too

TITANS ARISING

by Joseph V. Danoski

Hear the winds
That rise to even the odds –
The dying cries of our disposable gods.

A primitive and primal force
Is taking form upon the plain;
The eye of the almighty storm
That first gave shape to this terrain.

The Dragon King
Is awakening from his ancient sleep,
Because the dream has gone on too long
And deep.

Too much has grown
From the fallen bodies of the giants—
Too many false idols, in gods
And tyrants.

Hear the walls
We've built beginning to fall,
And our own chaos coming back to call.

The Titans and Leviathans
Resurfacing from seas of time;
Those old primordial shapes and forms
Arising once more from the slime.

THE SON OF ARMAGEDDON

by Joseph V. Danoski

You're the convicted victim of indecision;
That's what began the reduction and division.
Cast out to inhabit alien lands
And places without sun;
Those hypocrites all washed their hands
And thought the battle won.
But your private war,
Your secret storm
Had only just begun.

Your life the battlefield between good and evil,
A balance between life and death – God and devil.
Your life a symbol and sign of the times,
A test of flesh and steel;
You wore the stripes and double binds
Of wounds that never heal.
And the fools were warned

That you were born
To break the Seventh Seal.

It's time to gather up this legion of feelings
Like the leaves of fallen seasons,
And arise in a whirlwind like the warrior-demon.

It's time to release your forces like wild horses
In a fiery eruption,
And bring them darkness and death
From the brink of destruction.

It's time for retribution and your due season,
When false gods and prophets
Speak the truth of treason.
You've envisioned the strange new promise land,
Your will to power done;
The birth from death and desert sands
Of Armageddon's son.
The hell of war
In human form,
The house divided – One!

GROUND ZERO

By Louise Webster.

Upon Impact,
the lost star sheds tears
which rain down
upon the earth and freeze.

Mica, salt spray, lucent ice
shattered pieces of fragile glass,
jagged shreds of a broken mirror
reflecting only a mirage
of existence.

GALAXY DREAMING

by Louise Webster

The moonlight tonight
is a silvery spaceship.
From the nocturnal world
of the astral

A visitor hovers.
Drops a gossamer net
Over the sleeping world,
Pulls in drifting dreams,
And spirits them off
To another galaxy
Light years away.

UNSEEN WARS

By Ned Pendergast

Chartreuse horses with latex hooves find
silent haven within venal labyrinthian grottos
shrouded by Jupiter's errant gases, where

Unseen optic fibre warriors astride reinless
steeds flow into the billow of mist blind and
unhearing, digitized to attack at

The Great Red Spot, oval crimson battlefield,
harbinger of cosmic turbulence obscured, folded
within
gaseous clouds of ammonia and methane while

At another place, winged plant creatures cultured
on Saturn drink deeply of liquid metallic
hydrogen in
preparation for the Jovian confrontation while

Gliding menacingly in controlled orbit the war
lord Mars,
spins seeming unconcerned with patience borne
from
micro-eons of war, peace and more war than
peace while

The NASA laboratory enhanced with Hubbell orb
tumbles drunkenly within cusp of the galactic war
unseeing, unknowing, a spirit of *blithe ignorance*.

"MARTIANS WELCOME"

by Daniel S. Irwin.

"Martians Welcome" flashed
The sign at the diner.
As, indeed,
They truly were.

For our new friends have
Been found most tasty,
Basted with butter,
Once stripped of their fur.

ABNORMALITY

By Daniel S. Irwin.

Abnormality of the brain...
My visions, that is.
Now, comes another
As the path, on which I stand,
Splits in two.
The trail to the left...
Dark and foreboding.
The trail to the right...

Dismal and bleak.

A marker, by each way,
Indicates their respective
Final destinations.
Interesting...
Both read "Hell".
Where's an alien abduction
When you need one?

LOST IN TRANSIT

By Daniel S. Irwin.

"Is this the claims department?
I demand your assistance, NOW!
I've lost something in travel.
I need it badly, and how."

"Calm down, you filthy earth creature.
I'm sure, we're not to blame.
Just start at the beginning,
And, I'll gladly file your claim."

"Well, I had it before molecular transit.
And, it I dearly miss.
You Zookies better help me.
I really gotta piss."
"What mean you by this flagrant speech?
There is no reason to roar.
Tell me in brief simple terms,
What function is this for?"

It helps in the voiding of fluids,
From the human male, I mean.
And, it's used in procreation.
Hell, brother, I'm a sex machine."

"That sounds so foul and vulgar.
People are such disgusting things.
I have some objects discarded.
Would you settle for sphincter sprints?"

"Look, Zookie, you locate my 'Richard'!
Or, I'll stomp on your zilofrass!"

"Maintain yourself, earthman.
Our scanners show it up your ass."



THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE

by Pavel Viaznikov

... I decided to go to Croatia because (1) I've read an article about its ancient history, rich culture and benevolent climate, and (2) because it was quite cheap. Then, (3) my sister Kate wanted to go to a seaside for a long time already, and it is known that the Adriatic Sea near Croatia is the cleanest sea in Europe, and one of the cleanest in the world (or perhaps was - before the NATO aggression an Yugoslavia). Last but not least, (4) I got to know that it was really easy to go from Croatia to Venice.

So, I booked tickets and hotel - and at the last moment our friend Sonya Lukianenko, wife of a well-known SF writer, joined us; at that time, the hotel was fully booked, so Sonya had to stay in our double.

The flight was OK (even though the airport was NOT - it was the old Vnukovo airport in Moscow, crowded, stuffy, and inefficient). With smoking prohibited on board, the flight was even nice. When I saw lake Balaton beneath us, I suddenly felt sorry for going to Croatia, and not to Budapest where I had some really good time (I've written to you about Hungary, and hope that your readers will be able to read that story, too sooner or later). The airport in Pula [Poo-lah], again, was bad - with no air conditioning the long line to the passport control counter was a proper torture...

The hotel had no air conditioning, either. Very few hotels in Croatia have it, to that matter. It is believed that with the sea close by, with the sea breezes and pine groves around, one doesn't really need conditioned air; beeeeg mistake! There were no breezes, and the still air, though smelling of pines and fennel (of which there was a thick undergrowth), was HOT. It seemed to glow on itself with opalescent dusty white even if it was very clear.

Another thing lacking in the hotel was currency exchange service - actually, the hotel had it, but not at the time of our arrival. So, we found ourselves without money (that is, without Croatian *kunas*) - and therefore, we could not take a taxi or even a bus, or buy some water (for which we longed in the heat). We walked through hot fennel and hot wormwood grass, and through turtles' moaning (I mean birds!) - "O-o! O-o!..." - did we go, and the sun had no mercy upon us.

And, alas! no place offered currency exchange, or services for US Dollars, or by a Visa card. We passed by small cafes, shops with cans of Coke and bottles of beer behind misty glasses of refrigerating boxes... and there were policemen in basket-work chairs under a spreading chestnut tree sipping something cool and pinkish from tall glasses, and posters advertising beer and mineral water, and a puppy licking water from a small garden fountain... and we were like Hebrews in the desert, only there was no Moses to strike water out with his staff... After an hour or so we came to the central office of the Bank of Croatia - to find it closed. You see, it was Gospa, that is, the Assumption Day, and almost everything was closed for the holiday. Fortunately, there was a cambiomat near the bank, and I could exchange some money after all (as for the Visa card, we found out that it has very little use in Croatia, and there are no bankomates taking it - you have to go to a certain bank (few banks deal with Visa), stand in a line... On the other hand, they do take AmEx almost everywhere). So, we dropped at a small shop and fought dehydration with cold "Union" beer (for myself) and cold juices (for the girls). We checked prices for different tours, as we wished to see as much as possible, and went back to the hotel, this time by bus. We were tired and wanted to sleep. But we could not; another hotel, which was perhaps 1 km from our hotel, hold a 3-day non-stop rave festival. I HATE rave., especially when I have to listen to it instead of sleeping. I asked the receptionist if I could order a sound-homing missile, but unfortunately this service was not available... So we went to the beach. it was nice, cool and quiet there, as the beach was a stony bowl cut in the rocks, and we returned to our raved oven of a room at half past two in the morning. The girls moved their mattresses to the balcony, while I put mine on the floor and opened the door to the corridor, vainly hoping for a draught...

The morning saw us on the beach. Strangely, the air was cool here, and we enjoyed every breath of salty air. The water was unbelievably clear, and a big red starfish crawling among the rocks some six meters below was clearly seen. The sea life was not rich here, though: some slimy balls looking like crumpled nylon stockings, some dirty brown crabs, and strange bony balls -

obviously, shells of some creatures. And lots of sea urchins - hordes of them. Everybody going in or out of the sea had to limp on stones,, instead of walking on smooth limestone steps (natural, not cut), because the steps were found comfortable by the black sea urchins whose needles leave their points in one's flesh, causing nasty itching and inflammation. We decided that it would be safer to bathe in plastic slippers and that solved the sea urchin problem.

Then, we took a bus to the city center, had some ice cream and climbed a hill to the Citadella - a small (and not really beautiful) fortress containing the Military Museum and lots of Roman masonry work, like an amphitheatre, some gates and etc. All ruins are very tastefully enveloped in vines and make a terrific background for photos. The Military Museum, among other exhibits, displayed a hunting gun with 2-meter long barrel - I wonder, which game can be hunted with such a clumsy thing? Or was it for shooting down a game already caught and hold in place by servants?.. Another gun, with its seven barrels, looked like a proper weapon for brave Terminator, but in medieval settings.

A street which was in fact just steps going downhill, took us to the Coliseum the main landmark of the city of Pula. Only the walls survived the centuries, though furtive Venetian merchants took away all stone seats from the inside. Nowadays it is equipped with plastic chairs and again used for public amusements, for example, on the day of our arrival Jose Carreras sang there. Besides, the underground chambers, once (in the Roman times) used for keeping gladiators, now houses a museum of grape-growing and oil-making. The word "wine", many times repeated on explanation plates, made us think of going to a restaurant, and we decided for a tavern with national cuisine. Tourist booklets kept insisting that Troatian cuisine absorbed the best features of Mediterranean, Italian, Slavonic and Ottoman cuisine". The booklets praise local wines, "prschoot" - special *aged* ham "*which, like cognac, gets better with every year of aging*", seafood and Croatian vegetable soup... A tavern which we chose was quite close to our hotel, and it proved to be a small place on the ground floor of an apartment house. The tenants have to get home through the tables on the terrace. The above-mentioned tables (and the chairs) seem to come from a scrap heap - all of them are different wooden tables, once oil-painted but then scraped with sandpaper and varnished, with bits of paint left here and there beneath the lacquer. I must admit that there was a certain style in that. Soon the lunch arrived, with a plate of aged " prschoot" for a starter and clay cups with fig brandy to go

with it. There was also homemade young wine, a vegetable salad, the famous Croatian soup and baked crayfish. The waiter kept asking - "Dobre? Dobre?" ("Good? Good?") - as most Croatians he was sure that all Russians can easily understand Croatian. Which is not 2 quite so - on different excursions, we preferred English-speaking guides.

Well, the food was hardly "dobre". The fabled " prschoot" was just ham, only a bit tainted. Perhaps a gourmet who enjoys high smelling game would appreciate it, but we didn't find the dish really delicious. The salad was drowned in vinegar, and tasted of nothing but vinegar. We could not eat it. Nor could we finish the soup, which was made mostly of pearl barley which each of us hates with all our hearts... The baked crustacea were very much agreeable, though.

... The night was bad again - hot and noisy, since the rave festival was still going on. Did I say that I hate rave?.. As soon as we managed to get asleep (at about 5 AM) we jumped up to the ringing of the telephone. It was a mistake - the receptionist thought that we were going to Venice that day, but we were not. So, we decided against trying to go to sleep again and went to the beach instead. We even managed to slumber a bit there. At 9 AM, the rent-a-boat booth opened, and we hired an aquacycle. We took lunch packets from the hotel, and had our lunch in the sea, myself in the water and the girls on the vehicle. The point is, I jumped from the aquacycle to bathe but could not climb back - the boards were too high, and a special ladder behind obviously was not designed for a person of decent size. So, I managed to eat my hepatic... er... liver pate, tomatoes and processed cheese (I tried to guess what exactly process was applied to that cheese, but could not. Some alchemy, I guess) in the waves...

We spent some time just walking in the city, wondering at ancient-looking houses, at polished marble pavements, at boys selling dried shells, starfish and crabs, at leaflets announcing deaths of parishioners and at street names written in Croatian and Italian, as there are many Italians in the city. Walls are covered with ivy, and red tile roofs seem red-hot in the sun... In the evening we had an excursion to a "village party". A mini-bus took ourselves and some Italian and German tourists to the very center of the Istr peninsula, to the rich agricultural region. The family who hosted the party was running a kind of a motel ("agricultural tourism" is getting more and more popular now) and a tavern. A girl in Croatian national costume (a dress with sleeves so long that they were tied in a bow behind her back; the sleeves were cut so that the hands could be used with the sleeves serving as just a decoration) gave to each guest a small cup of plum brandy and took us to a cellar dining room - "Grandpa feels that a rain is coming", she

explained. At the cellar doors Grandpa was selling homemade liqueurs - prepared from all known fruits and herbs on 65-percent moonshine. Some were really great, for example liqueurs of peaches, pears, juniper (that one also featured a toy ladder made of juniper-wood in the bottle)... But the national cuisine here, too, was a disappointment. Here is what was promised by the tourist company and what we got in reality:

Promises	Reality
Holiday soup	Barley pearl soup. (yuck,!
Pasta with meat	Pasta with a bit of meat fibers (uninspiring)
Poultry country style	Overcooked chicken wing.
Fresh vegetable salad	Vinegar with some greens floating in it
Country pies	A couple of tiny Doughnuts (each not bigger than a plum)
Homemade wine	Homemade vinegar (without greens in it)
Croatian folk dances & songs	- An accordionist (solo) playing German and Italian tunes

The wine was lousy, but I must admit that it was served in abundance - as soon as a carafe was empty, the long-sleeved girl hastened to bring a new one. So in the end everybody became happy enough.

I went out to have some fresh air, and observed a rather comic (if a bit cruel) scene: a boy brought a fish head and impaled it on a rose bush. Then a young cat arrived and started trying to get the fish. In the end, the poor creature climbed the thorny brunch and got its prize...

Next day, we decided to go to Briuni islands - a famous Croatian natural reserve, once a residence of Marshal Tito. We bathed and departed by taxi to the town of Fazana, mostly known because that's where ferry boats to Briuni start from.

We wanted to go by ourselves, without messing with an excursion, -- just to bathe there, to see ancient ruins and safari park, perhaps to have lunch at Briuni Hotel (it was built for Austro-Hungarian aristocrats in the 19th Century, and was famous for excellent climate and for three taps in each bathroom - for cold water, for hot water and for sea water...). Unfortunately, that proved to be impossible. Unless one is a guest of the hotel or one of the VIP villas he cannot go on his own there. You must walk only with your guide, bathing is strictly prohibited (except for the hotel guests), entering the hotel is permitted for hotel guests only, etc. So, upon arrival at the islands we were locked in tiny and hot auto-train and had to enjoy the nature from within those wheeled tin cans with dusty plastic windows. Well, everybody opened car doors in spite of the guide's orders and could breathe and see after all.

The nature does not look very unique there, except in the safari park where there they keep lots of different animals including some exotic antelopes imported especially for Marshal Tito - since their meat is the most healthy meat among all mammals. The safari park was originally organized in the last century, as was the local zoo, with pits instead of cages; only the zoo is uninhabited now. They say, there was an epidemic several years ago, during the Bosnian war. The war itself directly affected only the South of Croatia (which is by the way separated from the main part of the country), still indirect influence was experienced all over the Balkans. (That is one of the reasons why I wish that the Nato copperheads get their asses kicked in Yugoslavia; I don't think much of President Miloshevic, but the aggression is sure to disrupt economy and ecology of this heavenly part of Europe, affect the Europe's unification and the world political system... I say, why doesn't NATO drop bombs on Istanbul which does with Kurds what Belgrade does with Albanians (by the way, the Kurds are native in Northern Turkey while the Albanians in Kosovo are not). Why London does not experience attacks of cruise missiles and clumsy (but still deadly for the Serbs whose weapons are quite obsolete) FI 17 flying coffins" - I think that some of the Irish would enjoy it... Well, back to Croatia).

We saw very romantic ruins of the Venus Temple - several pillars and marble steps going in a lagoon; an olive tree which is more than 1600 years old; some Byzantine ruins and a Romanian fort. Also, we saw the Marshal Tito Museum and Zoology Museum (or rather Hunting Museum, since more than half of the exhibits are Marshal Tito's trophies).

From Fazana to Pula we went by bus, and had to wait for it for almost one hour, which we spent in nature studies - we observed an anthill and the ants' behavior. Very educative.

... That night, at about 2AM, a representative of the tourist company called us and warned that our excursion to Slovenian caves of Postojna was cancelled because there were not enough tourists who bought that tour. So, she said that she is sorry (she could not get us earlier) and in the morning she arrived to reimburse our money and to offer us an individual tour of the Istr peninsula. It proved to be even less expensive than the cancelled bus tour, so we got a car from Hertz, driver included, and took off. The first town on our route was Vodnjan, where we were to see St. Blaise Cathedral. (We stopped at the entrance for some time because the girls noticed some brightly colored fluttering creatures over flower-beds; the girls were sure that those were hummingbirds, while I insisted on the insect theory, on the grounds that humming-birds are not native to the Adriatic region. As for the cathedral, it is mostly famous for its rich

collection of holy relics - some of them just brown bones in glass vessels, decorated with coquettish ribbons and bows, but there are also very well-preserved remains of several saints, of which the most famous is St. Sebastian. Now, in some places like Trinity Monastery caves in Kiev or in Capuchin Crypt in Brno, special climate is responsible for preservation of the bodies, but in St. Blaise Cathedral the climate is quite ordinary...

After the gloomy relics we needed something more joyful, so we went to the beautiful town of Rovinj - the "tourist pearl of Croatia". It was difficult to find a parking place, so the driver let us out near the city Aquarium and drove off, promising to pick us up in a couple of hours. We walked, and it was fun. The city (as we found out later, when climbed the belfry of the city cathedral) looks like a big butterfly spreading its wings on the blue of the Adriatic. The central street is like the butterfly's belly, and the two walled parts of the town, with their semi-circular streets, starting and ending at the main street, form the wings.

The town is very nice, with small passages suddenly becoming steep steps leading down to the water, with medieval architecture and lots of small cosy restaurants. We dropped at one of those; we just couldn't pass a place with a fully dressed diver in copper helmet standing at the bar. It was of course a dummy; still, it looked swell. He place was decorated With various "antiques" - from old photos and oil lamps to typing machines and details of sailships' rigging... After a plate of baked mussels and a pitcher of excellent white wine (good but considerably more expensive than in Pula), we continued our walk to the cathedral, enjoyed the view from the belfry and finished our walk at the aquarium, which was small and poorly kept.

Our next stop was Lim Channel. An interesting fact is that nobody knows whether it is a natural or an artificial channel - or both (a natural one but improved by men). It's a long and rather wide bay, not a passage - it has a dead end, and is mostly used for growing oysters (a man at the gates of a restaurant on the channel called them "ostrich", so for some time we were quite puzzled). These oysters are considered best in the Adriatic, and Mediterranean region.

In the next city - Porec [Poh-rechl] - we did not have much time and could spend only ten or fifteen minutes in the famous Byzantinean basilica with beautiful mosaics. Then we drove straight to the Baradin caves. We were going along the seaside but did not see the sea - the beaches are walled, as it's the biggest in Europe naturist camp site. Croatia, by the way, is naturists' paradise - with lots of naturist beaches,

camp and hotels both on the mainland and on numerous islands... Well, the caves were great except it was quite tiresome to walk down and, especially, up the caves.

The first hall is known as the Toad-Hall, in honour of four toads who fell in once and stayed there; the guides know the toads "by the face" and call them Lily, Jake, Annette and Noname. The Toad Hall is just a hole in the ground, while other halls offer fantastic decorations of stalactites and stalagmites, stalagmates, stone balconies, bridges, wells and pillars. Our guide was giving explanations in English, German and Italian, and it was funny to hear that while in English he compared the limestone figures with open books, swords, draperies and curtains, banners and church organ, in Italian same wonders were described as pizzas, pasta, lasagne, ravioli and etc. (I don't know Italian but it was quite clear - he mentioned all that food, showing same things). Pity I didn't know this method when I showed an Italian friend the places of interest in Moscow - next time I'll try to compare Kremlin with a pizza or something...

A narrow but deep lake in the caves is home for blind cave protei - that's a kind of amphibia. One of them lives in a shallow pool, covered with a wire net, so that the visitors could see it. It's like a pale, thin lizard... even though it's blind, it still feels light, squirms in flashlight beam and tries to escape from it. Only there's nowhere to escape.

The last town which we saw that day was Vale, or Bale [Vah-leh I Bah-leh] (it has two names, one Italian and the other one Croatian). It is, in fact, a fortress on a hill, with all houses connected to each other so that it is, in essence, a giant single building. It is very beautiful and romantic, too, with its narrow passages, stone arcs and embrasure-like windows.

Next day we went to Venice. First, we were taken by bus to Porec, where a rapid catamaran "Prince of Venice" was waiting for us, with an ugly look on its insectoid "face". The boat did look frightening. On the inside, it was quite comfortable, though. Two families were left ashore - they thought that since the excursion permits one-day visit to Venice without a visa, they do not need their passports, either; which was a mistake. The sea voyage was not really interesting - just three hours of water. Then, there was Venice. Well, I dreamed of going there for a long time - but was disappointed a lot. St. Mark Square was crowded like Moscow metro in rush hours; no wonder that the city's drowning under such burden. The fabled cathedral was nice, but... not really inspiring. Even less inspiring was its belfry - though the view from its top was great. As was the lift boy - a man in his fifties, looking much like Igor, the servant of Baron Victor Frankenstein in the old movie (the one With Boris Karloff). One minute before the bells of the

tower clock started telling hours, we managed to get in the elevator and escape from the tower - even from below the ringing was deafening! Do not ask for whom the bells toll - they are tolling for your ears... From the tower, the square and the palaces looked as if infested with zillions of cockroaches - which were in fact doves. Disgusting birds - silly, cruel, fat and untidy, real flying rats (only rats are clever). The guide told us of different landmarks - a crocodile figure (on which St. Mark stands) was brought from India, the famous Venetian lion was shipped from Persia (Venetians cut off its wings and replaced a sword in its paw with a book), four horses "symbol of Venetian freedom" - were imported from Turkey... Well, stolen or bought, all foreign artifacts found their place in Venice, making its unique countenance.

We walked around a bit and then visited a small glass factory close to the square. Most glass workshops are on Murano island, but this one is in Venice - as a tourist attraction. Our guide kept telling us that it is in this shop where they make some special glass horses, which are mostly shipped to Japan and cost there a lot. Here, she said, only their company has the right to sell these horses, and only in the sea - in the duty free zone. Then we saw how these horses and glass vases are made; the maestro made a horse in less than one minute, and it took him a minute and a half to make a vase. Not because it's an easy job, but because he is very experienced. It looked like a magic trick and we enjoyed it immensely. After the shop, most people went to have lunch, but we chose to walk around: a lasagna is a lasagna is a lasagna, no matter in Venice or in Oslo (we would try something Venetian like a squid "black risotto" (in squid's own ink) or something like that, but the menu was pre-arranged) while you can walk Venetian streets only in Venice. Unfortunately, most of "dry" Venice (that is, its streets, not channels) are narrow and all you can see is shops and restaurants in the ground floor. Still, I made some excellent pictures in Venice... The road back to the "Prince of Venice" & paid for all. we went by water-taxi along the Grand Channel, which is really one of the best townscapes in the world. Pity that we had only five hours here - it seems that to get to know Venice even a little one must spend there at least a week...

On our way back, the guide started selling glass horses. \$10 apiece. Exclusive bargain, with same horses costing \$45 each in Japan. Many people were lured into buying these horses which can be used only as an absolutely useless present to somebody... if you do not break it in the plane, going home.

On our last day in Croatia, we went to Plitvice lakes [pleet-vee-tse]. The road was most

tiresome - five and a half hours in a bus one way; but it was also interesting. For example, there was a terrific view from Uchka pass between two mountain tunnels; then the road went along the coast, so we saw several Adriatic isles, of which the biggest is Krk (no vowels!). Krk's western coast is covered with resorts, there is some industry in the North, while the south-eastern part of the island is bare and almost lifeless because it is regularly swept by cruel storms which bring lots of salty sea-water. They say that storms are very dangerous in certain places of the Adriatic, among the isles, where the wind turns water into foam, aerating it and thus diminishing the water's density. A boat can easily lose floatability here and drop underwater... alternatively, a man in a boat can suffocate in the wind which is very strong, carries lots of salty water-drops and causes abrupt drop of air pressure. Many islands are uninhabited, some of them just bare rocks; some house hotels and resorts (many of them naturist, as I have already mentioned).

Perhaps the most interesting place on our way was Bakarska bay. Its northern coast is adorned with a high lonely chimney. It belonged to a coke-producing factory once, and the coal for it was shipped by sea. When the communist government was down, so was the factory - it was calculated that a resort here would be much more economically effective than the factory, so the factory was disassembled and the territory around cleaned. The brick chimney remained, though - it was found too expensive to pull it down. Now it's but a landmark. The opposite coast is notable for terraced vineyards which produce grapes mostly for sparkling wines. Beneath the vineyards there are tilted masts on bracing ropes. Those are fishermen's watch-towers; watchmen were lying on tops of the masts, and, when they saw a school of fish, they gave signal to their fellows in the boats.

(By the way, why do they say "a school of fish", but "a flock of birds", "a *herd* of cattle", "a pack of wolves", "a *crowd* of people"... "a *bevy* of (???)" and "a *shoal* of fish (again!)"?)

Then the bus began climbing a winding mountain road. We stopped at a restaurant and had a lunch - it was accompanied With fresh lake water, unusually clear and tasty. Then we were invited to electric buses and the excursion began - it is forbidden to use any other engines here, as well as to do anything else which could harm the lakes. The first lake which we saw fascinated us with its bright emerald water - the colour, emerald in some lakes or bright blue in others, comes from the limestone bottom, which also clears water in this lake system better than any man-made filter could do. The tourists have to walk by a special path, paved with logs, and it is forbidden to leave that path. Cascades, waterfalls, rapids, rivulets and springs, groves and bushes of colorful plants, rocky formations and

fallen trees in the pools, covered with water-weeds and looking like corals, make a breathtaking impression. The Grand Waterfall is perhaps not really grand if compared to the world's greatest waterfalls, it's just 78 meters high, but together with surrounding rocks and vegetation it looks better than it could if it was designed by the best landscape designers in the world... We spent five hours in the natural park, but I wish I could spend at least a month there. This is perhaps the best natural sight which I ever saw, perhaps the best sight of all. The air is very clean, too, and the forests are mostly undisturbed - due to strict regulations and Draconian, merciless fines for each and every violation thereof.

... Next morning we bathed and departed to Moscow. In the airport duty free shop, I asked an attendant which local, Istrian drink I should buy as a souvenir. He advised a mistletoe liqueur on grappa, and an aged grappa. I asked which was better, in his opinion. The man explained, that he, personally, was without prejudices and enjoyed a glass of grappa in the morning and a glass of mistletoe liqueur for the night-cap. I wondered, whether a glass of 50% alcohol in the morning gave him headaches, but the man retorted convincingly, that to avoid headache one must also have a glass of "Nine Grasses Liqueur" at midday! So, I bought all three; and all three proved to be a great bargain later. I never followed the man's schedule of drinking, though.

And then, we returned to rainy, cold and crisis-stricken Moscow...

Then... I shall tell you how we went to the old Russian town of Myshkin...

The decision to go to Myshkin came to us all of a sudden, when somebody presented a new mouse to writer Sergey Lukianenko. Sergey and his wife Sonya enjoy mice, they keep a triplet of pet mice in a cage, regularly take their kid mice to a pet shop and collect toy mice. Now, somebody remembered that there is a Mouse Museum in Myshkin, and everybody decided that it was perhaps a good idea to go there. So, we contacted them via Internet, hired a guide (a schoolteacher), and then also hired a Ford Transit van for us (there were 15 of us). Next Saturday, at 8 AM, we started.

The voyage was more or less dull until we had to make a stop. The van drove off the road... and immediately sunk into the sand. The sand looked strong enough and was intended to represent the side of the road. Yet, it worked almost like quicksand - the van was sitting on its belly, wheels and all in the sand. We tried to dig with some planks found in the ditch at the side of the road, we pushed things under the wheels (like tree branches or pieces of a rusted remains of a

derelict car - perhaps, our predecessors failed to get out... There were no bones, but then, those could have been eaten by wolves and ravens. We were close to despair, as the road was empty and there were no signs of human settlements. We were rescued only about an hour later by a guy in an old Russian-made Moskvich which astonished us by pulling our Ford Transit out of the sand-trap (of course we all, except ladies, were pushing the van and we dug trenches for the wheels, with tree branches and planks in them).

About ten kilometers after the treacherous sand, the road suddenly turned into a kind of a testing ground for cross-country ability. For tanks, most probably. This was a concrete surface, but the concrete was full of big, angular stones. We had to move very slow, less than 20 km/h, for almost one more hour. Then, we turned to another road with lots of churches at its sides. After each two or three kilometers there were churches - most of them deteriorating or already ruined, but nevertheless very beautiful. One -of -them, with a masonry main floor had a wooden belfry, which was sadly leaning over the neglected cemetery, almost 300 from the vertical... A village that once used to crowd around this church, was now a ghost one, houses ruined, burned or just slowly rotting with their windows blocked with nailed planks. It was a very sad place.

At last, we came to a high post with a coat-of arms, showing a shield with an upright (in Russian heraldry this is called "roaring", as opposed to "running", "sitting" or "laying") bear, proper, bearing a halberd, in the field of gold, on the upper half (for the Yaroslavl province), and a golden running mouse on the field of red, below. The mouse gave name to the town: "Myshkin" means "Mouse Town" (from Russian "mysh" - "mouse"). An old legend says that one of Russian princes (a knyaz) wanted to repose in the woods where he went hunting, dozed off but was awakened by a field-mouse which ran across his face. The angry prince jumped up and wanted to stomp on the impudent little beast, but suddenly he saw a viper coiling right where his head was a moment before. The prince decided that the mouse was sent to save him, and commemorated the miraculous salvation by building a small chapel in the name of his patron saint; one of the icons showed the mouse awakening the prince.

A small village soon sprang up around the chapel, and in 16th century the place was given the town status. It was a typical Russian "countryside town", a centre of an agricultural region and a market-place. Conveniently situated on the high banks of Volga river, it became a provincial trading centre but the development of railroads which even today do not come to Myshkin, the town remained a small and quiet backyard place. Which is good -

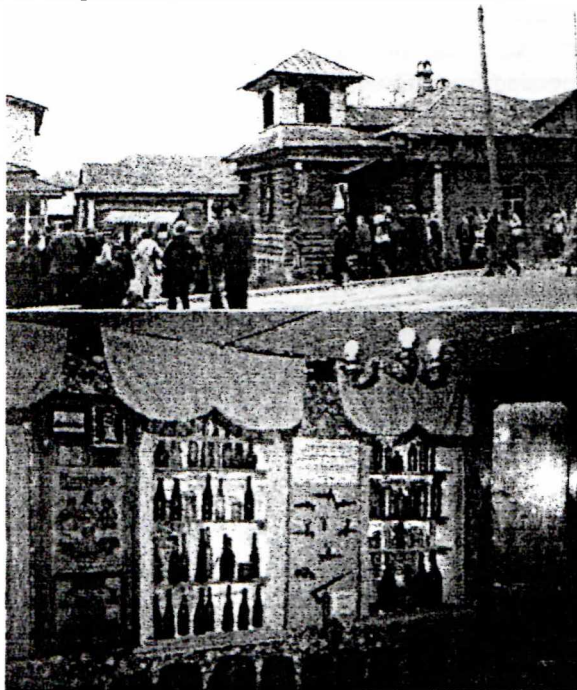
Myshkin never saw the "great construction sites of socialism" and retained its provincial charm.



Post near the Myshkin town museums complex, with the town's coat of arms.

The "main door" to Myshkin always was, of course, its pier - or, rather, wharf, as it saw more cargo than passengers. A short but carefully paved street leading from the pier consisted of substantial stone houses of rich merchants, and ended near the domed cathedral of the Assumption of the Mother of God. The cathedral, after the 1917 revolution, was of course turned into a "House of Culture" - a propaganda center. The belfry and crosses were pulled down, and instead a monument to Lenin was erected in front of the ex-cathedral. The Bolshevik leader in this market town looks like a merchant: he is plump, complacent and, instead of pointing his hand to the "bright communist future", stands with one hand behind his back and the other one on his belt. A merchant looking down to Volga, where his barges are moored. Behind the statue, a small kiosk offers local vodka and honey. Across the street from Lenin, there was the city museum - a vast yard with several buildings. At the entrance, several babushkas (old ladies) were selling sunflower seeds, goat-fluff shawls, valenki (felt boots) and, of course various, toy mice. Our guide Tatyana was waiting for us there. Tatyana is a schoolteacher and at her spare time works in the museum. The museum is an amateur one, and only two guards work on salary, the rest, from the director (and founder) of the museum, to the guides, restorers and keepers, are volunteers.

First of all, we were taken to the museum of Smirnov (and Smirnoff) vodka. In fact, Myshkin is the birthplace of the first Smirnov of the dynasty. (By the way, the Smirnov vodka never was the best in Russia, but surely it was and is one of the most famous. As for Smirnoff, the Smirnov who sold the brand rights to USA hardly had right to do so. American Smirnoff is more smooth and clear, good for making cocktails, yet for drinking straight, Russian Smirnov is doubtlessly better). The exposition shows bottles of all shapes and sizes, stills, and various documents relating to vodka distilling, bottling and selling. As I mentioned above, outside there is a shop selling local brands of vodka, Smirnov among them. A dusty Smirnoff bottle sadly sits in the corner - it's too expensive for this small town where average salary is 15 USD per month, and tourists prefer to buy, as souvenirs, local brands, some of them very good. There are vodkas scented with lemon, birch-buds and oats, honey, pepper, black currants, rowan berries, cherries, apples, and whatnot. In the old days, Russian landlords used to brew their own vodka, composing collections of distilled concoctions usually based on alphabet. Their guests of honour were offered rows of bottles, containing Apple, Blackberry, Cherry, Dandelion, and Etc., at least one kind for each letter of the alphabet (but more often several kinds).



The museum complex of Myshkin and a room in the Smirnov(ff) Vodka Museum

Then, we saw a pond. It was small, but said to be over 10 m deep. They say, that there is a merchant's treasure hidden on the bottom, but a diver who tried to look for whatever was down there, could not see anything in thick silt. Probing the silt with a hook, he pulled out a heap of rusted guns - the nearby police station, existing for at least 150 years there, used to dump confiscated (during the Civil war of 1918-1921) weapons into this pond,

if they could not be used by the Red Guards. Once, a boy with a video camera fell in; his father saved the kid but the camera found its eternal rest on the bottom, where 'the guns once used to be. Perhaps, it will be one day found by future explorers...

Next to the pond, there were a museum of carpenters' everyday life and work (Myshkin's carpenters were famous all around the Yaroslavl province for solid and richly decorated with carvings log houses), and an exhibition ground for old machines. There were a couple of lorries, one of them the first Soviet AMO-3-F truck; the first Soviet snow-clearing machine with ominous "teeth", a locomobile (a steam engine for providing power to various agriculture machines like winnowers, threshers, flax-rumplers, and etc.). A propeller-sleigh, a river tug and an anti-aircraft gun topped the list.

Then, there was the main building with some findings from stone-age sites, with wooden sculptures from ruined churches, pottery, goods of local craftsmen - among those there were even... tin galoshes. When the WWI almost stopped the delivery of rubber (and the existing stocks were claimed by military industry), the locals invented overshoes with wooden soles and tin tops! The museum looked a bit eclectic, but very interesting. A special room imitated a house of a Volga pilots, very important people in a town which always depended from navigation.



"Museum village" within the town museum complex: a house, a bath, barns and etc.

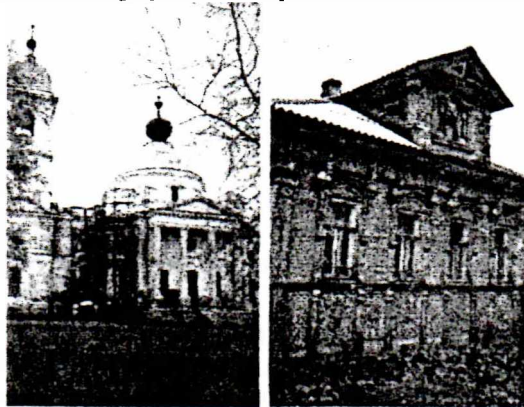
After that, we asked for a break and used this break for buying mice. As one more of my friends collects toy mice, I purchased a small herd (or shall it be a flock or a pack?) of nine heads, all very cute. There were clay mice with a slice of cheese, mice hiding in felt shoes (we will yet talk about shoes, even if we omit kings, cabbage and sealing-wax); mice with cats on leads, coquettish lady mice sprawling on frivolous settees, spillbergous mousezaurs; mice-saltshakers, mice-paperweights and mice-paper-clippers, mice-cups and micreamers... The mouse business is a good idea; not too many people would be ever attracted by a provincial museum, but as a centre of

mousism, having the only museum of mice in Russia, Myshkin has quite a lot of guests... The museum itself, though, was not very impressive - my friend's collection is bigger and includes real rarities like a Kuznetsov porcelain egg with two mice, or a handmade silver thimble with a tiny mice on it. I think I should send them a mouse or two!

Then Tatyana took us to the uptown. With Myshkin, "uptown" and "downtown" mean exactly what they sound - half of the town is on the high bank, and the other half below the high slope, immediately near the water. The streets consist of old, cosy houses with geraniums behind the nicely framed windows, and each house bears a plate indicating when it was built, by whom and who owned it. The most interesting inhabitants (like known merchants, craftsmen or municipal officers) who ever lived there also are mentioned on the plates.

Soon we saw an impressive cathedral; it is very unusual for a "rural town" to have two cathedrals. The story says, that once the governor of Myshkin decided to have a new church-constructed in the upper part of the town, ~the Governor's house (which by the way was looking very impressive and had two facades, one facing the river and the second one the street). The Zemstvo (town council representing different social groups of the population) agreed, especially since the existing cathedral was under the high bank, and the town wanted a church which could be seen from afar. They invited an Italian architect and ordered a church; but when the architect showed his drawings, they were for an impressive cathedral! The merchants were disappointed at first, but then one of them threw his cap on the floor (a gesture of a reckless decision) -

"Well, gentlemen, we are not worse than the guys in St.Petersburg here! Aren't we ready to pay for a nice cathedral in our town?". So they pulled out their wallets, and paid not only for the project and construction, but also for hiring well-known (for painting frescoes in the St. Isaac Cathedral in St. Petersburg) painters to paint icons on the walls.



The "uphill" cathedral and a typical log house with carved decorations.

In the old governor's house, there is a tea-room with *bliny* (pancakes) and tea from Russian samovar, and a museum of felt shoes. The town has a long tradition of making excellent, strong and nice felt boots, which are made by hand with almost no machinery involved, and sometimes wittingly decorated with ornaments (including mouse motifs, of course). Prices for felt shoes are surprisingly low, too.

By the way, the prices surprised us all the way. For example, in the town's only restaurant (for some reason called "Lotus", not "Mouse") the most expensive course was 17 Rouble 50 kopecks - that is, about US60c. The restaurant did not seem to prosper, yet the food was quite good and the only waiter, a nice old lady, was all smiles and cordiality. Thus, we helped local catering business but could do nothing for the local Ritual Service Bureau (i.e. the undertaker's) located next door (and same building!) from the restaurant. Believe it or not, the funeral office in Myshkin really occupies premises in the restaurant building. It's not a -Mortuary, of course Just an office but still, it's sod of weird, isn't it?

The house next to the restaurant is now the local ambulance station, and once it was a house of a poor aristocrat - a really poor one. Once, the man disappeared for a whole year, just to come back as a Gypsy Baron! Now, he was doing quite well and also had a beautiful Romany girl, daughter of the previous Baron (the title is derived from Romany "baro" - chieftain, leader). After the Bolshevik revolution, when most noblemen and rich people were exiled to Siberia (if they were lucky) the man escaped purges. As a Gypsy, he was considered a "friendly social element", and the new authorities just confiscated most of his possessions. The baron made friends with a bottle and used to scold his wife for not knowing how to steal or tell fortune: "were you brought up as an ordinary Romany girl, and not as the chieftain's daughter, we could now live on your skills!". Naturally, the women retorted, pointing out to the baron's own lack of any practical skills... Interesting enough, that their descendants still live in one wing of the ambulance station and work there.

On our way home, we made a brief stop in the ancient city of Uglich, famous for being the place of assassination of young Prince Dmitry, legal heir to Ivan the Terrible. After the boy's death, there were several impostors who proclaimed themselves to be Dmitry. One of them even managed to rule Russia, with help of the Polish nobility and army, for some time (there is also a hypothesis that this was after all the real

prince, who managed to escape from his murderers). Anyway, the Uglich Kremlin is very beautiful, and the view to Volga is great, too. So we had a very nice and interesting day...

One more thing: I would like to boast a bit. At the *Strannik-2000 convention*, I was awarded the Strannik ("Wanderer") prize, a cute bronze figurine of a striding man in a long hooded cloak, with a sword, a walking stick and a sword. (You can read about this convention on Louis Boujold's site in Internet). Here are two photos - myself with the award, which I got for the translation of Frank Herbert's DUNE.



Above, all the Strannik award winners, including American guests. Below, me, the Strannik award, and DUNE in Russian.



THE R&R DEPT

PAULINE SCARF, Sydney, NSW.

Loved TM 94. Though it was the last issue so far. Particularly like the cover. It reminded me of my short story APPETITE.

My favourite story was Meryl Brown Tobyn's BEYOND THIS WORLD. I wonder whether a person's spirit can look back & see what their family & friends are doing. Anyway I thought it was an interesting idea.

I enjoyed THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE & Mae's pages as always. Am glad she is to put her writings into a book. Good luck with it Mae!

Lots of comments from the R&R DEPT.

(21 Mar 99)

ROD MARSDEN, PO Box 19, Spit Junction, NSW 2088.

THE MENTOR #94 carries a nice article on Japanese animation. Nice little devil on page 10. HUMAN BEHAVIOUR by Richard Reeve was a bit too cosmic for my tastes. The mermaid on page 19, however, was cute. HIGHEST GROUND by Peter Brodie with it's O'Henry ending was well written SF. Good choice. Brodie's poetry isn't bad, either. Meryl Brown Tobyn's poem, however, sank without trace. Richard Reeve's poems, especially A PAGE OF HAIKU were real gems. MADAME MONIQUE'S BONETIÈRE was a little off centre but I liked it anyway. (Maybe I liked it because it was off centre).

WHITMAN PRESS & FANTASY FICTION by Sean Allan Wallace was interesting. There seems to be so much more to our past in SF than the general public knows about. A lot, no doubt, has been lost.

I had to laugh at Buck Coulson's view of my opinion of Australian women. Since I wasn't jumped on by every woman reader I will take it for granted that what I said was tragic but true. Australian women *do* have a hard time saying no, thank you. In fact it is a definite that there are some Australian women who would rather bludgeon the poor bastard to death with a rock than say no thank you to an offer they wish to decline. It is very tragic, very sad. Otherwise, they're quite intelligent.

I hope life gets better soon for all your Russian readers and friends. If the USA isn't careful and more helpful Russian democracy may come to an end very soon. This would be awful for all of us. Already there is fear of blackmarket Russian weapons getting into the wrong Middle Eastern

hands. No, I'm not just talking about nukes. There are diseases developed by both Russian and American scientists over the past 50 years that make atomic devastation pale by comparison. Such weapons are not only easily made and very effective but easily portable, too. What could wipe out a whole city can nowadays be carried in a bottle of perfume by an unsuspecting tourist visiting a foreign country. Pretty scary stuff. Thank goodness the Middle Eastern nut-cases are still playing around with nerve gas and conventional bombs. Mind you, nerve gas proved to be disastrous for one Middle Eastern village some years ago. It's bad but not as bad as what could be out there. What could be in the wrong hands.

I disagree with Brent Lillie. MARS ATTACKS! can't hold a candle to MEN IN BLACK. The only thing I hate about MEN IN BLACK is the jigger-boo, rap-rap (let's go again, bring!) rap (%\$#@***) music (reverb, reverb, lets screw up that record) and it came at the end when the movie was all over and I was leaving the cinema anyway. Only I was leaving in more of a hurry. If the black guy is dressed so cool why can't he be into jazz or jazz rock? Now that's cool! Not this modern crappola. (23 Mar 99)

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

In my last loc I meant to add a more serious comment on Darren Goossens' last instalment of his history of science. He referred rather light-heartedly to the warmongers' going ahead with the atomic bomb in spite of a chance that it could literally set the world on fire. The real story is really quite hideous. Calculations showed that a nuclear explosion could react with the nitrogen in the air and set off a worldwide chain reaction. That had them worried, but then they decided to go ahead on working out that there was a chance of only three in a million of that. Now, I don't know whether that chance was a quantum probability or just the uncertainty of their theory, nor whether later knowledge has removed this risk, but whatever the case, a chance of even three in a million of destroying the Earth is one hell of a monstrous risk to take, especially just for the sake of being able to kill far more people far more efficiently and even more horribly. Decades ago I read a science-fiction story based on that, set somewhere in the middle of the United States with some scientists awaiting the test of some new weapon thousands of miles away in the Pacific. This bomb converted matter totally to energy and there was a chance that it could start a chain

reaction with the Earth's crust and thus destroy the whole planet. And they were waiting there wondering whether this would happen, calculating who long it would take the destructive wavefront to reach them! It's unbelievable that anyone could seriously take such a risk, and yet along with everybody else I accepted that idea for much of my life. We must be truly insane.

I'd like to point out to Mae Strelkov that I think I'm much the same as I've always been at least over the last fifteen or twenty years. I'm no touchier than I used to be; rather I'm just touchy about some things. I tend to be very touchy about people writing letters complaining, not about some thing I've written or printed, but about what I allegedly "never" write. Like, I'm never funny, provide no light relief, or make endless laments on weather – that sort of thing. Unjust sweeping generalisations. A few people got quite offside with me by writing me that kind of crap over the last few years. I know Mae liked me as Michael of Matala, but I now call myself Michael from Mountains. Sorry, but I can't stand still; one must move on.

By the way, has anybody out there got a recording of Judy Collins singing "Michael from Mountains"? I've heard that version of the song only 1½ times (once and a half). The first time was in a bus outside the Timna copper mine near Eilat, Israel, back in 1970, the other time maybe last year on ABC FM during an interview with that scientist I thoroughly dislike, Richard Dawkins (of selfish gene fame), and pathetically they only played a bit of the song. I have Joni Mitchell singing it as well as Judy Collins singing "Both Sides Now", which, I believe, is another Mitchell song.

I'm afraid you've mangled my letter with some of your typos. I don't mean you've misspelt some words as much as that you've substituted different words from the ones I wrote. For a start, in column 1 on page 64 the three words "strine public opinion" should be in the one paragraph.

In column 1 on page 65 "along" should read "alone", "random" read "ransom", "way" read "war", and "university" "universe".

(29 Mar 99)

JOHN ALDERSON, Maryborough, VIC 3465.

I am a bit surprised that Julie Vaux supposes that Continental epidemics must "surely have crossed the Channel"; I thought her reading of Dark Age sources would have given her definite information. After all, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle mentions many at to the Irish and Scottish chroniclers, stating that as many as one third of the inhabitants dies and occasionally they had two epidemics to a generation. Also, the rising sea-level and temperature added to epidemics whilst floods and tidal bores (one alone wiped out 30,000) also helped reduce the population.

Vaux may sneer at my library and say it is lacking in "archaeology of the Dark Ages". My library is vast and unwieldy and I measure my

archaeological books by the yard. For her information I am a Fellow of the Scottish Society of Antiquities and a Life Member of the Royal Archaeological Institute. Archaeology is no better than the history on which it is based, and without a good historical foundation archaeology is a mere enumeration of potsherds, and is utterly useless to determine matters of linguistics and can only confirm history's affirmation of a movement of people. Vaux takes the English "politically correct" view of English history, based as it is on shocking racism. Back to the original documents, Julie. Bluntly, there are none, they are like the one which supplied the information about the Anglii ... Alfred, five centuries after their supposed invasion and all subsequent references are taken without checking from this 8th Century source. They were unknown on the Continent.

Vaux's references to Saxony and Belgic Gaul are hopelessly confused, she is mixing two different peoples who may have both been referred to as wearers of a peculiar type of garment. In the second century the shores of Flanders and the opposite one of England were called "the Saxon shores" and the Roman appointed an official, "the Count of the Saxon Shore" to put down piracy by these "Saxons". Now, at this time the Germanic Saxons did not even feature on the maps of Germania in Wightman's GALLIA BELGICA, and the author states that the major invasion by the Germanic people crossed the frozen

Rhine on the 31st December, 406 and only Jerome mentions the Saxons in a letter. I am not talking about these Germanic Saxons who were separated from the Baltic by the Wents or Ghents and were almost certainly land-lubbers who had never seen the sea, let alone invade England.

The Belgic Celts of whom I am talking would have been so named by their Gaulish neighbours, and they would certainly not have referred to themselves as "trouser-wearers". In Ireland and Scotland they were referred to as "Fir Bolg" or bag men, and *bolg* is the same word as *belg*. Refer to MacLellan ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE GAELIC LANGUAGE. These Belgic Celts settled the east coast, the Home Counties and the southern coast (refer to Herbert, for example) and the southern Britons referred to them as the "ones with sacks" or Saxons. The "ing" names along the southern coast refer to enclaves of the aboriginal inhabitants, the Gaels, that is "an Gael". The Saxon invasion of England began in the second or first century B.C. and there was no invasion of either Jutes or Angles. What had happened of course was a sea-level rise which flooded much of East Anglia and the coastlands so that there was a mass migration of Saxons and Angles to higher ground. The "invasion" idea was concocted in the Middle Ages by the English who did not want to be associated with inferior Celts.

The first reference to Angles on the Continent is from Alfred.

But Vaux pulls a real boney with *rex*. The Romans once had kings but got rid of them and forgot

the name they used for them, and so have I. So when they came into contact with peoples who had kings they used the Gaulish term *rix*, a component of hundreds of old Celtic names. They also took thousands of other Gaulish words into the language. Now *rix* actually does not mean king, which comes from some such word as *denning*, to know, though Weekley and others derive it otherwise. However *Rix* means chief. MacLellan under *righ* (pronounced ree) and gives as possible origins, Old Irish *ri*, Welsh *rhi*, Old Breton *ri*, Gaul *rix* and Old Celtic *rkes*. But it occurs in Sanskrit for example, *Rg Veda* (Usually spelt *Rig Veda*). I suspect that *rig* became *rix* under Greek influence. I hope Julie doesn't think that *Rg Veda* is derived from the Latin.

Of course what is not usually appreciated is that geographically and linguistically the Celts and their language lie between the Teutons and the Latins and it is possible to derive almost any Celtic word from one or other of them and I could give many examples of "Anglo-Saxon" worlds with Celtic origins many centuries before the first Teuton entered Europe.

The bulk of Europe was occupied by Celtic peoples of some type for at least 2000 years before these times. The Teutonic invasion could not have been much before 200 B.C. and must have been spreading pretty thin. Indeed James THE FRANKS said that archaeologists could not tell a Frank from a Gaul from the skeleton! Yet a child could tell a square headed German from a round headed Frenchman. It is becoming increasingly obvious that these Germanic invasions were almost wholly linguistic, like English invading the Continent today.

It is obvious that Julie's information could come from a local library, not from a specialist library like my own. (13 Apr 99)

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

Very many thanks for the latest issue of THE MENTOR (94) which arrived today, just too late to get into the fanzine column for ERG 146. I must be dim as Tonia's cover had me puzzled. Was it Icarus in modern dress tossing up to see if his flights were really necessary? I know little about Anime, but I enjoyed Peter Brodie's article. My sole bit of info on the genre is my cherished possession of a video-tape of Doc Smith's GALACTIC PATROL, slightly changed from Doc's version, but still fun. Nice illos to the article.

HIT DELETE was a lively little piece, just the right length and for me I'd rate it Best in the Issue. By contrast HIGHEST GROUND had a flop ending and BEYOND THIS WORLD just flopped. Sorry about that. Poetry, I pass.

A weird thing happened today, one for Charles Fort. I sat in the lounge reading, all was peaceful. I drove down town, picked up Val and went home. In the lounge were 29 honey bees and the only window open was in an upstairs bedroom. Any theories?

Mae Strelkov was entertaining and THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE was both wonderful and horrifying when he tangled with police.

Excellent LoCCol - re Mike Hailstone, I'm afraid I never heard of "The British and American skulduggery over the Lusitania" which is why I asked for specifics. As for quoting what one writer says in a book - this may - or *may not* be "evidence". I've read or seen books on UFOs, aliens held by the USAF, corn circles and the Loch Ness monster but I wouldn't feel they were strong evidence of such phenomenon.

(Jun 99)

BILL WEST, 666 West Irving Park Rd #1-2, Chicago IL. 60613-3125, USA.

I'm sorry to hear that there won't be any MENTORs for a couple of years, but I certainly understand your need for a break. There's no reason to keep on doing something we don't have to do, if it stops being fun. I'm glad that you're not as fed up with editing THE MENTOR that you can't at least still look forward to a time for staring it up again.

I want to tell you how much I appreciate your open-minded interpretation of science fiction. You've published a number of my poems that wouldn't fulfil a definition of science fiction as a work that has a plot dealing with an imagined future or life on other worlds. Some of mine like "Beyond the Bend", "Super-Strings", and "Before the Event Horizon" are poetic expressions of scientific theories - some speculative and improved, and I think the science too often gets left out of science fiction.

Thank you too for being the third in the world to publish one of my poems. You publish well-known writers but you're also open to new-comers. Without editors like you, how would any of us get going? Since I first wrote you, I've had around two hundred and fifty poems accepted by magazines in many countries. Thanks for helping me get going and for your kind words and acceptances since. (24 Jun 99)

[Showcasing previously unpublished authors as well as established ones has always been one of the aims of this zine. - Ron]

NED BROOKS, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn GA 30047-4720, USA.

Mae told me you were taking time off from being a Publishing Giant. Did you know that Richard Brandt put a number of photos and a bunch of her hecto paintings on the Net? The address is <http://www.fortunecity.com/rosewell/quatermass/87/mae/>.

I quite agree with Hailstone about the bombing of cities. I have an old book THE GREAT DELUSION by Neon (a pseudonym) in which he undertakes to prove that aircraft will never be useful in warfare. He deals first with the lighter-than-air craft, which he dismisses as being hopelessly vulnerable to enemy fire and weather. Then he says (at great length) that heavier-than-air craft would be useful only for bombing cities - and no civilised nation would ever do

that ... He was right of course – the nations just aren't very civilised.

Sorry to hear about John Alderson's health. I remember tasting some of his wine at the 1975 worldcon. Since then I have started to drink wine regularly – but no more than about 4 oz. at a time.

Startling to encounter the name *Oscar J. Friend* in Wallace's article on the Whitman Press. I have the anthology *FROM OFF THIS WORLD* that he co-edited, and the odd name stuck in my mind. This book was given to me by an uncle. He had been given it by another uncle – as a joke which I doubt he ever understood. To me it always represented the spirit of 1950s SF.

I remember when Thomas Burnett Swann was GoH at Atlanta conventions. I met him and acquired at least one of the fancy editions put out by a small local press. He seemed like a nice guy, but somehow I never got into his work, and didn't realise how much of it there is. (22 Jun 99)

MAE STRELKOV, Argentina.

I tore open the smaller envelope containing the rumpled pages written earlier, so as to enclose two photographs of our heights 1) showing riders on the trail through the jungles up to the heights where only wild grasses grow. 2) shows a typical view from the top of our long Santa Barbara ridge. More razor-like ridges are seen here (to our west). Beyond is the populated plain where the towns are. Beyond that wide plain rise, the foothills of the Andes, range upon range, ever higher.



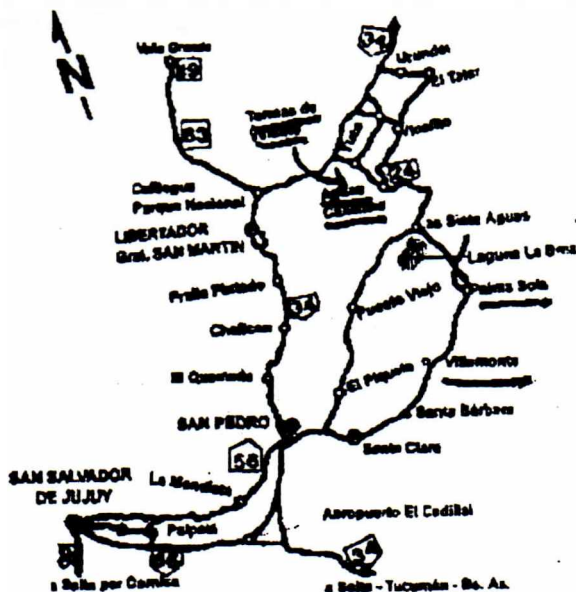
What I said about the Hot Springs to Michael, no longer holds true.. Even the would-be ruffians come now with a virtuous demeanour, as if anxious to be approved of by Tony. That Tony sure manages crowds with ease -- makes each individual feel he or she is the most important of them all. (Indeed, we feel that way -- all of us. Even our local thugs we *value* them as potential angels in lifetimes ahead, when they evolve finally. We respect them for this.)

I also enclose the first attempt at printing a flyer, but the photos in black-and-white were so poorly done, Sylvia and Carlos are looking further away for color printing.. Meanwhile, they've been asked for articles for travel magazines published in Buenos Aires, and I help writing the English versions. They do the Spanish. The attached flier is a first example of this cooperation. Tony, on the other hand, has such crowds swarming at the parklike place, (electric lights blazing till very late so visitors linger, or stay to camp), he really doesn't feel like advertising for even more swarms beyond anyone to handle. hundreds can be taken, care of - not thousands. And the fame spreads and new crowds learn of the place, and the curative powers of those special springs always were known but formerly it was scary to go there in the wilds. (Hooligans were keeping it for themselves for shooting practise, drunken bouts, etc. Same fellows who tried to dirty up the W.Cs. etc., on opening day, but now are reformed to enjoy welcome and no doubt forgiveness implied. Infantile types),

We're right beneath Bolivia which is a VERY rugged place and here too coca-chewing and drinking of medicinal alcohol, (watered) is a very old custom even amongst respectable-seeming males. There are many here like our Tony Sylvia,, and their spouses, who wish to see this forgotten remote province brought into civilization (of our present age). Yes, you may sneer at civilization, but ignorance and superstition leave pitiful little folk unaware of their own dignity and that of their fellow-humans. one struggles against that apathy. (My long going story from 1984 and 5 tells of the earlier bouts.)



The map of Argentina shows the province of Jujuy stuck away in the northwest corner, and the province looks like a wrinkled boot. Its toe is packed with hot springs, dozens of them (often too hard to reach in the hills). But it's said the Hot Springs Tony now manages, (helped by his wife and their hard-working clan), is unique curatively.



The map is not very precise, but I've underlined for you our Villamonte (where we live), and further north. down valley, Palma Sola. Still further north where it says Aguas Calientes as also Tiernas de Vinalito', that's where Tony and family live now. And so much has it captured Tony especially, on the rare occasions he drops by on a visit, he feels the place pulling him back – tugging at him in a strange symbolic way.

(29 Aug 99)

DEREK PICKLES, 44, Rooley Lane, Bankfoot, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD5 8LX.

Many thanks for Mentor 94.

I'm afraid I know nothing of Japanese animations so I'll have to give Anime Mine a miss.

I liked Brent Lillie's HIT DELETE, I could do what the hero did with no problem at all. As I wrote to someone my finger-bones aren't

connected to my headbone - well, that's my excuse and I'm sticking to it.

Andrew Darlington is interesting, as always. I remember the books and magazines as I spent my life selling them and all other published SF and fantasy from 1947 to 1968. I even managed to read most of them too. Today I find it very difficult to read a book and have at least fifty filling a shelf and awaiting reading. Most of them are detective (Elmore Leonard, John Grisham, Patricia Cornwell, Jonathon Kellerman) but I do have almost all the Doc Smith Lensman series bought from a charity shop for 25p or 35p each, all in mint condition.

Mae Strelkov grips as usual. What a life she's had, and what experiences of unusual things. Beats the hell out of a mundane like me. Possessed roosters that peck the evil out of a girl.

I regret the sudden loss of Buck Coulson. I had exchanged letters with him for only the past seven years or so but really looked forward to receiving each one. Buck had that marvellous ability to write as if he was talking to you, in fact I often read them aloud and wondered what his voice was like and if it was anything like I imagined it to be. Been a bad time this year for losing fans I have known, some for fifty years. Vince Clarke, he was one of, if not the nicest man I have ever known; James White - who I met in the 50s at the London Conventions and later enjoyed his Hospital Station books.

In my last letter I said I was happy with my word processor. Well, my son talked me into spending a lot of money to buy a PC. I then went online and got an e-mail address. I have to say that it takes me about three times as long to write a letter on the PC as on the WP and I can't make head nor tail of files/folders/defragmentation(that sounds painful). Books came with the Windows and Word, I also bought Dummies books - I need simpler books as even though all four have chapters on the Internet none of the books actually tell you that you have to press ENTER after you've typed the website name in the box. I discovered it by chance in a computer magazine article.

I'm sorry that you feel that you're not able to keep on publishing Mentor but it is obviously a labour of love that involves a great deal of time and money. I hope that when you've had a break and refreshed yourself you will publish more Mentors. I know that I've enjoyed every one you've sent me and would like to thank you for many pleasant hours reading the articles and letters.

(8 Nov 99)