

# SPENT BRASS

The 25th issue of the Frequent Fanzine that popped its triple Axel. Edited and Published by Andy Hooper and Carrie Root, 4228 Francis Ave. N. # 103, Seattle, WA 98103, members fwa. This is Drag Bunt Press Production # 173, 3/5/94. Available for the usual, i.e., letters of comment, submissions of art or prose, or your own fanzine in trade. Material in this issue comes from Andy, Carrie, Jae Leslie Adams, and Luke McGuff. Art by Bill Kunkel (p.1), Steven Fox (p.2), Sarah Prince (p.4), Grant Canfield (p. 6), and Stu Shiffman (p.7). Title by Jeanne Gomoll. Please address all correspondence and trades to the address above. Next issue: New material by Allen Baum, Joe Maraglino and Andi Shechter, plus the possible debut of our new fanzine reviewer.



## TELL ME THAT YOU LOVE ME, RAINY TOWN TATTLER

by Andy

POTLATCH III was held over the weekend of February 11th -- 13th in Seattle, with results regarded as pleasing to most in attendance. There was some quiet discussion of the apparent dimming of the energy which the convention featured in its first two years, but to my eyes, there was plenty of activity for a so-called relaxicon. The program track was well-attended, and a number of "nano- programs" attracted attention as well. Aside from the usual workshops and readings, there were some entertaining collateral attractions, like the party that went out to attend the Seattle Spam-carving contest....I personally had a lot of fun running the dance, and yes, the Alternative History panel managed not to suck.... Nearly \$2,000 was raised for the benefit of Clarion West at the Sunday Auction, most of it garnered by Freddie Baer prints, T-shirts and collages.... **DON FITCH** was at the con, and reported that his radiotherapy appears to be having the desired effect, good news to one and all. His only complaints: a "sunburned" sensation in his sinuses and the loss of much of his mustache

hair.... **THE MODERATELY BIG EARTHQUAKE** failed to even knock over the stacks of fanzines at Don's house, which is more than can be said for many fans in the L.A. area. Many fans were among those who suffered thousands of dollars in property damage, and it is still unclear how many may have lost their homes altogether. It's hardly breaking news at this point, but worth repeating for those who aren't on a lot of mailing lists; no human fannish fatalities were reported, although Bruce and Eayne Pelz lost a cat to a collapsing bookcase -- our sympathy to you guys -- and Harlan Ellison broke his nose trying to get downstairs and out of his house. Vonda McIntyre, who is in L.A. these days on a screenwriting fellowship, reported experiences typical of many people in the region. Her water heater was torn off its mountings, and her power was off for an extended period, presumably leaving her somewhat unwashed and bored.... **NEWS FLASH:** Recent correspondence indicates that the plans to hold Corflu *twelve* in northern California have fallen through, due to a wealth of other commitments on the part of the nascent committee. Arnie Katz tells me that Jeanne Bowman suggested he form a committee to mount the convention in Las Vegas, and the eager trufen of the Silver State -- 34th fandom, aren't they? -- are said to be chomping at the bit. The current plan is for the convention to be held on the last weekend in February, 1995. We'll keep you up to date as further details arrive.... **IT PAINS ME TO NOTE** that this frequent fanzine h'ain't been too damn frequent lately. This is due to a variety of equipment problems which have kept us from owning the means of production as we had hoped. To compound this, the supply of quality mimeograph paper seems to have dried up completely, leading us to the possibly ill-advised experiment with mimeo bond which we are trying this issue. Last issue was printed by the heroic Mark Manning, who nearly killed himself trying to get it done for us on his own pitifully small supply of fibre-tone. We're hoping that we'll be able to acquire some more functional equipment in the near future, but this won't help us with our paper problems. Are there any readers out there with any leads on a dependable supply of fibre-tone/twill-tone- type paper, or for that matter, and paper that they do not plan to use? We're struggling against the spectre of creeping lizzardization, but physical and financial realities may force us to declare Spent Brass a quarterly genzine, and as we all know, gafiation couldn't be very far behind.... **CONDOLENCES** to the family and friends of Catherine Jackson, who passed away on Christmas night. Dan Steffan is said to be preparing a memorial. We got to spend some time with Catherine and Frank Lunney at ConFrancisco last fall, and we're very sad that we won't have a chance to build on that acquaintance.... **INFORMED SOURCES** allege that some very odd things appeared in the most recent Corflu progress report....I can't comment, save to note that as a member of the last Corflu committee, the fact that I am apparently not on Corflu NoVa's mailing list is somewhat disquieting.... **MR. ROB HANSEN**, also known as the Plashet Grove Masher, has recently indicated through correspondence his intention to fight this author's acquisition of Croydon all-star shortstop and toy boy Martin Smith. We will keep readers apprised of the litigation.... **WE'RE ALMOST OUT OF** title blocks for the front page of Spent Brass. Any artists out there have any ideas? -- aph

"I don't need bodyguards." -- Jimmy Hoffa, 12/75



## INDISPENSABLE FANZINES by Andy

1993 was another encouraging year for fanzine fans. The variety and quality of material published increased for the third straight year, and there seemed to be a little less "bunching" of issues around the big events of the fannish year, such as Corflu and Worldcon. I felt like there were far more good fanzines coming into our mail box than I could adequately respond to, and I don't think we ever went a whole week without at least one or two fanzines arriving.

It was a good year, but many fans tell me that it could be a lot better. There still isn't any single title that could honestly be referred to as a "focal point" fanzine, and that magic combination of frequency, quality and community participation might well be impossible to achieve in fandom today. Given that fact, it may also be impossible to lay to rest the persistent question: Is fanzine fandom in irreversible decline, or has it begun a new ascension?

Last week, while walking to the Post office, I engaged in a little secret mental crifanac. Suppose, I said to myself, that you were given a drastically reduced quota of fanzines that you were allowed to receive. Which fanzines would you choose? I had to think pretty hard about the question, and the criteria I would use in answering it. I mean, this could degenerate into just another list of the best fanzines of the year, ranked by some arbitrary method. Theoretically, you could find some kind of measure of absolute fannish quality, and all fanzines which slipped below that line would just have to go. But that certainly didn't feel right. As I considered different fanzines, I began asking myself a this question about each one: Is this fanzine critical to your picture of fanzine fandom, and would fanzine fandom be less interesting, fun or vital in its absence?

The first title which came to mind was Dave Langford's *Ansible*. Maybe I thought of it first simply through alphabetization, or because David keeps winning awards, but I honestly dread the day when Dave decides that even a one-sheet is too much work to do. Not only is it consistently funny and entertaining, but Dave puts more genuine news about the pro/fan milieu onto two pages than *Locus* manages in fifty. And if it weren't for *Ansible*, I think it would seem as though we had no dependable contact with Britfandom

whatsoever. I have no idea what went on in stfnal Britain for the four years that Dave wasn't publishing it. So, because of frequency, subject-matter, and execution, I regard *Ansible* as the single most essential fanzine published today.

Now watch me hedge on that. *Ansible* is great, but there's only so much you can ask a single-sheet to do. For real fannish stature, you need a thick, brainy genzine, one that unites strong editorial vision with high quality writing, inventive art and design, and excellent reproduction. Ideally, the zine

would come out bi-monthly or quarterly, but nobody can really afford to do that anymore. The current title which comes closest to perfect is Dan Steffan and Ted White's *Blat!*, by far the publishing highlight of 1993. One might suspect that I am saying this because I have had extended pieces in each of the first two issues, but as reviewers and LoC writers have pointed out, my submissions were by far the weakest things in them. The pressure of trying to come up with something worthy of such a remarkable publication is considerable.

The most arresting thing about *Blat!* is the editorial personalities presented by Dan and Ted. There is no question of who is presenting the zine to you, their touch is visible on every page. It is a perfect example of how a fan editor can make a fanzine an expression of their own ideals and values as fan; and in fact, it comes very close to being a perfect fanzine in every way. It is by far the best example of the zine-making art available today, and an absolutely essential beacon on the sometimes murky fannish horizon.

Another group that I think essential guardians of the faanish way is Minneapolis fandom. Imagine fandom without Minneapolis in '73 parties for the last 20 years! Right now, the best expression of the Minneapolis fan ethic is Geri Sullivan's *Idea*, an elegantly produced and consistently entertaining title that I always devour immediately upon its arrival. Geri also manages to perform miracles in maintaining contact between different generations of fandom on three continents; without her efforts, for example, would anyone have had the pleasure of meeting James White on this side of the Atlantic in 1992? *Idea* has also been a showcase for the remarkable mimeography of Jeff Schalles, one of the top two or three practitioners working in American fandom today. It's been far too long between issues even now....

Sometimes, you find a fan-writer whose taste and style compliment your own aesthetics so well that you find it hard to believe that they aren't writing particularly for you. For me, that fan-writer is Redd Boggs. His *Spirochete*, generally available only to FAPA members, is a small gem, always leaving me wishing for more. Redd is one of the more underrated giants in the fannish record; when will someone

step up to do a collection of his work? His presence is ample reason to join FAPA all on his own.

Robert Lichtman's *Trap Door* has been well-praised and Hugo-nominated for some years, so I won't go on too long about it. Two points, though; While many genzines may have a more impressive appearance, Robert manages to create a sense of community and connection between himself and his contributors that emphasizes the social structures of fandom without ever becoming cute or smarmy. Nothing in *Trap Door* ever seems detached or affected. The second point is that Robert is trying to publish twice as frequently as he has in the past, which looms very large in his favor. *Trap Door* frequently *feels* like a focal-point fanzine.

Probably the most notable new fan-writer and editor to enter the scene in the past five years is Barnaby Rapoport. His zines *Let's Fanac* and *Snarkin' Surfari* have a remarkable ability to link sercon subjects with a well-developed sense of wonder, a combination of talents that we have never seen enough of in fandom, and extremely little in the past 25 years. I hope that he will continue to publish these and other titles for a long time to come.

*Mimosa*, edited by Dick and Nicki Lynch, has been honored with two Hugo awards and a lot of fannish acclaim, much of it well-deserved. Any fanzine whose stated mission is to preserve fan history has to be a good thing. Sometimes, it seems to me that *Mimosa's* elaborate bonhomie is somewhat forced, every Dave Kyle anecdote is touted as a piece of deathless prose fraught with fan- historical significance. but every time I start feeling like that, I come across some piece of ephemera or whimsey that balances the total picture; a zine which shouts FIAWOL in public, but whispers FIJAGDH with a wry smirk in private. It's a fine line to tread, but they manage to make it work.

Rob Hansen is not the best fan-writer in Britain, and may not be, in fact, the best fan-writer in his own home. His series on the history of British fandom, *Then*, may not stand up as explosive reading, and as far as I know, might turn out to be not particularly accurate or encompassing as a work of history. But his achievement in publishing this massive series is still remarkable and invaluable to students of fandom's social history. As an initial effort to record the events and personalities of nearly sixty years of British fandom, Rob's efforts are above reproach. If future writers choose to refine and correct some of the conclusions he makes, at least they will have his work as a starting point. And contrary to what some reviewers have said, I find his prose informative, entertaining, and quite easy to read.

*Astromancer Quarterly* made an enormous splash when it first appeared, both for its impeccable physical presentation, and for the unexpected nature of its debut. Who knew there was that kind of fandom in Niagara Falls? But

over the course of two years, some of the lustre has worn off. Niagara Falls doesn't seem to have the kind of vibrant club interaction that a great clubzine requires; the zine is much more reflective of Joe Maraglino's personal vision than anything else, and the club seems most concerned about what it can do to advance their efforts to host the 1998 worldcon. As a result, it doesn't have that spark of interchange that I hoped it would have. Joe seems to avoid much in the way of controversy in the pages of *AQ*, and I wonder how long he can keep that up. He's one of the most complicated and mysterious people I have ever met in fandom, and I get the feeling that what we see in the fanzine is a tiny fraction of his true editorial personality. Still, even if we accept this as true, and assume that much of the artistic excellence of the zine is due to the efforts of assistant editor Linda Michaels, it's like seeing a man fold origami cranes with a blindfold on and his hands wrapped in strapping tape....

*File 770* remains by far the best and most dependable voice of con-running fandom ever published. Mike seems to bunch his issues sometimes, cranking out three issues in five months, then giving us just one in the next seven, which impairs its value as a newszine. But it has remained entertaining in a tabloid sort of way for over one hundred issues, and it's hard to imagine fandom without it.

*Folly* and *YHOS* are linked in my mind for several reasons. The most prominent is that both Arnie Katz and Art Widner are fans who returned to fanac after prolonged periods of gafia. Another is that they both distribute their fanzines primarily through FAPA, and provide two of the main reasons for being a member of that society. Because of the long-standing links they have with some of the most senior fan-writers still active, both of these fanzines are liable to present material by some very big names. Of the two, I might pick Art's folksy curmudgeon style over Arnie's, but it's hard to decide. They each have a gift for presenting a fairly contemporary sensibility, tempered by wide fannish experience. I wouldn't want to give either of them up.

*Wing Window*, by John D. Berry, has only appeared once in the past, what, five years? But I still regard it as essential. Without it, I would have to accept the gafia of one of the most entertaining voices fandom has ever known, and that would be very hard to deal with. Once every five years is enough to keep both John and I firmly in denial....

In many ways, *Bento* is a very annoying fanzine. It's tiny, about the size of those little calorie-counter books they used to sell at supermarket check-stands, and therefore difficult to file. It appears far too infrequently to satisfy me, and I always wish it was twice as long. But when it appears, it serves to keep me up to date with the delightful David Levine and Kate Yule, and manages to redeem all of Portland fandom by proving that someone down there can produce a

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I didn't know the Police investigated particle interactions.

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fanzine worth reading.

*The Frozen Frog* is among the most promising of a wave of new fanzines that have been appearing lately. Its editor, Benoit Giraud, is a really nice guy, and his fanzine reflects the kind of earnest goofiness he exhibits in person. And without it, how would we ever keep a finger on the pulse of fabulous Cap Rouge, Quebec fandom?

I have never been able to summon the courage and intellectual perspicacity to write a letter to *FTT*. Joseph Nicholas' skill at debate and rhetoric is so daunting that I shudder to think what kind of response my white male bourgeois imperialist sensibilities would elicit. But I always enjoy reading the zine anyway. It's encouraging to see someone challenging the right-wing paradigms that often seem to dominate fandom, and if Joseph and Judith were ever to stop publishing, it would immediately become necessary to raze the entire city of Louisville, Kentucky to the ground.

*The Metaphysical Review* is another fanzine I get through FAPA. It was sort of galling to note that I couldn't come up with a single sercon American fanzine that I felt worth saving, but actually talking about the literature has always been a strength of Australian fandom (At least, it has in the few Australian fanzines I have been able to read). Bruce also manages to present a selection of fannish material from time to time; the recent tribute to Roger Weddall was both touching and illuminating. It usually looks pretty good too. I don't know how keen Bruce is on trades or the usual, but I recommend writing for information. If I had to, I'd seriously consider subscribing to this zine.

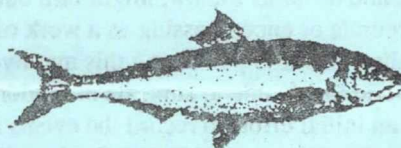
I find Nigel Richardson's *Slubberdegullion* puzzling. His incessant whingeing about the dreadfulness of his own life and the state of the world in general always grates on me after about three paragraphs, but I keep reading to the end. An excellent illustration of the way in which the British have refined complaining to a high art form, and an even better guide to the true personality of much of British fandom. Plus, sometimes the stuff he writes and presents is so funny that the zine ends up making me feel good in spite of myself.

I finish with two conundrums, Greg Pickersgill's *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk*, and Bill Donaho's *Habbakuk*. I agree with the opinions of these which Ted White offered last

issue; they are remarkable fanzines, and it is marvelous to see two talented writers return to fandom after a long absence. Not only do they offer their own voices, too little heard for far too long, they have also succeeded in coaxing some other fans out of the woodwork after long gafia -- note the address for Mike McNerny in our COA section, who would love to receive some fanzines.

On the other hand, I think it's natural to be suspicious of expressions of boundless energy made by returning gafiates, and both the frequent schedule which Greg has set for himself, and the sudden transformation to genzine which *Habbakuk* has made, leave me tensed for a possible collapse. One of these two zines will most likely continue to present incisive and exciting stuff, and the other will probably flame out within two more issues. I decline to hazard an opinion as to which is which; I hope they manage to prove me wrong. But if I was you, I'd try to get on the mailing list as soon as possible.

Well, that's all that made the cut. 21 fanzines and 24 editors standing between us and featureless crudzine oblivion. Is that a healthy number of people and titles on which to rest the future of fanzine fandom or is it disquietingly few? Of course, saying that's all we have to look for is more than a bit inaccurate. There are a lot more fanzines that I actually like quite well; they just don't seem quite as essential to the fannish scene at the moment. And there are those which are published so infrequently, or have been so long between issues, that I can't see investing much weight in their value to the fannish community, however good they are. And there's even more with some minor flaw that keeps me from putting them in the first rank. But then, if the fanzines listed above all ceased publication, I'm sure we'd find something to entertain us, just as most fans will read *Analog* if they have to. And for all it's faults, I consider *Spent Brass* pretty essential, too, if only to have something to trade for all of these great fanzines. -- aph



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NOTE: Most of these fanzines are available for the usual, trades, LoCs, or even a polite request to the editor. *File 770* is still primarily available by subscriptions, as is *The Metaphysical Review*. If you have any doubts, write to the editors below and ask for details; most will respond with at least one sample issue, if not several

*Ansible*, Ed. by Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 5AU U.K.

*Blat!*, Ed. by Ted White, 1014 N. Tuckahoe, Falls Church, VA 22046, and by Dan Steffan, 3804 S. 9th St., Arlington, VA 22204

*Idea*, Ed. by Geri Sullivan, 3444 Blaisdell Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55408-4315

*Spirochete*, Ed. by Redd Boggs, P.O. Box 441, El Verano, CA 95433

*Trap Door*, Ed. by Robert Lichtman, P.O. Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442

*Let's Fenac/Snarkin' Safari*, Ed. by Barnaby Rapoport, P.O. Box 565, Storrs, CT 06268

*Mimosa*, Ed. by Dick And Nicki Lynch, P.O. Box 1350, Germantown, MD 20875

*Then*, Ed. by Rob Hansen, 144 Plashet Grove, East Ham, London E6 1AB U.K.

*Astromancer Quarterly*, Ed. by Joe Maraglino, P.O. Box 500, Bridge Station, Niagara Falls, NY 14305-0500

*File 770*, Ed. by Mike Glyer, 5828 Woodman Ave. # 2, Van Nuys, CA 91401

*Folly*, Ed. by Arnie Katz, 330 S. Decatur, Suite 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107

*YHOS*, Ed. by Art Widner, P.O. Box 677, Gualala, CA 95445

*Wing Window*, Ed. by John D. Berry, 525  
19th Ave. E. Seattle, WA 98112

*Bento*, Ed. by David Levine & Kate Yule,  
1905 SE 43rd. Ave., Portland, OR 97215

*The Frozen Frog*, Ed. by Benoit Giraud,  
1016 Guillaume-Boisset, Cap Rouge,  
Quebec G1Y 1Y9 Canada

*FTT*, Ed. by Judith Hanna & Joseph  
Nicholas, 15 Janson Rd., Tottenham,  
London N15 6NH U.K.

*The Metaphysical Review*, Ed. by Bruce  
Gillespie, Gillespie & Cochrane Pty Ltd.  
GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria  
3001 Australia

*Slubberdegullion*, Ed. by Nigel E.  
Richardson, 9 Windsor Green, East  
Garforth, Leeds LS25 2LG U.K.

*Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk*, Ed. by Greg  
Pickersgill, 3 Bethany Row, Narbeth Rd.,  
Haverford West, Pembrokeshire SA61 2XG  
U.K.

*Habbakuk*, Ed. by Bill Donaho, 626 58th St.,  
Oakland, CA 94609

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All we gotta do to win a larceny trial is prove how the universe will end.

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## WORKING ON THE LINE

by Jae Leslie Adams

A statistician, an economist, and a mathematician were preparing the club's bulk mailing. If it sounds like the beginning of a joke, you are welcome to complete the story in any fashion that amuses you. It was quite amusing enough for me to be there. We discussed, among many other subjects over a long afternoon, how wonderfully overqualified we all were for sticking labels onto flyers.

The Statistician counted and listed all the pieces as he was directed by the Economist, who had a terrible head cold. The Mathematician noted the physical count again and added it up three different ways. His total was different from the Economist's total. We started checking the rubber-banded bundles again.

"How about this one bundle of Mixed States you don't have listed there?" I asked. It had been separate from all the bundles for sacking. Exactly 91 pieces.

"That's it."

I guess I would be the Auditor. Maybe only the Bookkeeper. I was the one who got to drive out to the club Treasurer's house that Sunday evening to pick up a check for the postmaster, and then drive the whole mailing over to the post office Monday morning.

I had six pages of numbers with me -- two different lists of how many flyers were in the bundles. "You'll need documentation," the Economist had told me. But when I waved my sheaf of papers at the Bulk Mail Acceptance Unit postal employees, it turned out all I needed was the post office's mailing statement form, which has been changed so many times in the past few years I always ask them to see if I have got the right one and have filled it out correctly. Usually I have the old one, and they take it anyway and give me a stack of the latest form.

Both of the Bulk Mail Acceptance Unit clerks were friendly and helpful, Bob who is always there and the other guy. Maybe my face is beginning to look familiar to them as theirs are beginning to look to me. The Other Guy directed me to the workroom which had been moved since the last time I was there. I had bundled bulk mail before, and learned obscure techniques like which order to put the rubber bands

on, but hardly ever sorted it into sacks, never before handled a big enough mailing for that. I checked everything that I could, and then went to ask questions.

"Do I have these bags labeled right?" I asked.

"Well, are they Flats?" he asked, looking at my labels.

The post office has different bulk rates for letter-sized pieces and larger flat envelopes.

"I don't know, are they?" I asked him, producing a bundle from the canvas bag. Our overqualified group of college grads had read up on the postal rate classification for this size of mailing, and decided they were flats according to the dimensions allowed in the postal authority's thick instruction book. But when in doubt I always like to check my information by asking people who work on the line with it every day. They're the experts. They know things like: The minimum bundle is exactly ten, but the correct maximum size of a bundle is a comfortable handful.

"No, these are Letters. You can just cross this out here, and write LTR." He scrawled over the preprinted label.

Instead when he left I searched out the proper printed labels and changed them. Only five sacks. Get it right as far as possible. This information, if it was correct, was worth a nickel per piece to us, which adds up after a thousand pieces here and there. I filled out the mailing statement as well as I knew how and took it to the front desk.

"Where do you want me to put these bags?" So I was playing a little dumb. Like I say, they work there, and I just drop by every few months.

"Do I have this filled out right?" I asked Bob. Mostly I did.

"Well, you have the postage due carried to the front. That's good. But you could put this part over here." There are a hundred tiny lines to fill out on the back of this form to figure your postage due, of which I have never had to use more than two. This time I used three, but I had picked the wrong section, although the correct rates.

"Next time I'll know better. Thanks."

At home an hour later I got a call from a puzzled postal worker who was processing our mailing. The exact number of flyers that I had listed on the mailing form was perfectly correct: 1742. But the breakdown of which rates applied to which bundles was perfectly wrong. How could we know so

much and so little? She needed permission to charge us eight extra bucks. I was relieved it was nothing more serious, like all the labels being in the wrong place or something. To find out which numbers of my six pages of numbers were the numbers I should have used to fill in those three lines out of a hundred, I chatted with her for a few minutes. Too many numbers.

"You know, we have a number you can call if you have any questions about bulk mailing." She sounded kind of hurt.

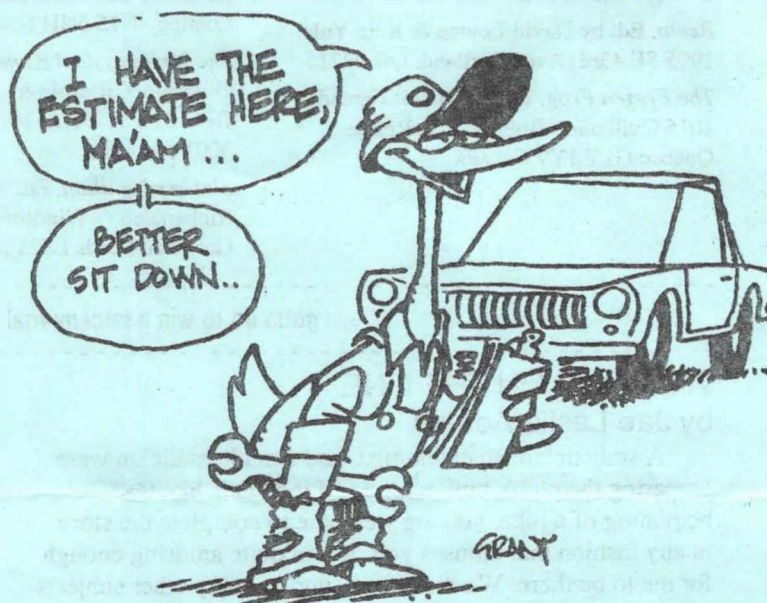
"I know -- " That would be Bob's number. But I didn't think I needed to take her time to explain how unlikely it would be for a sociable group of college graduates to get together at a time when Bob would be at work, rather than evenings or Sundays.

"And another thing," I thought I'd double check, "I thought these were going to be Flats, but they're Letters, right?" Silly me.

She had a perfectly logical answer, although it wasn't what we had found in the instruction book.

"If they weren't folded over, then they'd be Flats."

Of course. -- Jae Leslie Adams ☐




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"The most repulsive thing you could ever imagine is the inside of a camel's mouth..."

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## A Sense of Stress Relief by Carrie

Two things which I find normally only mildly stressful ganged up on me last year - work and travel. My project went through an incredibly difficult period, delayed beyond our wildest nightmare by delays (due to everyone else, of course), failures during factory testing, customers from hell, and finally delivering the system only to have it show up in Augusta with half the hardware in leetle bitty pieces. I finally made it out for the three-week site acceptance test in September, only to find that the software that worked perfectly with our small factory configuration, discovered a zillion different ways to fail when used in the field. I was there for five weeks, home for a week, then out for four more weeks. And we *still* haven't started the formal tests. In addition to the two extended trips to Maine, I did an extraordinary amount (for me) of travel in 1993. I flew to Corflu in May, then two more trips to Madison (for my daughter's high school graduation, and for Thanksgiving), to Albuquerque to a family reunion, and to ConFrancisco.

We have many ways of dealing with stress. Most pick two or three (consciously or otherwise) in our generally successful efforts to survive the confusion and complexity of modern life. In the last few years I have discovered the emotional and spiritual benefit of walking, and try to walk five or six hours a week. I know others who achieve the same from music, or sex, or gardening. But the ultimate for me,

since I was old enough for my own library card, has been reading.

So 1993 was the year I read. Now, I'm not the world's fastest reader. I don't even try to be, because I enjoy the process of reading, and the feeling of immersion into another world, so much that I'm reluctant to lose it by finishing the book. (I like short stories, too, but get much better stress-reduction from longer works.) (I love *Little, Big* and *Dalghren*.) I read 18 books between May and December, and that represents a *lot* of time reading. Then when Andy reminded me that I hadn't written anything for *Spent Brass* in a long time, and I replied that I hadn't done anything but work, and I didn't want to write about that, he just laughed and pointed to that pile of books. So here goes.

The following are not book reviews, because I don't like book reviews. Nobody can tell me whether or not I'll like a book (well, maybe if it's REALLY bad...) and I particularly dislike the reviewer that tells you so much about the book that there's no point in reading it. So these are just some of the observations I made about these books as I was reading them. If I didn't like a book enough to say anything about it, I didn't mention it at all.

Looking back on the pile, I noticed how many of them were about Mars. Sure, Mars has been a standard skiffy setting since before *The Martian Chronicles*, but I didn't have to go out of my way to find these: *Mars*, by Ben Bova. *Red Mars*, by Kim Stanley Robinson. *Moving Mars*, by Greg Bear. *Desolation Road*, by Ian McDonald. I think I figured it

out, though. The first three of these books came out in 1992 or 1993, and would have ridden the coattails of the Mars Explorer if all had gone well. In terms of stress relief, big is good (and all of the Mars books qualify there). But for me (I'm just a frustrated astronaut), scientific content is also important. As you'd expect, these are "hard SF", although *Desolation Road* is a little ... well, not soft, but perhaps with some oblique angles here and there. (Time traveling little green men?) Bova's and Robinson's books start with the first exploration of Mars, Bear's and McDonald's take up after colonies are well established. I was pleased that they all presumed that the colonization would be accomplished by a trans-Earth effort, with minimal division of Mars along national lines. And I thought Robinson, in particular, created some really striking characters, which I'll be glad to follow in the *Blue* and *Green* books of the trilogy.

I read Amy Thomson's *Virtual Girl* and *He, She and It* by Marge Piercy in quick succession. They started on the same track (the 'virtual girl' and 'It' are both artificial intelligences, one mechanical, one bionic, which are created in secrecy), but the meta-themes were different (although I think they're both "morality" tales). Amy was interested in the plight of the homeless and our treatment of women. Piercy's focus was on the morality of creating life. Hmm, I just noticed that these two were also the only books on my list written by women. That's pretty unusual for me. Has there really been a lapse in SF publications by women? The Hugo nominations last year were pretty well split, but I haven't seen anything new in paperback by Connie Willis, Pat Murphy or any of my other favorites in the last few months.

I'm not a real big a fan of alternate histories, probably because my knowledge of history is so weak I often can't figure out what's alternate about it. I think you can say that *Tours of the Black Clock* by Steve Erickson is an alternate history, like *The Difference Engine* by Bill Gibson and Bruce Sterling and *Winter in Eden* by Harry Harrison. *The Difference Engine* is classic steam punk, with Babbage's mechanical computing machine grown up. *Winter in Eden*, the second of Harry's *Eden* trilogy, is set in the Flintstone's universe, with dinosaurs co-existing (if not thriving) alongside stone-age man. Erickson's *Tours* is harder to pin down. Avon published it as straight fiction, but seems to be about a guy that prevents the fall of the Third Reich by writing pornography for Hitler. You might want to call this one a parallel universe or even a fantasy, though, because the protagonist occasionally slips between that world and one that might be ours. Weird.

There were several really cool (ie, BIG) books by people that I always read everything

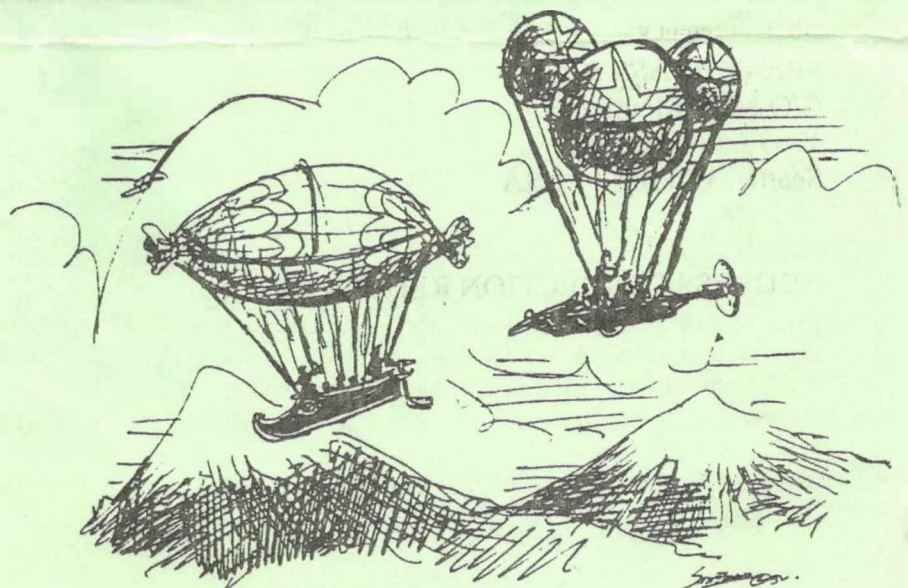
they write - *Last Call* by Tim Powers, *Against a Dark Background* by Iain M. Banks (but when is plain Iain Banks going to write another?), and *A Fire Upon the Deep* by Vernor Vinge. I'd like to include Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* in this grouping, because I liked it just as much, but I haven't read anything else by him. But I will.

You may have noticed that none of the above are fantasy. So note here that I am not rigid and that I did read *The Malacia Tapestry*, by Brian Aldiss. I was disappointed there was nothing in it about needlework.

Oh yes, I also read some short story collections - *Year's Best SF #10* edited by Gardner Dozois, and John Crowley's *Antiquities* that was published by our pal Ron Drummond's Incunabula Press with typesetting by John D. Berry. A book that is almost as beautiful as its contents. But small.

I do occasionally read something besides SF. I grabbed up *Russka* by Edward Rutherford because I'd liked his previous book, *Sarum*. Both are slightly fictionalized histories of a place and a people; *Sarum* of the Salisbury plains around Stonehenge; *Russka* about Russia. Rutherford has a knack for showing how the invading cultures blended with the indigenous to produce the personalities of the English and Russians of today. In America, the blending process is so much newer, more incomplete, that we sometimes forget that the whole of Europe was the original "melting pot". *Russka* was written before the fall of the Soviet Union, and it has amused me how much of what has happened since seems like just another chapter of the book. William Kennedy's *Quinn's Book* was eerily like the Rutherfords, an historical piece set in the Northeast around the Civil War, but focusing on the difficult assimilation of the Irish into the American culture.

I've already started on next year's list. Here's hoping that if it's a long one, it's because I had time to read, and not because I had to read.... or ☐



From "TOTALLY FOUND BEAT POETRY" by Luke McGuff

SUPER HERO ACTION FIGURE

POWER ACTION BAT PUNCH  
POWER ACTION NUCLEAR PUNCH  
POWER ACTION DEEP SEA KICK  
POWER ACTION Pincer Thrust  
POWER ACTION MARTIAN PUNCH

POWER GLOW SUPERSUCTION  
FIREBALL FLINGING ACTION

WEB SHOOTING  
WEB CLIMBING  
WEB SUCTION HANDS  
SPIDER SENSE TINGLING

CAPTURE CUFFS AND POP UP ARMS  
SUCTION CUP AND GRASPING  
TENTACLES  
FLICKING TONGUE AND SQUIRTING  
ORCHID

COIN FLIPPING ACTION  
WING FLAPPING ACTION

THROWS PUMPKIN BOMBS  
BOG SUCKER BIOMASK  
GRABS AND SQUIRTS VICTIMS

TORPEDO LAUNCHING SCUBA GEAR  
TURBO WEAPON SPINNING ARM

OPTICS BLAST FIRE

QUESTION MARK LAUNCHER

LAUNCHING SMILE MISSILE  
LAUNCHING HYPNO SPIN UMBRELLA  
LIVING SKIN SLIME PORES

SAVAGE ATTACK WINGS  
SAVAGE STRIKE TWIST ACTION

I'VE GOT CLAWS AND I CAN USE  
THEM

MUTANTS MUST RULE  
MUTANTS MUST RULE  
MUTANTS MUST RULE

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