

VYSTER

5

goes to the seaside



CORNFLAKES RATHER THAN CRÊPES SUZETTE

Lilian Edwards MATRIX GOOD FOOD GUIDE

Stanislaw Lem
Polish gem
Had a deep rooted atheistic theologico-cosmogonic obsession
According to the encyclopedia in my possession.
((see Nicholls page 351))

**** * * * * *

Tommaso Campanella
An Italian fella'
Attacked contemporary science
For its Aristotelian reliance.

((again Nicholls))

**** * * * * *

Cyril Judd
Were very good
And I can only assume that when Kornbluth and Merrill wrote Gunner
Cade
They were both equally paid.

**** * * * * *

H.Beam Piper
Thumped a typer
His yarns paid for by the dime
Weaved their way through paratime.

**** * * * * *

James Branch Cabell

Twenty volumes on Manuel
Had to suffer the censor's burden
When they prosecuted Jurgen.

I was delighted to receive the following from JOHN BRUNNER.

You're a connoisseur of "here's the
answer - what's the question?" jokes.

Try dropping this one in the next XYSTER,
e.g. with the answer at the beginning
of the mag and the question at the back.

A: "Tellurium!"

there you are then folks now search

TALES OF THE ALHAMBRA

"No thank you, I can manage." Brenda smiled sweetly at the macho Spaniard bearing down towards her in Malaga airport, arms outstretched for the heavy bag she was lugging through passport control.

I blanched at the upsurge of emotion crossing his olive features.

"Customs," I hissed.

"Well you told me to act nonchalant."

As the rest of the flight passengers surged past to freedom I stood mutely watching the officer dipping into our personal effects, tossing hair driers, nikon cameras, tummy tablets, towels, Amazing Stories, briefs, filters, and a half eaten chicken leg onto the counter. He didn't stop until he encountered a double roll of pink toilet paper. This seemed to satisfy his blood lust and with a dismissive gesture we were waved into the airport lounge.

"Why did you say that?" I was still trembling.

"I thought he was a porter."

"With a gun and a truncheon!"

"Well I was told they could be very persuasive."

We dragged our cases out into the car park. Brenda was still muttering on about our encounter.

"He wouldn't just pick on us for nothing. I bet it was something to do with that Dutch man who sat next to me on the flight."

"Why?" I asked wearily.

"He hardly ever smiled you know. And when we were coming past that awful customs man he was skulking round the corner as if he didn't want to go out. I said goodbye to him but he looked guilty and turned away."

"But you said on the flight that he didn't understand English."

"He was probably pretending."

"Don't be silly. What about the man who sat next to me! He said he was a South African but I saw his passport and it said Ugandan. He told me his parents were German, He had been working in Israel, he lived in Spain, his sister lived in Cairo and his brother in Houston. Now that is the sort of person to suspect!"

I was beginning to feel lucky we had got out of it without at least a

hi-jack. As I bundled Brenda onto a courtesy coach I noticed Sydney Greenstreet climbing laboriously into the battered old Ford.....



It doesn't do much for the system to wake up and find that the Spanish weather is quite capable of emulating the climate from whence we had so recently fled.

Sadly we were faced with grim black clouds, a stiff cold breeze and the threat of rain. No way were we going to be able to chuck off our clothing and plunge into the blue briny. Sitting round in the hotel bar seemed to be the only alternative to mooching round the shops. So we chose the shops.

I had read somewhere that Torremolenos was the leading foreign colony in Spain. There are certainly plenty of bars with exotic names like PADDY'S PLACE and THE WHITE LION to suggest at least the British find some affinity with the place. Anyway, swarms of English, French and Americans crowd the streets. Shops and restaurants, nightclubs and the aforementioned bars at every price from luxury to budget-budget huddle together cheek to jowl. It's an incredible example of tourism run riot. Took me back to my days in Blackpool!

It was therefore with a cry of glee that I spotted the sign 'Second Hand Books.' They obviously thought of everything. The day began to perk up. The arrow pointed to a dingy stairway up which I leapt with enthusiasm.

"Morning." The man behind the counter had a gruff Yorkshire accent. I peered closely beyond the beard in case it was Ashworth come to haunt me.

"Er, morning."

"Ah, English. To the right."

The place was laid out by nationality and then subsectioned into the usual categories; thrillers, romances, girlie mags, westerns, bestsellers, horror and sf. The sf was neatly stuck in the far corner immediately adjacent to an unrivalled display of female anatomy. I pulled my macintosh closer and began foraging. What a splendid start to the holiday I thought as I handed over 300 pesetas (about £1.50) for a first British pb edition of 'The Girl, The Gold Watch and Everything', a First Avon printing of 'Behold The Man' and an American Hard cover (1940) of 'Babes in the Darkling Wood' by H.G.Wells - the first time I'd actually come across a copy of this book.

Back at the hotel everybody was gloomily looking out of the bar window at the lousy weather. What to do that afternoon? Then somebody mentioned that the nearby Butlins hotel was showing 'Ghandi' and we all decided that was the programme.

I suppose what with the recent TV serialisation of Paul Scott's 'Raj Quartet', the hype surrounding Sir Dickie's epic and the upcoming David Lean version of Forrester's 'A Passage to India' we must be coming close to saturation point on all things Indian. Still, allowing for the rather romantic approach and sumptuous photography I found the three hours of 'Ghandi' almost totally absorbing on my part - despite even the temporary hitch with the projection unit which brought out a bouncy "Hello, campers" red coat to put things right.

One section or event stuck in my mind. When at the end of the eighteen ninties Ghandi's successful campaign for better conditions for his fellow Indians brought about a change within the South African government, what if.....what if the black population had also been involved and successful? Might the world be a different place now? Idea for an Alternative History story.....?

The ancient kingdom of Granada, into which we are about to penetrate is one of the most mountainous regions of Spain. Vast sierras or chains of mountains, destitute of shrub or tree and mottled with variegated marbles and granites, elevate their sunburnt summits against a deep-blue sky, yet in their rugged bosoms lie engulfed the most verdant and fertile valleys, where the desert and the garden strain for mastery, and the very rock is, as it were, compelled to yield the fig, the orange and the citron, and to blossom with the myrtle and the rose.

WASHINGTON IRVING 'THE ALHAMBRA'

Granada nestles at the foot of a mountain range which rises high above the city and includes Mulhacén which at 11,477 feet is Spain's highest peak. What we had earlier taken to be a low bank of white cloud we could now discern as a thick white covering of snow. This indeed was the Sierra Nevada - the Snowy Mountain.

Driving towards Granada across the rich fertile land: a silver sea of olive groves, the road passes through Santa Fé founded in 1491 during the seige of Granada by Christian troops. Here the last bastion of the eight hundred year rule of the Moslem world in Spain was surrendered to Ferdinand and Isabella. And here too the first TAFF winner Christopher Columbus was given the money to go off and discover the New World. Not that there is a lot to show for all this history and it certainly gave no indication as to the wonders we were to see when we reached Granada.

In January 1492 Boadbil, the last Moorish king of Granada, surrendered the city to the Ferdinand and Isabella. Eleven long years of battle was finally over. Boadbil left his palace and asked that the gate he used (Puerta de Los Siete Suelos - the Gate of the Seven Sighs) be sealed forever. The Moors deplored most of all their loss of Granada and mourn it still in their evening prayers. To commemorate their victory the Catholic Monarchs built a flamboyant Gothic Royal Chapel where they were eventually buried and have lain side by side ever since. Their grandson Charles V decided this was too small for so much glory and commissioned Diego de Siloé to design the huge cathederal which was finished in 1667. A Renaissance masterpiece with magnificent stained glass windows, statues and paintings by Ribera and El Greco it is still overshadowed by the true glory of Granada - the Alhambra.

The Alhambra is an ancient fortress or castellated palace of the Moorish kings of Granada, where they held domain over this their boasted terrestrial paradise and made their last stand for Empire in Spain. The palace occupies but a portion of the fortress, the walls of which, studded with towers, stretch irregularly round the whole crest of a lofty hill that overlooks the city and forms a spur of the Sierra Nevada.

In the time of the Moors the fortress was capable of containing an army of forty thousand men within its precincts and served occasionally as a stronghold of the sovereigns against their rebellious subjects.

WASHINGTON IRVING 'THE ALHAMBRA'

The way to the Alhambra from the city is through a high narrow archway erected by Charles V. This leads to a ravine like passage which winds up towards the vermilion towers of the Alhambra proper. Eventually the road reaches a Moorish barbican through which you enter the Arabian Nights.

Although we were in the company of several hundred other tourists of all nationalities, so vast is the place and so full of unexpected twists and turns it is quite possible to find areas where you might be forgiven for thinking you are totally alone in the immense structure.

Walls and ceilings painted and tiled in a multitude of colours, scintillating domes and gold mosaics, sudden gardens and terraces with dripping fountains, festooned arches, slender columns, all contrast with the great hulks of the watchtower and battlements. There are gentle green water pools and dark foliaged bushes. Intricate workings in the walls contrast with the hard splendour of stone lions spouting water from their mouths.

An Arab proverb says that God gives to those who he loves a means of living in Granada. Washington Irving certainly couldn't tear himself away from the place and for any of you who cannot visit the place then his book will be a very good substitute. Written in 1832 and given the title 'The Alhambra, a Series of Tales and Sketches of the Moors and Spaniards.' it is nowadays shortened to 'Tales of the Alhambra.'

Alhambra means ocre-red in Arabic and the Generalife (Garden of the Builder) is white. It stands on the hill near the palace and was the summer residence of the caliphs. The gardens hedged with yew trees are again places of slender fountains, white battlements, stately cypresses and rose beds. Unfortunately March is a little too early to experience the gardens in their true glory but there is little doubt in my mind that they must be a breathtaking sight.

The history of the Alhambra is that of 800 years of Moorish rule in Southern Spain. One can easily imagine the long procession of rulers and their families, courtiers, poets, lovers, emirs, alchemists eunuchs, assassins, slaves and women. Once the door of the Puerto de la Justicia was engraved by the Arabs with the hand of Fatima, whose fingers evoke the five laws of the Koran. Beyond this door was a door engraved with a key. There was a legend that if the hand of the first door were to take the key of the second then the Alhambra would be lost to the Arabs. The prophecy was fulfilled not by the myth but by internal wrangling which eventually opened the door to the Spanish invasion.

The triumphant Spanish monarchs attempted to live there but it is said that the exotic setting of the Alhambra was too much for the Catholics to accept. The Alhambra was abandoned for centuries. Eventually it was restored to some of its splendour and that is what I feel fortunate in being able to experience.

THE ROAD TO Morocco

It was Wednesday, so we went to Africa.

We were driven from Torremolinos through Fuengirola visiting the hillside village of Mijas with its square bull ring and then on through Marbella to the southern tip of Spain. The port of Algeciras lies just beyond the bulk of Gibraltar.

From there we set sail for the Dark Continent.

Memories flooded back of Tarzan, Jungle Jim, Opar, Casablanca, Bogart, Yvonne de Carlo, strange rites, harems and all the rest of the exotica associated with this wonderful land.

North Africa is rather like an island. It is separated from other lands by the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, and from the rest of Africa by the Sahara Desert. The Arabs call it Djezira-el-Magreb, or the Western Isle.

North Africa has a long and fascinating history. The oldest inhabitants were the Berbers, from which comes the term 'Barbary', but many other people have intruded on the land: Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, and finally Arabs. It has come under the rule of the Turks, the French and the Spanish. Today it remains mainly Arabic in language, religion and culture.

Much of North Africa consists of plateaus and mountain ranges. The Atlas range spreads across its northern edge and the first sight we had was of the Rif mountains and the Port of Ceuta. When Morocco gained independence in 1956 Spain gave up her protectorate of Spanish Morocco retaining only a number of towns on the Med coast. Ceuta is a free port and a haven for the tourist in search of the duty free.....

To get into Morocco we had to pass through customs and cross the frontier no-man's land. It seemed a fairly painless but frustrating experience for the European tourist to gain entry to Morocco. Better by far than being a Moroccan trying to get into Spanish territory. Twixt Spain and Morocco seethe a swirling mass of people in transit. Dressed in their flowing djelabas and yellow slippers, and lugging round incredible amounts of luggage elderly Moroccans mingle with blue jeaned youths and rough and ready dressed gipsies. Some sit against the sea wall with a look of dejection and despair. Others wander aimlessly along the hill edge. Many of them are blatantly hostile and make threatening gestures as you walk past. And very evident all around are guards with rifles and machine guns cocked in their arms. Three coach loads of tourists preceded us through this area with little incident. Ours broke down. We were herded off and, under escort, had to walk slowly across the strip between the two frontiers. People appeared from nowhere and surrounded us. They made no sound but had a disconcerting habit of suddenly lunging forward at the tourists on the edge of the group. We were all warned to hold tight to our cameras, handbags, wallets purses etc. The general tactic was for the lunger to catch the unwary off guard and while they were flustered a small boy would be nipping in from the rear and snatching what he could. The frontier guards looked on with complete indifference.

It appears that it is a fairly simple thing for the Moroccans to get out of their country. But exceedingly difficult for them to then get into Spain or indeed return from whence they came! The result is this seething mass of discontent. Even a straight-forward case can take up to a week to result in passage to the other side. Our guide hinted that some of the less savory characters had been in limbo for longer than anyone cared to remember. The sight of one family stripped naked and washing their clothes in a stream tended to confirm this observation.

I suppose under those circumstances it comes easy to despise the well-heeled tourist who glide swiftly through their midst, day in and day out. But then, how would they react to the knowledge that their beloved King Hassan has a small domicile in Marbella which set him back some 60, million dollars, not to mention the luxury vessel anchored in the bay.

I suppose it all added up to a bit of extra local colour - after all if our coach hadn't broken down we would have been driven through sans excitement. AND, we wouldn't have partaken of the further pleasure of making the rest of the journey on a Moroccan service bus. This was the sort of thing we scrapped round about the end of World War 2. Spartan interior with tubular frame seats no air conditioning and windows that had been sealed down with super glue.

We sweated our way towards Tetouan.

Now it must be said that the road we embarked upon ran parallel with a particularly unspoilt (tourist wise) coastal region of the Mediterranean coastline.

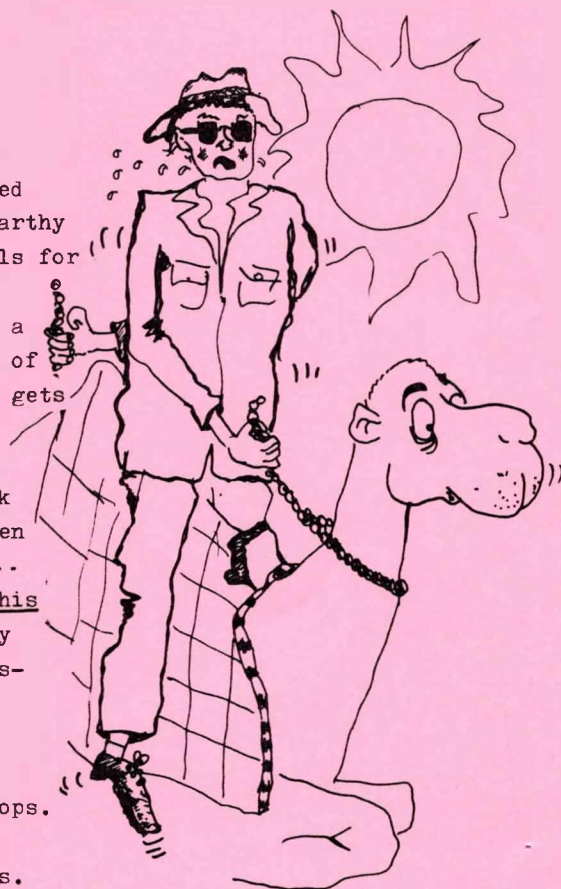
Unfortunately it is only too obvious that the acres of unspoilt sand wedged between rocky promontories is ripe for development and there are signs already with Club Mediterranee and other holiday clubs moving in. The sand is a beautiful yellow and the water crystal clear. Everything the fun loving holidaymaker could possibly want. I'm glad to have seen it as it is now - but what of next year?

But, Lo! Commercialism has but this moment stopped our bus.

Ever ridden a large ruminant with a humped back? We were ushered off the bus into a field which was full of camels and small swarthy men with big mustaches and wide grins. They were happy souls for they were about to fleece us.

For only 60 pesetas we were offered a ride on a camel (or is it a dromedary in these parts?). Actually what we got was a feeling of terror for about sixty seconds. What you do is this. The camel gets down on its knees. You get your legs over its hump, grasp the halter rope in your right hand (or left if you prefer) and with whichever hand you still have free grasp behind you what I took to be another rope. It could of course have been its tail. Then the camel driver gives the beast a sharp command..... up comes its rear end and you find yourself falling forward. This is the reason for the stern rope. Almost at once, and certainly before you have had chance to acclimatize yourself to being suspended at a rakish forward angle, up comes the front legs now you make full use of the front harness. It is a very high and precarious position to find oneself in.

The camel man turns the camel round through 360 degrees and stops. Down go the front legs. Hang on in there Dave! And the back. I fell off at this point.....as indeed did several other fools. This was the sum total of the much vaunted camel ride we had been primed for in the pre-trip briefing.



Allah be praised!

Back onto the bus which has now taken on a more luxurious feel. Our destination is Tetouan capital of the province we are passing through. It is a hill-top town; white building and olive groves and gardens give it a certain charm. Its history can be traced back to 1286 when a Merinide sultan built a kasbah there. Kasbah means a chief's residence. I was later told that when in 1492 the Moors were driven from Spain many of the refugees from Andalucia, and in particular Granada, settled there adding to the character of the town and later causing it to be known as the daughter of Granada.

We were disgorged into the Hassan 11 Square, a pleasant area of flowers and gardens. Round the centre were seated many locals in their flowing robes and leather slippers. It was a scene of peace and tranquility and everybody seemed to be relaxed in the heat of the sun. Out came the trusty nikon for a few shots of 'local colour' and I was quick to find that the Berbers have a rather strong aversion to second-rate Snowdon's photographing their features. Something about taking a little of their soul, or so our guide said. Still they were about to skin us alive if they got the chance when we entered the Medina.

Like a crocodile of school children we were led into this area of great activity and much commerce. Our first stop was to watch a snake charmer who just happened to be on the street corner at the moment we passed by. And he just happened to have his photographer with him, armed with a nikon! Out came the drums and with a little rhythmic tapping he charmed a snake out of a hat. Well nearly. The snake, even more blasé about tourists than his master, just lay there and flickered its tongue. No amount of coaxing would induce it to do anything more exciting. The master took over and lifted it out of the hat. It hung discontentedly from his hands. To engender a little excitement he hung it round one of our

necks. Brenda's! Oh, joy on my part as the shutter of my camera blurred into action. On her part a sort of steely resignation. The crowd clapped. The snake charmer beamed and the snake flickered its tongue half heartedly.

"You do it now David, and I'll take your photo!"

"Naw, that would be a waste of film. One of us is enough."

We walked on.

"Pity really," I murmured when at a safe distance. "It must have been a great experience. I wish I'd had a go now."

Brenda snorted.

Then came the big sell. We found ourselves in a carpet shop. Trapped. Surrounded by wily Moors who spoke fluent English and had an amazing grasp of accountancy, VAT, import duty, and the shipping services between Morocco and Clevedon. We seemed to be there for hours as with subtle moves and offers they tried to induce us to buy a startling orange and green carpet which would be the envy of folk far and wide when we proudly laid it in our lounge. It was, to be polite, quite yuk!!!!

Finally everyone grew tired. Tourists began chanting "Why are we waiting!" and the leaders of capitalism withdrew and we made our escape.

Escape was back through the Medina (I worried in case that damn snake was about but I guess he had gone to another corner to catch another group) to the Royal Palace where we were to eat. Well, next door anyway.

Now I understand that Moroccan food can be a delight to eat. Not so for the junk we were served. Probably the place was the equivalent of, say, a burger bar in England or the chef had a liver on.

We had been told that a Moroccan meal (or diffa) is a delicious and informal affair in which the appreciation of the food is far more important than conversation. Well the conversation which accompanied our fare would have made a camel train driver blush. Let me tell you what it should have been. For starters was a delicately soapy flavoured soup and Arab bread. The bread actually lived up to expectation. It was a round loaf, nutty and granular. I enjoyed that and was able to consume the soup with its help. Nobody else did. Next came the cous-cous. This is Morocco's National Dish. A veritable mountain of white granular semolina hides within in it carrots, turnips, courgettes and pieces of mutton. The whole is moistened with a hot, thin sauce poured over at the last moment. It is light, digestible and the right way to eat it is to pick up a small quantity of the grain in the fingers and, by applying gentle pressure, shape it into a perfect ball. This is then tossed delicately into the mouth. An orange provides a nice desert and it is all washed down with mint tea - drunk very sweet. It is an excellent digestive. The tea used is green tea and comes from China. Slowly and in silence a quantity of tea is put in a pot. Boiling water is added. Then a large amount of sugar and a handful of mint are crammed in, the lid pushed down and the mixture left to infuse for some minutes. Then the tasting begins. The tea maker pours a little into his own glass, tastes it with all the concentration of a real ale addict, pours it back, adds maybe more water, more sugar or more mint, leaves it a little longer, tastes it again and so on until he is satisfied. He then pours a little into each glass.

Sounds super.

What we got was a sloppy yellow, runny mess that we had to eat with a spoon. Between the ten of us at the table we played find the mutton and find the veg. Somewhere along the line the tea maker must have dozed off. We never had a sniff of the stuff.

Five musicians were wailing away and a belly dancer (they wear more clothes than a Yorkshire dales sheep farmer in winter) gyrated a bored route across the room.

It was good to get outside and be harassed by the general populace who seemed to be solely employed as purveyors of leather handbags and wallets.

The actual street traders were silent dreamy folk who took little or no interest in us. It was quite obvious by the way our guide rushed us through the market place that here he didn't get a back-hander for sales made.

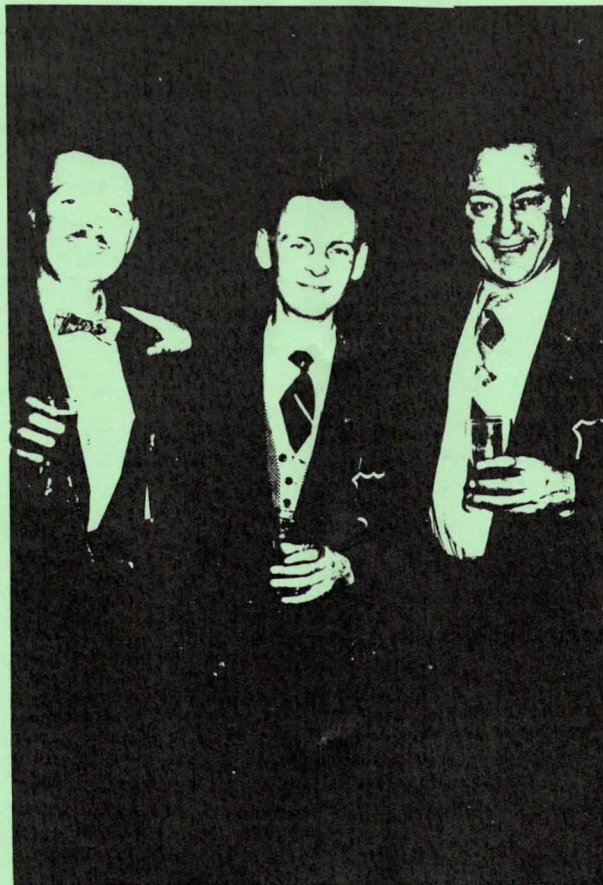
Still, it was a fascinating experience and one which provided constant conversation on the journey back to Spain.

Oh, yes. They were all hanging around in no-man's land as we passed through customs. Probably they are all still there now.



Loddie Jones - - Terry Jeeves
Eric Bentcliffe

THOSE MAGNIFICENT FEN IN



THEIR DOUBLET AND HOSE

eric bentcliffe

Not too long ago at a convention I was discussing the fannish past with a somewhat younger fan who commented that one of the things that got right up his nose when he came into fandom was all these characters in enblazoned blazers and knightly garb whom he equated with the fannish 'Establishment'. Whilst I couldn't entirely agree with this world-view, I could understand his viewpoint and certainly the sight of Norman Shorrocks in Doublet, Hose and Purple Socks was enough to strike terror into the minds of even the brashest of fans neofans. But it wasn't intended to be quite like that.....

"And it came to pass that in the year of Our Lord, Nineteen Hundred and Fifty Seven did the Noble Fen Of Cheltenham chance upon certain parchments and other documents pertaining to one Saint Pantony whose origins be lost in the mists of Arthurian England but whose Spirit and Workes did endear him to these fen. Whereupon did they wish to do all honour to him by carrying forth his Workes and Deeds and Spreading His Spirit amongst all those Who Be TrueFen....."

That quote was used in the Charter of The Order of Saint Pantony, but it should not be assumed that the Origins of the Order were truly in antiquity - before even Harry Warner, Jr wrought his first loc; no, the true story is a little more prosaic.....but at least as fannish. Really, it was all the fault of the Liverpool Group, that same conglomeration of fans who were responsible for so many other weird and wonderful variations on basic British fanac. Back in the early 50's they started a tradition of honouring a select few country members (at that time they had country members in such diverse locales as Barcelona, Potsdam N.Y., and Christmas Island!!) by making them Honorary Ex-Chairman of the Liverpool S-F Group Society. Ex-Chairmen, because it was

deemed to be a high honour indeed to attain this status without first having to undergo the traumas of actually being Chairman.

Several members of the Cheltenham S-F Group were among the first to be so honoured; notably Eric Jones and Bob Richardson. The Liverpool and Cheltenham groups of that time were highly compatible - whilst neither group was frenetically active in fan pubbing they both contributed much to British Fandom's social scene at convention times and when any other good excuse for a fannish-party could be thought up...such as Mercer's Day and Harrison's Birthday. Other activities of the two grps which can be mentioned in these pages were frequently combined wine-tastings; and the making of fannish tapes and films - that the latter was sometimes combined with the former partly explains some of the fantastically fannish results achieved!

Several of the members of both groups also had a common interest in medieval arms and armour; Eric and Bob in the CSFG, Eddie Jones and Norman Weedall in the LSFS.....forerunners of the Society for Creative Anachronism, mayhaps....and it followed that when the CSFG decided to return the honours and favours bestowed on them by the LSFS that this should influence the form it would take. This was why the Knights of Saint Fantony came about; once started like all fannish 'institutions' of the period it grew, developed, deviated, mutated, and (occasionally) changed direction as the ideas of those first Knighted were added to those of the founders and helped flesh out the bare bones of the Order. Norman Shorrock (of course) was the fan responsible for the discovery that 150 proof Polish White Spirit was remarkably similar to the True Water-From-Saint-Fantony's-Well, and a most acceptable substitute at times of Induction. (I think the theory was that if they failed the initiation they would feel no pain from the headsman's-axe!) Costumes for Lords and Ladies of The Order were designed and made, Ina Shorrock, Margeret Jones (Eric's wife), and Eddie Jones were largely responsible for this - for Ceremonial Occasions. Certain 'Heredit' ry' Offices were declared; Eric Jones as Grand Master, Bob Richardson as Knight Armourer, Norman Weedall as High Executioner, and Keith Freeman as Scrivener Pursuivant....much of this was decided, course, on the grounds of fannish expediency, i.e. Norman had an axe, so he got the Chopping Job.

From the outside, of course, all this looked a bit like snobbish smofery or it does in retrospect but the fandom of the times realised what it was.....a Grand Fannish Jape, and took it as such. And it did add a great deal to the colour and spectacle of conventions at which induction ceremonies were held. The biggest of these took place at the 1965 London Worldcon where, amongst others, Ethel Lindsay, Boyd Raeburn, and Walt Willis were Knighted. A great deal of advance planning was necessary for the half hour ceremonie which was quite spectacular. (I had an admirable overview of this as I'd managed to inveigle myself the job of back-room-boy-switch the-tape-recorder-bits-on-at-the-right-time-boffin - this wasn't helped by the 'hotel p.a. system upon which I was to perform being in a very sound proof box and I having to lip read what was going on twenty foot down and thirty foot away, it is quite possible some of us early fans were once Slans!) The stage crowded with Knights and Ladies in their colourful costume contrasting with the sombre garb of The Executioner. Knowledge of those fen who were to become Knights and Ladies of the Order was always kept from them until their names were announced as candidates for Initiation and anyone who has ever had anything to do with organising convention programme items will understand the difficulties this oft presents, and the power of inherent in the Members of the Order which made it possible to overcome these - ahem, this is also known as Low Cunning.

Just how those to be honoured were chosen must remain a secret - I am after all a Member of the Order and sworn to secrecy as to its avowed aims and Ultimate Ethic - but, obviously, they had to be fen of Impeccable Taste and be thoroughly capable of drinking 150 proof Polish White Spirit neat. (after which they probably lost the power of Impeccable Taste, I seem to recall, gaspingly.) Apart from an occasional convention time induction the Order saw fit to hold other celebrations; the Great Feast and Tourney of 1959 in Cheltenham for instance, at which a Great Jousting took place between the London Circle and Knights of the Order. Prominent amongst those present were Baron Tubb, Lord Bulmer of Tresco, and Sir Michael Moorcock with his trusty wooden sword Divotmaker.

This is not a Hystory of Ye Order of Saint Fantony, just a few fond memories of how and why of it. Sadly, many of the founders have since died and the raison d'etre for such a body no longer exists anyway, but...as with all other such bodies whose origins are lost in antiquity...inherent in its mythology is that in Fandom's Hour Of Need the members will re-awaken and come striding 'cross the land bearing stencils, styli, staples, and water from Saint Fantony's Well. Whether or not this is at all true I don't know but it didn't do a bad job on looking after the life-support systems of Mal Ashworth, Vin~~e~~ Clarke and Dave Wood now, did it?

SECURICON

SEACON 84 is all water under the bridge now and except for the scars left on the brain and liver can safely be consigned to the memory vaults.

I decided not to include any blow by blow account of the weekend but have instead concentrated the essence of the whole thing into an exquisite personal overview by Hazel Ashworth and the speech by Dave Langford which was to me one of the trully great highlights of the 'official' programme. There must of course be some of the flavour lost from this speech as Dave point blank refused to bleed from the nose over each individual copy. I suppose I should have writ large somewhere that views expressed by contributors are not the responsibility of the editor - just in case Elron is about!

I am now awaiting for the scoop LOC in which Hubbard will defend his monster.....

One personal comment....great to have met you all. Some people are not as bad as they are made out to be.... some are worse....some you can't get through to....most are great to sit round a table with....hope you all enjoyed my company as much as I enjoyed yours.



BADGERED
BUTTONHOLED
AND
BOOZED-UP
IN BRIGHTON



I'm not sure...
but I don't
think it's
Martin Hoare

HAZEL ASHWORTH

"What did you think of the ballerina?"
I whirled around guiltily. I had been peering through the glass-
panelled door of Hall 1 at Josef Nesvadba winding up his talk.
Anyone else would have said "I missed that" or "What ballerina?"
but three days into the Brighton con had slowed down my responses
a fraction, so I answered him honestly, wondering why the hell
anyone should want my opinion twenty-four hours after the event.
"I was rather embarrassed. I didn't know whether it was supposed
to be serious or not." His eyes flashed. "Well, I thought the
girl put a lot of thought into it." "Er, yes." Then he launched
into a rapid spiel .."you are a vital part of the performance...
the observer has an important role to play..." I didn't interrupt
to say that this particular observer had sneaked off to the bar
after the first pirouette. I stepped back a little, gazing
wistfully at the audience in the Hall, but there was no escape.
Somehow he managed to bring in the Hindu god "Shiva the Destroyer"
to support his apology for ballerinas. My eyes glazed. Poor old
Shiva. He didn't mention that the deity is also known as "Lord
of the Dance", depicted in those graceful South Indian bronzes..
hermaphroditic, many-armed Shiva Nataraja...neither did I.
Before his harangue about Art, the Universe and the Ballet Dancer
could get much further, Malcolm appeared like the Baff in Shining
Armour he is, and we went to hide in the lift till the little
chap had gone. Malcolm looked at me strangely. "How did you get
talking to him?" he demanded. "He just came up and asked my back
a question about ballerinas" I explained. We re-emerged. It took
a long time to shake off the feeling that my inquisitor might
have been 'the girl' herself.

I should be a little slicker at buttonhole evasion by now, for
the days of neodom seem to be over already. I've just seen my
third Eastercon come and go with that famous scientificational
lightening-speed with which you're all so familiar. Now I can't
resist making a few comparisons: the first was definitely the
best (Channelcon), but maybe it was because everything was
filtered through a rosy neo-n glow of First Contact with Real
Fandom. Then there were those other little things; people made
you feel welcome as you crept tentatively from the safety of
your room down the broad stairway to where the action was.
The bars too, were cosy and you could talk across the table
without using a megaphone. (This year it was doubly difficult
to tell Dave Langford anything horribly secret for Ansible -
those round tables must have been a good six feet across (the
precise footage has been reconstructed from memory with some
help from Malcolm: 'if you think of lying across them', he
suggested)). The hangar-like blackness of the bar-room walls
presaged the post-coital gloom that would descend on all those
who suffer from end-of-con blues well before the programme had
begun. It could have been an attempt to recreate the jolly

'Come Dancing' atmosphere of the innards of Hot-Black (Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy) Desiato's rocket ship, but that didn't help too much.

Hands up (if you can) everyone who got grabbed, mauled and generally trampled on in the little security effort run by the oh-so-cool diplomats of the Seacon Shillelagh Society. Hands were not actually laid upon me, but it appears I was one of the untouched few; the verbal challenge (which got boringly repetitive after a bit) was delivered in an offensive enough manner to secure immediate non-cooperation. "WHERE'S YOUR BADGE?" (You dirty rat). I wore mine the whole time, in a reasonably conventional (Ha!) area, but that didn't suffice. I heard of one poor guy being torn off a strip for wearing his badge in the WRONG place. All through the weekend I heard people complaining: some were amused, some upset, no-one was spared: ex GoHs, veteran con-goers of 35 years, neos, Baffs, gophers...Gophers? Yes. Dave Wood, having relinquished his star of office after two days of impeccable gophering was seized and about to be (im)pounded, his squeaks of "I'm me!" falling on deaf ears, when a Voice from Above boomed "That's Dave Wood! Put him down!" And lo, he was put down. Even a dog got hassled. "I'm not sure what the Committee think about dogs" quoth one Security Forces member, holding the offending beast in his steely ~~jaw~~ gaze. "I don't give a bugger what it thinks" said its amazed owner quite mildly "I'm paying the hotel £3.50 a bloody night for it!"

But none of this ruined the weekend: the weather was an improvement on last year at Glasgow, and there were enough fans not engaged in hysterical role-playing to make it all worthwhile. Besides which we'd laid out too much money in petrol and accommodation to see our fun go up the Swanee. There was a moment of anxiety on Friday noon as we flopped gratefully into our lovely room. The distant sounds of the sea and the murmur of traffic lulled me into a doze. "WAAH!" Infant wail. More murmurs. More doze. "OOeeppeeGLOOpoo." Infant burbles. Murmurs doze "WEEH!" Murmurs doze "WOOH!" What a lot of children they must have next door, I thought uneasily. There followed a frantic scrabble until I found my faithful box of Boots Earplugs, a leetle misshapen, at the bottom of the hold-all, underneath a kettle and a tin of salmon soup. And a peaceful afternoon ensued.

It wasn't until much later that I realised it wasn't a giant family next door after all, but the sounds of kids crashing in the creche a few yards down the corridor. Refreshed (well, a bit) by the cold-soup-in-a-tooth-mug and rather warm and runny bread and butter, we descended into th'inferno and conned our way round the con - you had to be a fast talker



to get into the loo with the security arrangements I mentioned-bumping into people we knew and people we didn't as we trekked from black hall to black hole to get to the various programme items that sounded good. And what we got to, was: Julian May's beautiful costumes were breathtaking, as was Forry Ackerman's slide show. Forry turned out to be a fine speaker with plenty of humorous tales to tell about the Really Old Days when young whippersnappers like Ray Bradbury would sell him a book to get a dollar to take some girl out. (And that was when a dollar would buy you half a dozen Astoundings, a bottle of Budweiser, a copper-plated beanie and you were still left with a Sense of Wonder).

Dave Langford's talk was very breathtaking, for rather different reasons: would some Nameless Dread round the corner, grasp the mike and silence him before he had given L.Ron 'Big Brother' Hubbard's latest opus the treatment it so richly deserved? Oddly enough, DL was seen with a streaming nose-bleed later that evening. It appears that Awards for Bravery are a much-needed addition to the usual BSFA ones, and I would like to see one awarded here, Premiere Classe, for courage bordering on fool-hardiness in taking on Scientological might in his talk The Dragon-Hikers Guide to Battlefield Covenant at Dune's Edge.. to the huge enjoyment of 99.9 % of his audience. Perhaps a gang of protective heavies should be on call as part of his prize, the remainder being a substantial amount of hard cash (but not substantial enough to render him 'suable'). 1984 is here!

Award Deuxieme Classe to That Elf in Fancy Dress who went on singing, and Troisiemes all round to those of us who made it past Those Dreadful Badge People.

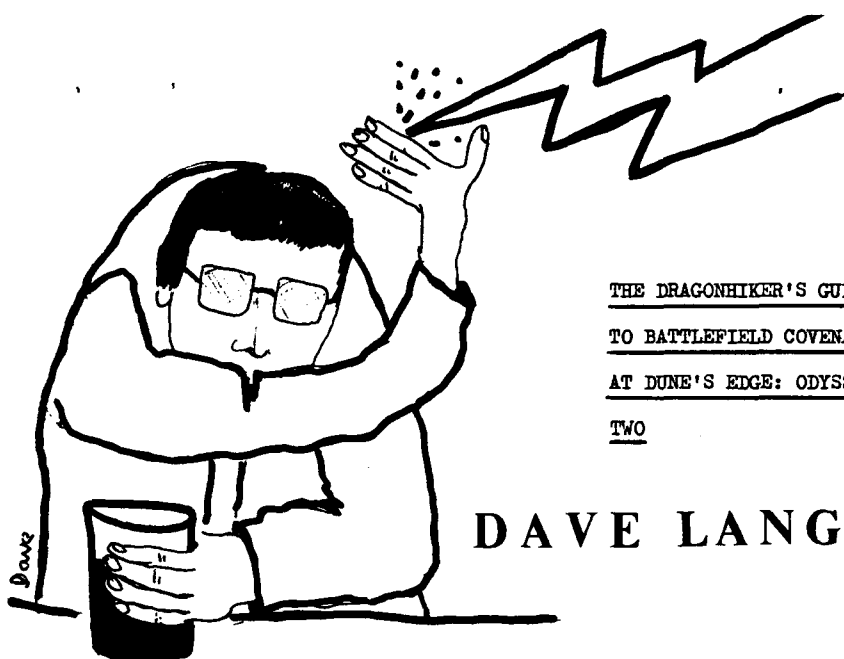
Those fans daft enough to do things with that mop on the greasy floor of the bar deserve a separate Award of their own, though I don't know quite what to call it. Those of you not present at this spectacular piece of family (hurrumph) entertainment will be no-end tickled to know that D.West can do it with a cigarette (well, that's what he calls it) in his mouth, and very agile he is too! Impressive as this feat is, it is still not enough: as a prospective TAFF candidate he would have to do it with a ten inch cigar. Rob Hansen was of course fracfly good, and Vinç, Edie Siclari and M.Ashworth get special mentions for Trying Very Hard. I didn't see any others have a go. These spectator sports do take it out of one, so it was off to the bar for some excellent (Thank the Lord) beer, and some sane conversation with the uncomplaining and imperturbable Metropole staff, and then some more drinking and rather less sane conversation with the flopped-out dwile-flonkers or whatever they call themselves, until at last, late on Monday afternoon, we reluctantly made our way out into the blazing April sunshine.

"Wasn't it lucky the balcony was stronger than the lift?" I said as we steamed along Northwards. "You what?" asked my chauffeur. "You know, that party last night...there were ever so many people on the balcony, including you, miles above the ground. What if its hinges or whatever they hold those things up with had come loose, it would have been like Glasgow, only much worse."

There was a little silence. I closed my eyes.

"I don't remember any party on a balcony. Whose was it?"

But it was too late for further elucidation until much later. I was fast asleep.



THE DRAGONHIKER'S GUIDE
TO BATTLEFIELD COVENANT
AT DUNE'S EDGE: ODYSSEY
TWO

DAVE LANGFORD

A preliminary note: This is, more or less, the text of a talk given by me at Seacon '84, the combined Eurocon and British Eastercon held amid the fleshpots of Brighton. Bits of the text are based on material written for Ansible, British Fantasy Newsletter, Cloud Chamber, Vector and White Dwarf. Now somebody ever so famous, I forget who, once observed: "A journalist is stimulated by a deadline: he writes worse when he has time." My effort to disprove this may have resulted in one of the most hastily prepared public utterances since Abraham Lincoln said, "It was a lousy play anyway." For reasons of self-esteem I didn't tell the lucky audience that I'd travelled down to the convention two days before the talk was scheduled, armed with nothing but a title, a blank wad of paper, a lot of notes and a copy of a certain 819-page book. And for reasons of tact I even neglected to mention the quite true fact that, while checking references in that same book mere hours before speaking, I'd suffered a spontaneous and violent nosebleed. Post hoc ergo propter hoc or not, that revelation would have been an Unfair Blow. Other seeming unfair blows in what follows can be ascribed to my natural bad taste and---in common with ever so many reviewers---difficulty in separating personal grouches from ineluctable cosmic truths. Also I have this undemocratic liking for good sf. The reader is warned.

*

In the past, when I've given talks at cons they've been on humorous subjects, like fandom, or the royalties I get for my books, or the destruction of human civilization as we know it. I've avoided the horrible realities of our present-day world, such as science fiction.

All this changed in 1983 when I sold out to the big magazine tycoons and started writing an sf review column for White Dwarf, the magazine of fantasy games and Harlan Ellison. Each month I got a handsome two-figure sum---I'm not saying where the decimal point goes---and was privileged to gobble enough monthly reading matter to be recycled into the New Forest. After the first half year I felt a

new insight into the name White Dwarf---my brain had collapsed to a tiny fraction of its former size, and looked ready to go out like a light. All that kept me going was the invigorating shower of hate mail from the 14¹/₂-year-old Dungeons and Dragons fans who were the magazine's chief audience, and who regarded the works of Stephen R. Donaldson as sacred texts to be spoken of with awestruck reverence and kept far apart from commonplace books (a point with which I actually agreed).

Speaking of Donaldson, I've just been looking into his thriller book published under the impenetrable pseudonym Reed Stephens: The Man Who Killed His Brother, now a major remainder! The private-eye hero has Donaldson's own version of those snappy names like James Bond or Mike Hammer---he's called Axbrewder, Mick Axbrewder, and he's bowed down with a massive weight of remorse and guilt, and instead of being a leper he's an alcoholic. Instead of thinking leper outcast unclean in italics on every third page, he thinks to himself, in italics, you need a drink you need a drink you need a drink. This must be the effect of SRD's discovery of sf conventions.

Fortunately I didn't have to review The Man Who Killed His Brother, but over the last year or two there've been plenty of other review books which after about five pages set me muttering (in italics, natch), you need a drink you need a drink you need a drink. I swear that each new piece of really ropey sf leaves a new scar on the forebrain---if late at night you see me mumbling and falling over, it's not what you think, just the sea air causing twinges in my old Piers Anthony wound. (Did you know that in British fan circles the phrase "as thick as two short planks" is being replaced by "thick as a Piers Anthony trilogy"---or in extreme cases, "as a Piers Anthony protagonist"?)

Anyway, because I can't forget the real cesspits from my years of sf reviewing, I don't see why you shouldn't have to suffer too. As a select committee of one, I'm going to announce and annotate my shortlist for the newly created SF Superglue Awards---for the books that stick in your mind although you wish they wouldn't. Lots of awards for the best of this and the best of that are going to be presented this weekend---but we should remember Sturgeon's Law and give due

honour to that 90% comprising the silent majority. This is known as democracy.

My first award comes in the hard-fought category of Forgettability, and the trophy is a lavish thousand dollars' worth of interstellar vacuum imported at colossal expense and sealed in an old peanut packet. (I forget where I've put the trophy just now.) The book which most sticks in my memory for being specially unmemorable is Isaac Asimov's Foundation's Edge. It goes on for hundreds of thousands of words which contain less actual plot than one of those little 40-page segments in volume one of the trilogy. Vast wordage is expended in a self-indulgent effort to tie all Asimov's novels into a single Future History, despite the fact that the Foundation set isn't really compatible with the robot books---a lot of guff about robot separatism can't account for the total lack of even the crudest domestic robots by the time of the Galactic Empire.

When I finally woke up at the far end of Edge I found the essential message went further, and was that Seldon's Plan was all wet, so the entire preceding trilogy was therefore a complete waste of time. Having taken two hundred thousand words to say this, Asimov appears to be keeping the next revelations for a sequel in case readers are overwhelmed and overexcited by this headlong pace. In my review column I ended up quoting Kenneth Tynan's famous line: "The trouble with reviewing commodities like this is that you know in advance that, for all the effect it will have, you might as well fill your column with a relief map of Death Valley."

It's only fair to admit that the next Asimov, The Robots of Dawn, was quite a bit better---"Here," I remember saying, "is a writer who shows promise and may one day make a name for himself." Dawn is specially recommended for setting a new record in sf for the number of meticulously described scenes in which the hero visits the toilet. I mean, Kim Kinnison never went at all, and I shudder to think what happened to Lensfans who tried to imitate all their hero's little idiosyncrasies.

Our second award category covers the traditional literary qualities of Style, Imagery and Diction. Since the Seacon '84 progress reports are disqualified as amateur publications, there is absolutely no contest and the winner has to be

Stephen R. Donaldson, for White Gold Wielder. This book concludes a trilogy with an almost memorable plot, which goes roughly like this: Lovable leper THOMAS COVENANT wishes to remove a blight from the fantasy LAND but is told by evil LORD FOUL that in attempting to serve the ends of the Land he will in fact be serving the diabolical ends of Lord Foul, which is why Covenant goes about actively not serving the ends of the Land on the theory that this will therefore cause him not to serve the ends of Lord Foul, little realizing that (further complicated by the efforts of cuddly LINDEN AVERY to serve none of the ends of Covenant, Foul or Linden Avery) this attempt to serve the ends of the Land will in fact, et cetera, et cetera. All this gets so complicated, the book should have been called Tinker, Tailor, Leper, Spy. No wonder even the author and Lord Foul are hopelessly confused by the end of the book, with Donaldson having to cover his tracks by inventing and invoking the useful Rule 42---which says that if the omniscient Lord Foul and his all-potent forces of cosmic evil should win, they automatically lose.

However, I'm giving Donaldson his laurels on the grounds of style. He uses these triffic metaphors---Covenant passes the time "sucking the wounded places of his heart," which I'm told makes you go blind, and certainly our hero soon develops that interesting symptom, "a gelid knot in his chest."

Donaldson is still pillaging the same bizarre dictionary used for five previous fat books. Something isn't just hurled but "hurled like a jerid"; a person doesn't just ramble on but is "anile as the dead", which doesn't mean what you think. Best new words of the book are "preterite" and "argute", as in "he made his preterite way" somewhere, while "her preterite self-contradictions held her back." Likewise Covenant's face---his "gaunt, compulsory visage" as SRD calls it, in striking contrast to those of us whose faces are optional---tends to be "argute with concentration." Sometimes the whole damn situation gets "so argute that it was almost physical."

After you've cut your teeth on these elementary puzzlers, you'll be ready to try and decipher the meaning of my two favourites---"beneficent mansuetude" and "analystic refulgence". Only advanced students of Donaldsonese should tackle the

inscrutable lines exhumed from The Wounded Land by Joseph (for it is he!)

Nicholas:

"They were featureless and telic, like lambent gangrene. They looked horribly like children."

I don't object to increasing my word power: Gene Wolfe in "The Book of the New Sun" and, to some extent, Brian Aldiss in his Helliconia things sneak in a number of exotic words, but with the context arranged to make it clear what's meant. Donaldson, conversely, has the knack of defusing his big, tense scenes---distracting your attention by sandbagging you with his dictionary, so that rather than being caught and enthralled the sensitive, cultured reader is apt to remark, "What the f...s he on about?"

This was the sentiment inspiring my favourite Ansible colophon, which went (in condensed form): "Ansible 32 is argute with analystic refulgence and beneficent mansuetude; it makes its preterite way to you, hurled like a jerid from the gaunt, compulsory visage of Dave Langford, whose unambergrised malison may be aneled by rushing gelid pound notes... Shining like cynosures for their aid are ((various helpers)). There are no prizes for guessing which doorstep fantasy blockbuster your editor has recently quaffed like a sapid draught of clinquant roborant whose fulvous surquedry and caducity make knurrs come from the vocabulary out..."

For his achievement Mr Donaldson receives a Collins Pocket Gem Dictionary, on the strict understanding that he gets rid of the one he's using now.

Award number three is presented to the book with the most diabolical plot. The trophy takes the form of a dragon exquisitely sculptured from saccharine. Er, yes, you're already ahead of me. Let me just say that once upon a time I rather liked Dragonflight and its sequel. The melodrama creaked a bit, maybe, but the swashes were tidily buckled and the guaranteed boilerplate tear-jerker situations (Mills & Boon, prop.) performed to specification. It was a guilty pleasure to be enjoyed far from the austere eyes of Joe Nicholas, John Clute and other shock-troops of the higher Lit Crit.

But the years went by, Anne McCaffrey became ever more gooey about her created

world (like Dorothy Sayers with Lord Peter Wimsey, who by the final books is so damned noble, sensitive, caring, encyclopaedically erudite and generally wonderful that one expected the canonization to follow any second). The Dragonbooks and their titles grew inexorably longer. Six hundred thousand words later, it says in the foreword, we have Moreta: Dragonlady of Pern, which I tried to like but failed.

One problem is that Pern and its dragons have been worn pretty smooth. We know all about the dragonweyrers, a sort of cross between Heathrow Airport and Gormenghast from which flying beasties rise to polish off unpleasant falling spores (Thread) with their fiery halitosis. We know that dragonriders and civilians will each be unchangingly competent, staunch, cowardly, noble, wrongheaded or wry, depending on the cut of their cardboard. We know the gimmicks of human/dragon telepathy, dragon teleportation, time-travel via dragon, excessive dragon cuteness, and the rest. We know with a deadly certainty that there's no escape from McCaffrey's recurrent ooh-ahh scene in which boy or girl meets dragon via "Impression", combining the emotions of first sex, first communion and the dread initiation rite of the Secret Fourth Form Gang all in one hygienic package.

In a brave attempt at freshness, Moreta is set 900 years prior to Dragonflight, filling us with excitement at the truly remarkable lack of change in Pern society over this period. The main difference appears to be that in ye olden days people have even sillier names, leading to lots of paragraphs like this:

"Sharth, Melath, Odioth," B'lerion closed a finger into his palm with each name. "Nabeth, as you suspected. Ponteth and Bidorth. That makes seven, and if my memory serves me, N'Mool, Bidorth's rider, comes from Telgar Upper Plains. Of course T'Grel's not the only rider who's dissatisfied with M'Tani's leadership. I told you, didn't I, Falga, that once those Telgar riders had had a taste of real leadership, there'd be trouble." He smiled winningly at Moreta.

"I actually defer to Sh'gall's abilities..."

It's not so much the ugliness of these bloody apostrophes spraying saliva all over the page, or the difficulty of having tragic heroine Moreta sound tragically heroic when stuck with lines like "Orlith says we've done a good job, A'dan... You were

marvellous assistants, M'Barak, D'l'tan, B'greal!" What's wrong is that, hopelessly in love with her gift for thinking up silly names, and convinced that clotted detail is what the fans want, McCaffrey is wasting time dishing out names and (what passes for) characterization to an immense horde of walk-ons and spear-carriers who in the leaner prose of Dragonflight would rightly have been "a dragonrider", "a boy", "a drudge", "a telephone sanitizer", or whatever. The "Dragondex"---yuck--- at the end of this book lists 145 characters' names. Too many.

Ignore the next bit if you'd rather not know the plot. Hide under your chairs, stop your ears, roll on the ground in convulsions (just as I did when I read the book)---here it comes! The foreordained conclusion is that Moreta snuffs it on her famous Ride as chronicled in story and song as early as 1968. Following contact with Pern's forgotten South Continent, an influenza pandemic rages, leaving one to wonder why another doesn't rage 900 years later when similar contact is made in Dragonflight. About halfway through the book, a plague-surviving Masterhealer dimly recollects that back at Healer school he was taught the now forgotten secrets of vaccination; duly he gives blood (drawn into a carefully sterilized syringe through an interestingly unsterilized hollow thorn), has it centrifuged ("Desdra... began to swing the jar around her head"---no, no, I'm not making this up), and uses the resulting vaccine on all and sundry. I was looking forward to the scene in which the Healers then find a mouldering Encyclopaedia Britannica amid their archives and read the piece on serum hepatitis---"transmitted usually by injection, as in blood transfusions.... a common hazard." No such luck.

OK. Everyone is vaccinated. But the dreaded 'flu will strike again unless everyone is revaccinated in short order! And there's a hollow thorn shortage! And for unexplained reasons a hollow thorn can be used only once! Luckily dragons can time-travel, so Moreta and entourage instantly nip forward to the next hollow-thorn harvest. This apparently pointless plot turn serves two purposes. Firstly, it restores the beloved dragons to their usual position at stage centre, which was in danger of being usurped by Pernese paramedics. (Nobody even considers trying to make hypodermic needles using the extensive metalworking and glassblowing facilities.) Secondly, it poses the fascinating question of how

this extremely useful time-travel ability, which in these olden days is reasonably widely known and which young dragonriders are apt to stumble on by accident, should be completely forgotten over the next few centuries, ready for dramatic rediscovery in Dragonflight. No credible answer ever emerges.

(By the way, McCaffrey cocks up another back-reference to Dragonflight. As you'll remember, you dedicated skiffy readers, you... that book had some stuff about olden-day lady dragonriders with flamethrowers, and 900 years after Moreta it's suggested for the first time in Pernese history that "agenothree" spray is better than flame. In Moreta the flamethrowers' fuel tanks are now said to be filled with agenothree, ie. HNO_3 , ie. nitric acid. Not the most likely of flammable fuels.)

Moreta now has to be set up for her Ride. For reasons which are not very clear, the great revaccination has to happen to everybody on the same day, necessitating huge logistical efforts by vaccine-carrying dragonriders. For reasons which are wholly opaque, one boss dragonrider refuses to do his bit (he's the latest in a long list of McCaffrey characters whose motivations are utterly mysterious because the author needs a baddie but can't imagine why anyone should be nasty to her favourite people). And for reasons of plot, only heroic Moreta and a chum can perform that last desperate vaccine run, in which she over-fatigues herself and---well, yes, quite. I felt sorry for poor Moreta, not because of her heroic self-sacrifice (the silly woman could have paused at any time for a good ten hours' sleep and time-jumped to carry on refreshed from the same instant) but because of the vast auctorial thumb pushing her so crudely to her doom. It's something of an achievement, when you stop and think about it---to shuffle an entire continent full of teleporting time-travelling dragonfolk out of the way, leaving our doomed heroine as The Only Possible Person to complete a task requiring approximately the same skills as a milk round.

(Another glitch. Great play is made in Dragonflight with the famous 'Ballad of Moreta's Ride', whose throbbingly significant chorus is all about black dust and freezing air---something to do with Thread falling to black dust when it's cold

enough. In Moreta, not only is there no reference whatever to black dust, but the celebrated Ride appears to take place after sowing time in a mild Spring. "Never mind the facts," I imagine the Masterharper saying. "The public always likes a catchy chorus about black dust...")

Luckily Moreta's tragedy is not allowed to leave everyone depressed. Within five pages, the entire supporting cast is saying spontaneous things like, "I must think of the beginnings of this day. Not of the endings!" and cooing over the sugary delight of that unescapable Hatching and Impression. I could hear the distant strains of violin music, I could feel myself wafted on a tide of saccharine to the nearest toilet, into which I stared for quite some while, meditating on timeless questions like, "They banned cyclamates but not this?"

Onward! It's time to encourage new talent with an award for a new young author who has---in several senses---brought fresh blood to the stuffy old scene of British SF with his novel Habitation One. If I remember the hype correctly, Frederick Dunstan wrote this when he was only eight, but I assure you the literary style is worthy of an eleven-year-old. An eleven-year-old who's borrowed a volume or so of Stephen Donaldson's dictionary. His award comes in the category of Good Taste, and the shape of the coveted trophy is---in the immortal words of James Branch Cabell---not convenient to describe.

The book is an everyday tale of post-holocaust folk going mad and mutilating each other aboard Habitation One, a future environment so wondrous that auctorial efforts to describe it collapse in adjectival gibbering. "Enormous---incredible---incomprehensible," gasps Dunstan, overcome by his command of big words. "Superb, colossal, brilliant," he continues. "Amazing, astounding, analog..." well, I do exaggerate just a teensy bit but not much. After pages of this stuff the only thing clear about Habitation One was that it had "filamentary stanchions." Your guess is as good as mine.

When not engaged in mayhem, the everyday cardboard folk make speeches telling each other things they already know, a plot device known in the 30s as "filling in the background" and more recently as "filling in the background very ineptly". This,

though, is not a book to be read for its literary excellence, which is just as well. The joy lies in savouring the rich psychopathology of the author's imagination. Let me, by way of example, tell you about the booby-trap.

Character A, a lady, walks into this booby-trap. The trap was set by character B in hope of catching character C, merely because C has driven B mad by threatening to shoot arrows into his goolies. C did this by way of tactful reproof because B, his advances having been rebuffed by another young lady D, was so coarse as to present D with exploding shoes which blew her feet off. Is that clear? There's a lot more of this, so let's get back to the woman A, who walks through a door and gets hit by a massive falling axe-blade which slices off chunks of her: a wisp of hair, a scatter of toes, a slice of hip and most of a breast. (When I told Bob Shaw about this he was bemused to realize that he'd never before spotted the pun contained in the word "booby-trap".)

Rallying after a short stay in hospital, A flips her lid and wanders round shooting people, preferably pregnant women who can gorily miscarry, nursing women so the same bullet can kill the mother and the child at her breast, etc. After a bit A breaks a leg and lingers for some while in hideous agony from multiple fractures, being saved just in time to be publically executed---dumped in the evocatively named Looney Bin whence no victim ever returns. A returns, though, posthumously, the author being in need of a female corpse for the big necrophilia scene in which C fails to notice that he's screwing his own dead wife... that is, he doesn't realize she's dead. Afterwards, another typical, meaning totally demented, character (it's our old friend B again) starts humping---sorry! starts lugging the body around for reasons even he doesn't understand. Little does he know that he's but a puppet in the hands of the author, who fancies a nice smelly body for next chapter's big cannibalism scene...

I was also struck by the boy-meets-girl vignette in which true love dawns as C helps D try on her first wooden leg; the martial-arts thrill of B's giant spiked yo-yo with which someone's chest is "minced off"; and the hilarious torture sequence featuring someone else's foot-long moustache being ripped out with hydraulic

jacks. This no longer moustachioed chap---call him E---gets his moment of glory at the book's climax, when for completely obscure reasons an evil loony (as opposed to the ordinary common-or-garden loonies who people the rest of the plot) is suspended by a rope high up in the air, grinning wickedly, laughing ha-ha, and clutching a small nuclear device with which he plans to destroy the entire plot. What a dilemma!

Luckily there is this other tasteful public execution gadget, consisting of a gigantic steam-powered catapult which bashes people into the air with such violence as to pulverize them from the waist down, disposing of the results by pitching the body over the edge of the world. Rather like a primitive, one-way version of TAFF. E, our man of the torn-off moustache, goes in for glorious self-immolation by having this catapult hurl him skyward. Converted from the waist down to bolognese sauce, he just happens to retain consciousness. And faster than a speeding Concorde, he hurtles towards the bomb-wielding loony who dangles on high, and fires an arrow at him, and hits him. Naturally the evil-doer then drops his small nuclear weapon; E fields it neatly and takes it with him, on to his big-bang finale somewhere over the edge of the world.

This may sound silly to you. It seemed even sillier to me in the book, which has added attractions like grotesquely bad writing. In fact it even seems silly to the author, who adds a really cringingly sententious epilogue in which one of the nicer characters (C) explains that the events of the last chapter vary between highly implausible, completely unbelievable and downright bloody impossible. Therefore the inscrutable hand of God must have been at work and we should all get down on our knees! This is the first book I've met which tries to pass the buck for bad plotting to God.

Comparison with God's previously published work suggests very strongly that on the contrary, this frightful effort is entirely the responsibility of Frederick Dunstan. In the words of famous BSFA reviewer Sue Thomason, "Please do not buy this book, even to read on trains."

The final Worst in SF award is the biggie, for Scientific Plausibility, and

it takes the form of a rusty Möbius strip riveted to a polypropylene urn containing the ashes of a complete run of Analog. In fact our winner could have made a good showing in any of the previous categories---in a single virtuoso performance the author achieves more padding than Foundation's Edge, mangles the English language as thoroughly as Stephen R. Donaldson, beats Anne McCaffrey hands down for remorseless use of clichés thought slightly stale by Mary Shelley, and even approaches Habitation One in the difficult arena of Good Taste. Let's hear a big friendly round of applause for our all-star winner, an 819-page opusculé which does for sf what the Rev. Jim Jones did for soft drinks---Battlefield Earth by L. Ron Hubbard!

Now Battlefield Earth is a book with something for everyone, all the way across the cultural scale from people who need doorstops to people who want to start bonfires. For example, Scots will be delighted to discover that in the year 3000 all Scots are heavily into kilts, tartans, clans and claymores, and all speak in the parodic stage-Scots accent which raised such titters in 19th-century issues of Punch. Likewise, the Chinese are inscrutable, and very subtle and cunning and diplomatic, and flowery in speech, and fond of rich Oriental robes: one gathers that in this world, Chinese Communism never happened. Neither did feminism---the most prominent of the few female characters achieves absolutely nothing beyond occasionally bursting into tears etc ("It was as though he had taken a board from an irrigation trough; the tears went down her cheeks."), and she spends most of the book locked up in a cage being gloated over by a fiendish alien baddie.

You get the idea. In 3000 AD, by some mysterious alchemy, every aspect of life, character, dialogue, action and you-name-it conforms in exact detail to the worst clichés of the 1930s pulps, the stuff that makes Doc Smith look like Tolstoy. Take that alien baddie's subtle characterization: "He went to sleep gloating over how clever he was." (The characterization of the aforementioned female consists in the two details "black eyes" and "cornsilk hair", repeated again and again without mercy in the apparent hope that sooner or later they'll evoke something.) Savour the richly realized future slang: "You're as crazy as a nebula of crap." "How the

crap nebula would I know?" etc. And one of my favourite lines for general style and panache---after Terl the deviously clever Psychlo baddie has spent several minutes watching the Earthling hero turn blue in alien Psychlo atmosphere, we have: "He suddenly got it. The man-thing couldn't breathe breathe-gas."

There is really no time for a guided tour round the major stylistic awfulnesses of Battlefield Earth---I'll just mention that that sentence about the man-thing and the breathe-gas figures in the anthology of specially good bits selected and circulated by the book's own publicity agents. The whole farrago has been written, or thrown together, using all the devices of short words, short sentences, short paragraphs, repetition and general flatulence from the days when pulp writers were paid by the line---and indeed any thrifty pulp editor would have trimmed the book by about three-quarters without sacrificing anything important. (Personally I could trim it 100% or more without sacrificing anything important, but that's just one fan's opinion.) I only managed to finish it by borrowing a spare office at my publishers' and leaving myself trapped with nothing else to do for a whole wet London afternoon---and even then I kept wanting to rush out and bite the pigeons, or scour the gutters for an improving cigarette-packet to read.

We'll stick to the scientific bits, since LRH is particularly proud of them. In the introduction he explains how he always wrote real sf, featuring real science and real people---adding that John W.Campbell couldn't get the good stuff any more when LRH stopped writing for him. Campbell had to publish hack serials with no characters in them, Dune and things like that. Anyway, according to this same introduction, Battlefield Earth is real sf. None of your implausible fantasy nonsense. So I've picked out a few specially good items of plausible skiffy/science which the publicity crew might care to include in their next Best of BE selection. (In fact I've just noticed to my surprise that at least four of them are visible or implicit in the existing publicity pack...)

One. Savour this, physics fans: the alien Psychlos have a different periodic table.

Two. Their world's entire atmosphere explodes into radioactive gas at the merest

touch of uranium. I now offer a small prize to anyone who can devise a plausible chemical composition for this atmosphere, and who can also explain how Psychlos who breathe this muck can walk round on Earth wearing only facemasks.

Three. It just happens that their "instantaneous conceptual knowledge transmitter", designed by yet another alien race solely for use with the wholly alien Psychlo brain, also happens to work on people.

Four. Psychlos build good, tough armour-plate. "Here was a mark where an atomic bomb had hit it."

Five. There's a great scene in which someone dissects a Psychlo and looks at the bits through an old-fashioned optical microscope. "Their structure isn't cellular," he cries at once. "Viral! Yes. Viral!" In the course of the next few paragraphs this chap, though limited to primitive technology, has completely mapped the Psychlo nervous system using a multimeter and a couple of test prods. It works like this: "The Psychlo cadaver moved its left foot. 'Good,' said McKendrick, '...I have found the nerve that relays walk commands.' He put a little tag on the nerve." By the way, although Hubbard doesn't preach his personal religion anywhere in this book, this scene ties into some digs at his old hate---psychiatrists. It seems that the fantastically cunning Psychlo psychs rewired the brains of the entire race (except the females, who of course don't matter) to instil the Protestant Work Ethic, but got it wrong and made them all vicious sadists instead. Which is why it's OK for the book's hero, Jonnie Goodboy Tyler, to wipe out the whole goddam lot.

Six. Connoisseurs of bad sf will already have recognized the exploding Psychlo atmosphere as a plot device which will allow Jonnie to snuff an entire planet without getting in a sweat. He just teleports a heap of nuclear weapons to Psychlo---little knowing that there's a force screen around the receiving bay! So what happens is that the first doomsday bomb goes off, converting everything within that force-screen to a seething radioactive hell resembling a Worldcon bidding party---and the force screen holds! (Cf. point 4. As legitimate pseudoscience, the screen has a traditional plausibility which nuke-resistant armourplate lacks.) Dramatic pause. Then the

second bomb, which was sitting right next to the first, goes off. Then the third... fourth...fifth... and if anyone hasn't spotted something slightly wrong with this scenario they must be very thick, or L.Ron Hubbard, or both.

Seven. Those were ordinary Earth type atom bombs, the sort John Brunner knows and loves. Psychlos have something much jollier, the Ultimate Bomb---which, believe me or believe me not, consists of a little box containing things like hinged rods and levers. One is duly let off, reducing an entire moon gently to a cloud of electrons and nuclei. You might think that after this, whopping electrostatic forces would make the electrons and nuclei join up again pretty damn quick? Hubbard seems dimly aware of this. What he says is that the huge electric charge will cause mighty lightning bolts to shoot out and zap spacecraft which come too close. Think about that, but not too hard.

Eight. You know about electrolysis---ions flowing through solutions and all that. Now let the complacent mandarins of the fuddy-duddy scientific Establishment reel at... Hubbard Electrolysis! In this stunning new development, molecules flow along a wire. You can stick a probe into a bit of shrapnel lodged in someone's arm (say), connect a battery, and through the magic of Hubbard electrolysis the shrapnel will emerge from the other end of the wire.

Nine---and the last one. If you've seen the inflatable Psychlo in the dealers' room you'll have noticed that Psychlos have 5 talons on one hand, six on the other. Thus they count to base 11. Thus their mathematics is---we learn---very, very difficult for non-Psychlos to follow. According to Hubbard, no matter how many finger you have, the decimal system is the easiest for everyone in the universe. "Whenever they discover ((the decimal system)) on some planet they engrave the discoverer's name among the heroes." Lucky Earthfolk, having ten fingers all along!

"Aha," you say, although I hope you don't, "this is mere nitpicking of a jolly good traditional sf adventure." No. Battlefield Earth is crass through and through, bad and shoddy in every joint, hinge and detail. To find these specially amusing howlers I had to wade through 819 pages of the worst sf writing to be found since R.Lionel Fanthorpe got religion and packed it in. These, I maintain, were the good

bits, and you can do yourself a favour by avoiding the rest. At this climactic point I intended to bang the table, shout lots of very libellous things and ritually set fire to my review copy of Battlefield Earth; but the hotel manager says I can't. Of the twenty pages of fiery epithets I had all prepared, the only one to pass the Seacon '84 censors is: "Not as good as Foundation's Edge."

*

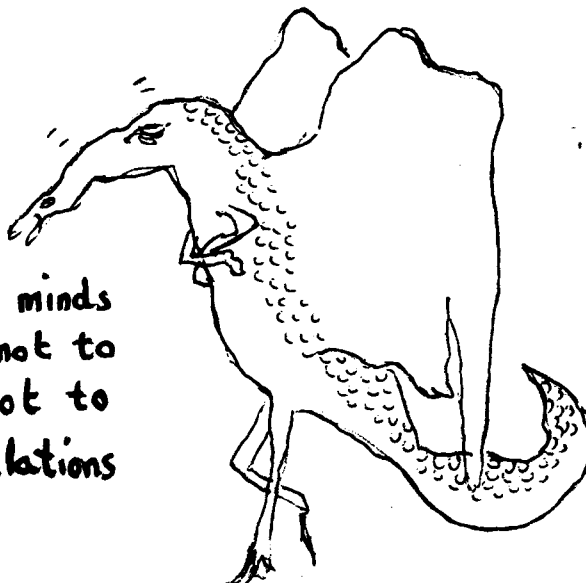
This would normally be the time for questions from the floor, but the con committee has kindly allowed me, instead, to use the next five minutes for a head start on the bands of thugs shortly to be hired by outraged authors. I shall be spending the rest of this convention hiding on the Continent, impenetrably disguised in a false beard (slightly too small for me---it was borrowed from John Brunner) and a false beer-gut (rather too large---borrowed from Martin Hoare). The "Dave Langford" you see in the bars this weekend will be a simulacrum programmed to drink inhuman quantities of Bass and to pretend total ignorance of any hideous insults in the past hour. Meanwhile, as Marty Feldman' used approximately to say: if anyone out there happens to be called Asimov, Donaldson, McCaffrey, Dunstan or Hubbard, well, ha ha, I was only joking, of course. If not---I meant every word.

Thank you.

*

Dave Langford, April 1984

I'm in two minds
whether or not to
refer this lot to
the race relations
board.....



Bravissimo!

Dear Dave,

XYSTER just arrived after a general tour of Sheffield...you put 23 instead of 230 on the envelope... and then to complicate matters,

you had put a flourish in the S of S11 which neatly converted the 11 into an H...never-the-less, our wonderful postal service managed to convert it all into the correct address with the help of the resident at the other address.

,.....tickled pink by the monks and their noise....we were somewhere in Germany..the hotel was beside a local church...and we happened to be there over some Feast/Saint Day which involved First Mass at 5am...then 5.30am etc etc... each with its own set of bells. Fair makes you wonder how Catholicism spreads with them getting so little time in bed.

Count me as a supporter of Vin/ Clarke's reading as an alternative to Winter Olympics...or any Olympics, football, cricket, Match of the day, Saturday Afternoon Stupidity...and of all things...WIMBLEDON.

Particularly liked those luvverly illos....apart from the one on the vasectomy item. Being a snivelling coward, I am firmly convinced that it is a good idea...for other people. Makes me squeamish just reading about it.

I enjoyed the letter column... and for some reason strange reason, it reminded me of another bit of civic improvement I intend to organise one of these days. If they show foreign films on telly, it usually has sub-titles so that we iggerent plebs can tell what is being said (if the film is French however, this seldom helps much...).

Now on the other hand, whenever a TV reporter interviews a speaker from C.Durham, Glasgow, or Northern Ireland..all we hear is "Grunge gunk oimkety plonk..etc" Can't we all write to the BBC/ITV moguls and DEMAND sub-titles for whenever these ethnic minorities (be it in plays, documentaries or interviews) make their indecypherable mutterings?

The amazing thing is that people in France, Germany, and all over Europe and the USSR are interviewed they speak in ENGLISH and what they say can be understood... Yet Northern Irishers, Geordies and some Scots are totally INCOMPREHENSIBLE.....

Bestest,

ERG 86

April 1984



I must just interrupt to mention that Terry has notched up 25 years of fan pubbing with ERG. I doubt if there can be anyone out there who is not aware of this, but it must still be worth a few lines of Egoboo....
Congrats, Terry.

Dave.



Dear David

.....thanks for number 4.....misery loves company but produces results. Or, optical deficiencies experienced by a number of fans encourages clearer print.

Thoroughly enjoyed the pieces from Mal and Hazel...the artwork throughout also..... little puzzled though as the only artist you credit is Atom and the material is not his style???? (((excuse the interruption, Pamela, but shucks, all the artwork is MINE, unless credited...thanks anyway.)))

Embarrassing moments.

Well I was about nineteen when, as a rather shy physical training instructress in the WRAF, I arrived at RAF Wyton to take up my first posting. The Warrant Officer (and this was to be virtually the first and last time I was to see him, apart from his flying visits to claim the credit for my work at the Station's sporting occasions..) reluctantly put down his golf clubs just long enough to suggest that an ideal way for me to get to know the Station was to visit every department selling some raffle tickets he just happened to have on him.....it seemed like a good idea and I was going to get to know the layout of the place even if I didn't sell many tickets.

Eventually I arrived at a large sprawling building discreetly labelled 'Photographic Section'.

Every door seemed to bear a notice prohibiting entry except to authorised personnel.

I was deep in a maze of corridors very much bewildered and bemused before I came across anyone who had the time to notice such a lowly person, let alone pause long enough to be questioned by her. Corporals might be someone at training establishments but elsewhere they count as the lowest of the low, especially when their tapes are so obviously brand new....that is unless you can find an 'erk'. An 'erk' is someone who has not served long enough to realise any better. To this one I explained my reluctance to pass through those forbidden doorways. Kindly lad indicated the way to the nearest section which was not barred to mere mortals.

There was no label on the door but the kindly lad assured me that the denizens of that particular room would be more than happy to see me and would probably buy up all my raffle tickets.

All I had to do was knock and walk right in.

I did just that.

The place was a gloomy forest of lockers with but two inhabitants. They spotted me. I advanced, and using words as a shield gave my sales pitch: extolling the virtues of the supporting fund, the value of the prizes. I threw in the occasional "sir" to be on the safe side. The men remained motionless. The older one was obviously able to take all things in his stride; bemused WRAF corporals dressed for P.E. were all in a day's work, and he said in a tone which was kindly enough, "It wouldn't be convenient just now corporal, we don't usually have cash in here." The younger turned his back his back and heaved his shoulders indicating that he was subject to fits of ague.

"Yes sir." I made a smart and dignified retreat.

As I marched down the corridor I spotted the large notice on the wall. It bore an arrow pointing toward the room I had just left. And the legend 'SQUADRON CHANGING ROOM'

I had learnt that airmen only wear long-johns under their flying suits. Further, they are not too particular about buttoning up all those flaps that seem to provide access to....

I would certainly be hard set to find a better way of announcing my arrival at the Station.

I later found myself organising and recording the air crews's compulsory participation in sporting activities, night vision training and para landing drill.

For a while the gaps in those officers attending charts were far fewer than prior to my arrival. My only regret was that I never again was able to recognise those two officers....you see I hadn't really been looking at their faces when I tried to sell those raffle tickets.....

Perela

ETHEL LINDSAY 69 BARRY ROAD CARNOUSTIE ANGUS DD7 7QQ

....many thanks for XISTER 4, received with much appreciation. I like Perelman too, but I would not say he was the best. You must hand that to Thurber surely. Take the first line of 'MY LIFE AND HARD TIMES':- "I suppose that the high-water mark of my youth in Columbus, Ohio, was the night the bed fell on my Father." ----- There now I nearly got sidetracked into reading the whole piece. Alexander Woolcott is another name that comes to mind.....read the piece about the wife who shot her husband over a game of Bridge.

Another favourite of mine is Dorothy Parker. What could be more succinct than her 'PICTURES IN SMOKE.'

Oh, gallant was the first love, and glittering and fine
The second love was water, in a clear white cup
The third love was his, and the fourth was mine
And after that, I always get them all mixed up.

All the rest of the issue was fine..... praise though for giving that piece by Irene Gore.....I can remember when she went to live in a caravan and was describing how the books were stored. I asked her how she found room for pots and pans?

"Oh, those." she said disdainfully.

Gore



"How was the Mexican then, gringo.....?"

Dear Dave,

Apart from the rogue claw which lay open my left thumb to the elbow and left the kitchen floor awash with red, red krovvy Xyster 4 was a pleasant experience. That said, I trust you are aware of the dangers inherent in putting even the very best of fannish talent next to the peerless Perelman. Even THE Bob Shaw isn't in that league as a humourist.

I'm afraid I wasn't terribly impressed by Mal Ashworth's tale of life before and after the knife. No doubt it was a moment of great moment to Mal, but I was bored. I'd read it all before, and better done. It seemed perfunctory, a response to a good idea that never got out of the starting stall. Whatever the Ashworth magic is, this didn't have it. Hazel's piece, however, had everything Mal's didn't - life, malice, that personal touch, a definable reality. Well worth the entire zine, just for that.

Neighbours, now isn't that a subject. There were the charming couple of young men who lived next door to us in Yeadon (in those days the 'us' to which I belonged did not have the same constituents as the 'us' to which I belong today) Lovely boys, beautiful manners, beautiful home, beautiful Dobermann puppies (try playing them Oldfield's 'Piltdown Man' if you want a very interesting experience...) and just one beautifully rumpled bed. That gave my 'liberated' then mother-in-law a turn, I can tell you! Mind you, they were semi-detached suburban Mr Joneses beside the bunch of weirdos I had in Camberwell. There were six flats on this staircase. I was in the middle. Opposite was a woman in her mid forties, or so, one of those hundreds of thousands who've lost the husband but kept the kids, somewhere along the line. She drank. She threw things at her boyfriend. She cursed her mother whenever she came to babysit the kids. She threw a fit when she accidentally received a letter addressed correctly to me, but put through her letterbox, loudly insisting I ensure she didn't get my filthy letters (it was from Ted White, as I recall...) On the day I moved in she gave us (the same us as then, but not now) a cup of tea, and not another civil how d'ye do for the next three years after that. She was normal. Upstairs was a guy who was always in and out of Wandsworth with the numbers for a name (well, Brixton) He was a part time bouncer at the Green River club, used by the local Chinese as an after hours gaming club (and you may know that the Chinese take gambling v-e-r-y seriously, even more seriously than fans take alcohol) Him and his missus delighted to throw late night parties on a Sunday night - a Sunday night! Shortly after they did their moonlight flit I met their daughter in the street - ten years old, blonde curls and as bright as a button. She got off her bike and told me, quite matter of factly, how her dad had got his throat opened from ear to ear in a Peckham pub just the Saturday before. Next door to them was a young West Indian couple who said nowt to no-one and didn't play any loud reggae or smoke any ganja. They were squatters. Down below was Mrs Ross who had also mislaid a husband during the passage of the years (lucky blighter!) If you want to know where Steve Wright picked up Mr Angry you only want to meet this large, short tempered Austrian woman (I wouldn't say she was paranoid, just that there really was a conspiracy against her...) She had a screw coming loose somewhere, and as her party piece she would chase after the local youth waving something that was either a police truncheon or a sawn off pool cue wrapped in electrician's tape. Given her personality, and the fact that much of the local youth was - like so much more of the local youth in inner South

London - young, none too gifted, black, and unemployed there was plenty of scope for misunderstanding. The trouble was that the D'Eynsford kids spent their time working out, playing football, roller skating, being cool, and getting up to no mischief at all. I'm sure it was only good humour that kept the particular butt of her mittel Europ tongue - an amiable lad called Winston who had signed professional for Charlton Athletic the last I heard - from taking that truncheon and stuffing it up an orifice which it is illegal to fill with pleasurable intent. Then there was Henry, an old man who was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time and was too proud to ask to be moved.

After that little lot everything else has to be an anticlimax, neighbourwise. How could Julie - two kids, a permanently absent RAF husband, and an almost permanent boyfriend - and Val - whose first words to Cathie were 'We women are such fools', whose taxi driver husband has spending habits that make Viv 'Spend Spend Spend' Nicholson seem like a miser, and whose companions on their surprise winter holiday in Ibiza turned out to be her schizophrenic brother and his equally schizophrenic girlfriend - compete with what has gone before?

Yours,

Malcolm

ERIC BENTCLIFFE 17 RIVERSIDE CRESC HOLMES CHAPEL CHESHIRE CW4 7NR

Dear Dave,

MACCHU PICCU!! But this must stop.....this mindless enthusiasm, this, this frequent fan-publishing....

Look, when I went before the Secret Masters of Fandom after finding that well-hidden spell (to be used only in the hour of fandoms greatest need) in NIRVANA 2 I promised them it wouldn't have any really nasty earth-shattering effects on fandom as they knew it - and they said I could use it. And generally, that which it awoke hasn't caused too many problems; I mean, Mal is still only thinking about ROT 6, and whilst Ving has pubbed his ish a couple of times he has, with great decorum, popped into hospital between each one so as not to exhibit any vulgar ostentation.

But you, MACCHU PICCU! (I repeat), KLONO'S MIGHTY BALLS!

However, I must applaud this fast and frequent fan-pubbing you are doing; XYSTER is going from strength to strength and any day now you are going to either a) Become a Focal Point or b) Burn yourself out...and I hope its the former. Apart from all the goodly material in this issue there's all these hoary references that please...casual mention of Shorty Rogers for instance - no other current fanzine is mentioning Shorty Rogers (or The Giants) and I suspect that apart from thee and me no one is concerned about this lack, even, which just shows the terrible state fandom has got into. Now then, this issue let us hear it please for Glen Gray and the Casa Loma Orchestra and "No Name Jive". Hein?

Excuse this marginal deviation....I've been off for a few days with a bad back, and the distalgesics I'm popping seem to have an odd effect on my perspective. Ahem, sorry...this won't be one letter you can just photocopy - I hope! .

Ever since I had my appendix (!) out at the tender age of seven.... and got convinced by the bod in the next bed that when they took the stitches out they fitted a zip-fastener...I've taken such tales as Mal's with several pinches of salt - useful stuff for rubbing in metaphorical raw wounds.

Hmm...Ving and SF in the Olympics. I suspect a snag here would be that track events would all have to be relays..... the current publishing tendency of all 'novels' being published as Trilogies. The Other Current Trend...ie, for stories not to have a discernable Begin ing, Middle or End could cause a certain amount of confusion ,too.

Delight of the issue was HAZEL's piece...she is one of those rare writers who write-as-they-speak and I could picture her telling the tale. Not that the power of her prose won't make it all as amusing to those who haven't had the pleasure of meeting her, I'm sure....adds he hastily and (hopefully) tactfully! Some lovely mental imagery there.

Good lettercolumn, and an excellent issue all round, Dave. Keep 'em coming....Keep well...

Sincerely
Chuck

SILDAN HOUSE, CHEDESTON ROAD, WISSETT, NEAR HALESWORTH, SUFFOLK, IP19 0NF

Dear Dave,

Many tks for copy of JUNGLE TALES OF XYSTER - but wasn't the snake (and not the tiger) whose eyes flashed the hypnotic commands? (Note, I do not make refs to assorted bakeries, famous writers, nor anything amounting to making 'Exceedingly Good Tarts' either) Still, I like the hint of the surreal/Popart you keep on using, a little dotty here & there, but it helps to break up the line & squiggle atmosphere that a good cartoon emits. Which reminds me, did you use the colours randomly, or did you batch the pages up with set colours? I did a Lettercol way back a couple of years ago with multi-colouring, and I still have the scars. I'd been running round matching like to like (well, you know what it's like when you start collating don't you) when all of a sudden I hit a mental block and couldn't match the pages up. Since then I've only used coloured covers - it's a lot easier on my knackered eyes (Yeah, I keep on getting free quotes from EVEREST and ZENEITH, but have switched to plastic lenses and thus now have a fear of them getting scratched. Sometimes ya just can't win, Kid - as Chandler was wont to write. And have you seen that mess they have made of Mike Hammer? Worst thing they ever did was to try and update the idea - totally destroyed the 'hardboiled' edge of the books. Damn it, is nothing sacred??!!)

Thanks, before I forget, for telling Mal Ashworth about IDOMO - apparently I've now become one of the Damned and have been placed on the mailing list for ROT no. 6. How could you do this to me? Have to admit though, that he's a very amusing writer even if the subject is a little cutting. Thankfully there were no comments as to 'the first cut is the deepest' and the like. But on the subject of tattoos...well, being in the RN I get to see a fair selection of 'oddities'. The now quite rare 'Foxhunting Scene' with the fox's tail peeking out between the buttocks takes more than several 'sittings' (though how the hell you can actually sit after someone's stabbed you in the bum a half a million times, is beyond me!), and even the cheeky Eyes have been vaishing of late. One very odd turn has been the sudden influx of Frogs, Toadstools and, of all things, Ducks - all on the botties of assorted sailors. What the 'loved Ones' make of all this I just don't know - but at least there is honesty in a frog, whereas the poor sods who walk around with a Singapore Beauty on their arms with a chinese message are lying through their teeth when they tell their young ladies that it reads 'I Love You' - when in fact it reads something along the lines of 'F Off Jack' or some such derogatory statement. Yet, to beat the usual run of 'MADE IN ENGLAND' (around the navel) and **CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE** (around the neck)

a cook I knew very early on in my Naval time had a spider's web tattooed on his glans. For many nights afterwards I would wake up in my bunk sweating and feeling countersunk after a nightmare with the likes of a massive Tattooing needle going for my Wedding Tackle, and normally guided by a furry spider leg as well. I, by the way, remain (to a certain extent) undamaged.

All the very best & good luck,

Chuck

0655 hrs on Wednesday the sixth of March!

(I have to leave for work in about thirty-five minutes so I probably won't get too much done now - but I have oft found that, when it comes to LoCs, there is a tide in the affairs of Man which must be grasped etc.)

Dave,

Also within this next thirty-two minutes, hopefully, a vast tide of fannish mail will crash and pound upon my door, smashing it aside with the awesome power of its pent-up energies. Then again, it might turn out to be a gas bill. Either way, it behooves me to stop futzing around and get me to the gist - namely, to whit, and viz: XYSTER 4, which is lately come upon these shores.

'Lately' being the operative word.

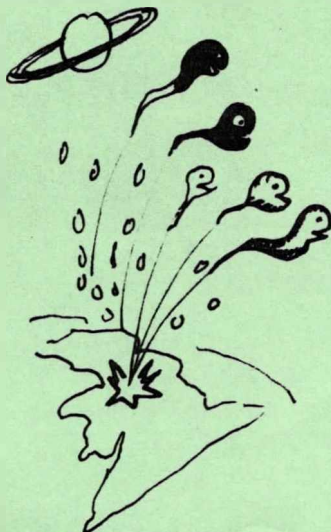
You see, we too have neighbours, and the one from number 23 is an awesome sight - built like a brick shithouse and with a face that looks like it's spent the last fifteen years as a heavyweight boxer's punchbag...and her husband's not much better!

Anyway, this neighbour (who we refer to as 'She-Who-Must-Be-Avoided') stormed up to our door after work last night (I think she has a temporary job as stand-in for the IRA whenever they're on holiday), demanding to know why people keep sending our mail to her house. "Three letters this week!" she stormed, as Cas shook and quaked with terror. It's bad enough that Nick's and Bethany's friends, the ones they met on holiday last year, should keep writing to them with the wrong address, but when Bristol's Antideluvian Ferret-Fanciers start mailing things to number 23, something must be done! Like I said before, the trouble with Boring Auld F-Farts is that their memory starts to go. "You can tell that Dave Wood," mumbled Cas, as I tried to persuade her out from the wardrobe in which she'd taken refuge, "that it's 25, not 23."

1910 hrs, later that same day.....

.....and back to XYSTER, XYSTER, burning bright. I am amazed at the editorial. That anyone would go to so much trouble in order for fans to come and visit them - my gobsmackment is total. So much energy gone to waste. Think of all the articles that could have been written, fanzines read, or ishes pubbed in those hours so trivially wasted. Mind you, you're really knocking them out at the moment, aren't you? A XYSTER a day keeps the doctor away? Too many XYSTERS spoil the sloth? Certainly one must agree with ATom's comments in the LoC-col, to the effect that, in respect of LoCing XYSTER, he who hesitates is lost. So much energy and enthusiasm certainly puts us younger fans to shame. Admit it Wood, you've been overdosing on the Sanatogen again!

Evenso, wasting all that energy doing jobs around the house? Unthinkable! Why, I even still have the hole in our bedroom ceiling where Mike Glicksohn put his foot through it just before SEAcOn 79 - and no, I will not reveal the nature of the unspeakable sexual practises that can lead to a fan, especially one with legs as short as Glicksohn's, putting his feet through the bedroom ceiling. Even with the Sanatogen, I don't think you could handle such knowledge.



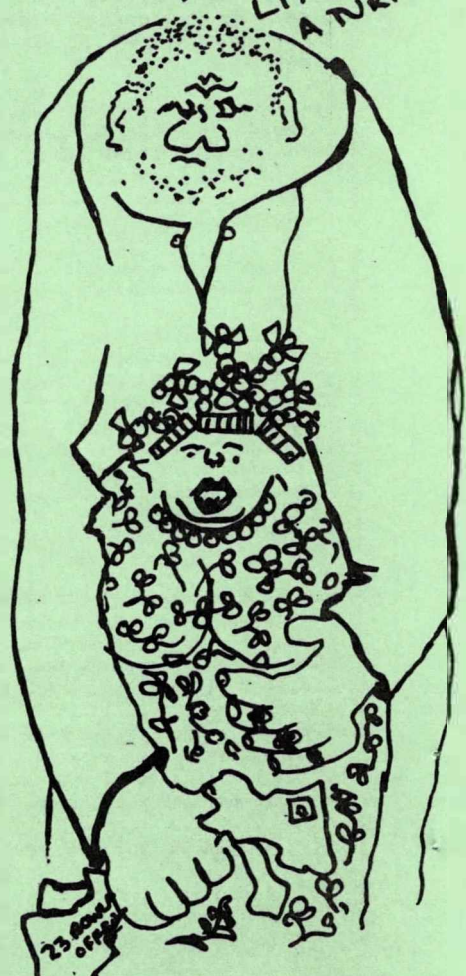
AT LAST,
MAN IS
SEEDING THE
GALAXY!

On the subject of geriatric has-beens... Mal's piece was the best thing of his I've ever seen. Lately he does seem to have been writing, in fanzines, as if he had to make up for lost time - thoughts spilling over the edges in all directions. With this piece though he's still 'full of it', but just nicely contained. I am though at a loss to understand Hazel's remark. I thought Mal always looked like an aquarium of tadpoles. When you're stoned he's more like a bucket of wombats. Oddly, I've often wondered what happened to all the spermatozoa that suddenly find themselves with nowhere to go. I guess a vasectomy is the spermatozoan equivalent of being stuck on the Birmingham ring road and never being able to find one's way out. I mean, what happens to all these sperms that can't get out? Do one's balls swell up until they approach the dimensions of the Graf Zeppelin, before suddenly exploding and impregnating every female from here to Cleethorpes? And if so, can they all sue you for rape? I think we should be told. Mal's remarks about having to fill the sample bottle put me in mind of that superb sketch from the recent 'Alas Smith & Jones' series "...that's nearly a milk-bottle full, innit?". The series was something of a disappointment, but for all that it did contain some really good stuff, such as the aforesaid artificial insemination sketch.

Mal would feel too ostentatious with a tie proclaiming his 'status'? I am put in mind of the aforementioned Mike Glicksohn who proudly sports a 'vasectomy' t-shirt, and I am convinced he only settles for that because of the problems involved in arranging for the sign-writing plane to maintain its station above him.

Of course, the best thing about Mal's return to fandom... is Hazel. She is a natural fanwriter. In fact, she is probably the natural fanwriter. We do have a local man who works for P & C Lines - in contravention of every local bye-law known to man he parks his big tractor unit outside his house (which isn't a million miles from ours) and revs it up for at least ten minutes at 5.45 every morning, before pulling away to a chorus of cheery hussahs (note: 'Cheery Hussahs' are not reprintable in any fanzine that might be read by Terry Jeeves or Pamela Boal).

ALL THIS
SEDITIONOUS
MAIL OF YOURS!
FAIR GIVES MY
LITTLE LADY
A TURN...



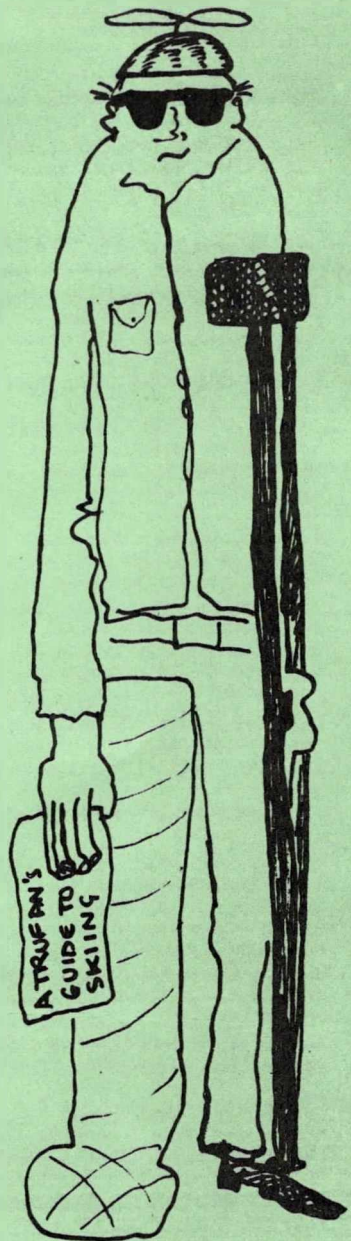
The postal avalanche by the way turned out to be a single envelope bearing the legend 'Wilmot Mountain, Inc.' writ large in the top left-hand corner. Bleedin' typical, init? Only yer bleedin' Americans would incorporate a sodding mountain. Mind you, 'Kinder Scout, plc' just doesn't have the same ring to it, does it? The envelope, which is from a ski resort, also bore, this time in the top right-hand corner, a preprinted wheelchair logo and the message "Remember Our Paralyzed Veterans", which is hardly the most appropriate symbol to have on a ski-resort's stationery, I would have thought. Then again, maybe they mean the ski-resort's paralyzed veterans - the ones who holidayed there year after year and finally ended up going back one year too many. The whole thing was franked with a postmark bearing the message "Save Your Vision Week". Bloody hell! When the Americans want you to worry about your health, they don't go in for half-measures. No wonder that Americans carry so much life insurance. I wonder how much the US post office charges the Life Insurance companies for this insidious advertising?

It's one thing to be sensitive to criticism - like Joseph's, that you were destroying the flow of the letters by butting in too much, but it's quite another to go and hide at the end of the letter-column. This is going too far. By the time we've read your responses we've completely forgotten what you're going on about. Perhaps a little moderation? The merest hint of compromise? A bit of chatypoos between letters, perhaps? After all, one would never say that you should never interrupt a letter, even. After all, sometimes a letter requires a response - to a particular point - and it can be distracting to the reader, who is also expecting that response, to find it not forthcoming. From there on until the end of the letter his attention is distracted. Also, if you try to respond to too many points at the end of a letter, you can end up losing the whole thrust and direction of the letter-column as a whole, and a letter-column should progress from start to finish with some degree of cohesion and a sense of plan. Of course, chucking all your responses in at the end simply means that you relinquish any chance to 'guide' your readers through it. Of course you are still selecting the order of the letters, and how much of each of them, and how many of them you print - but this is a bit on a par with putting the intrepid explorer at the beginning, putting Africa, India, South America, and China down in whatever order you like, and expecting him to find the right path through them all. The hardest traveller needs some directions, even if only to put him in the right frame of mind for the next leg of the journey.

Perelman's parody of Maugham left me unaffected. I am not very well read, certainly far less so than most fans. Whilst my reading has not been restricted entirely to SF, I have certainly not read as widely as many fans. I haven't read anything by Somerset Maugham, and if Perelman's parody is even half-way accurate, I won't be bothering. Thus, I can't appreciate any 'cleverness' it contains and can only respond to it as affected writing of utter tedium. Your samples of Perelman as Perelman were better, though nothing out of this world. I came across a collection of his work in the Stockport Central Library a couple of weeks ago but didn't pick it up, having already selected my allotted quota. However, I shall be back there tomorrow, and if it's still there I reckon I'll give it a go.

Speaking of going, I am.

Skel



CHUCK HARRIS 32 LAKE CRESCENT DAVENTRY NORTHANTS

I see somewhere or other that a Stateside gent was slagging off our Mal for saying "nigger minstrel"...or something, instead of "coloured troubador"...or something, and Quite Right too. The hole of HYSTER is permeated with this nasty racist filth, and even your homemade plonk is labelled WHITE Rose Pizz. Kindly cancel my subscription immediately and return any monies outstanding. Thank you.

✂(Sir, your reference is a slur on my birthright. No self respecting LANCASTRIAN would show a yorkist drinking anything as fine and noble as RED Rose Pizz....not that such a scurrilous character of such uncertain parentage would be able to take a drink of such fortified strength. I remain.....✂

And further, tell your other two readers that I did NOT author that chauvenist limerick about the Young Lady of Wantage.... although I frequently wish I had done so.

You know, nothing really changes in fandom. One of my best Convention memories is of a younger, prettier Ashworth rabbiting away to all sorts of credulous American ladies that he'd had mumps three times and was as sterile as sealed elastoplast. Eventually he pulled a geriatric woman from Wichita Falls who was 83 years old and was exceedingly grateful. Everytime he gave her one, she gave him one, and by Monday Morning he got sufficient from the deposits on the empties to pay for a taxi to the railway station.

Which was a sort of blessing because he was in no fit state to walk there. (Wasn't it marvellous in Sixth Fandom when you could still get money refunded on the empty bottles?)

This year I suppose he will be flashing his vasectomy certificate and soliciting custom as Fun Boy 1.

It was a good article though,....interesting as well as entertaining. I did once think seriously about sterilisation myself but the only first hand information I could find was from F Towner Laney,..... and he seemed to bitterly regret the whole thing. This was a bit discouraging and eventually I decided to stay Entire and Whole and Perfect....the story of our love just like it says in Hymns Ancient and Mod. I'm not sorry I did now either. My scream point is very low. I won't even let the dentist put the little mirror in my mouth without a general anesthetic and a few words of prayer.

The letter column was really tremendous ... sharp people with something pertinent to say. Especially the 1984 Model Joe No Nicholas. He was quite right too; I'm surprised Brunner himself didn't complain of your con report tucked away inside his con speech. I do hope John hasn't mellowed over the years too.

I seem to be collecting a different sort of reputation myself. Lat month WIZ told ALL of my penchant for bestiality, and now Old Mate Vincent labels us as necrophiliacs. If it goes on like this I shall be eligible to stand for TAFF. It really is only a literary taste though....mainly revolving around Patrick O'Brian who writes Napoleonic sea-stories featuring Jack Aubrey and Dr. Maturin.

Recently though I've been trying to catch up on some science fiction I've missed..... to try to get away from the sf of the 50's 50's into a broader, more modern field. I would like to see a definative article on this....a sort of expansion on the last paragraph of Joe Nicholas's letter.



Best

Oh Ye Wod of Little Faith!

How about this then ? Know what it is, huh ? A letter, that's what! And for an encore - The Second Coming of Christ, and the End of the World. (I thought I'd better not write to you on April 1st or you'd never believe it was genuine.)

So - there was this badly-stapled greenish looking thing lying on the carpet. "Jungle Tales of Xyster," I thought, "Lawks-a-Lunky the lad is getting absent-minded. He did that one last issue." There was that tyger, tyger burning bright in the forests of the unlocced fanzines littering the lounge floor to prove me right. Then I remembered you'd sent me a preview of the cover. I guess that let's you off the hook.

Now if I can only get this typer, typer burning bright - or at least glowing a little - you may even get this letter before your next issue. You will notice, too, that I have taken to your practice of repeating words. I don't understand why but whatthehell, I thought (allinarushlikethat), if Dave's doing it, it must be the up-up-to-to-to-the-the-minute-minute fannish thing to do. After all, Good Old Dave's one of those sophisticates who actually goes to the 'One Tun'. And if it's not the In-Thing to do he will receive a terse 14-page explanation of the fact from Joseph Nicholas, and then, of course, I'll drop it too too. (I can't wait to hear whether Joseph tells you you can't put 'classic' together with 'neo-Romantic'. He will be wrong if he does, but that doesn't seem to stop him. Or even slow him up much.)

Not that the foregoing is any kind of snide snipe at the 157 typos and spelling mistakes in Xyster 4. Oh gudness mee, naw! I understand about you neo-McLuhanites (that's spelled 'nue-McLuhancites') in British Telecom and your alienation from the boring old linear medium of the printed word.

Your elucidation of what Tony Walsh and I were talking about in the pub clarifies things no end. Wittgenstein, was it ? I thought it was Lichtenstein. Quite a relief, really, knowing that. I mean, when I said "Of course, compared with Tierra del Fuego it's rather more like Tristan da Cunha" and he responded with "The truth or falsity of every proposition does make some alteration in the general construction of the world", I concluded I was batting in the wrong league intellectually. It's times like that that I tend to notice my glass is empty, which is probably how we came to remind you it was your round.

Partly what I was doing in the bookshop while you were unearthing Patrick Campbell was unearthing Woody Allen - GETTING EVEN, an excellent collection which includes, among many other superb pieces, his wildly funny 'A Look At Organised Crime', half of which (from a magazine reprint) I have had for years and have used in 'Humour in Literature' sessions at College. Even though only an extract, and although they probably were not familiar with the 'History of Organised Crime' genre of writing, students invariably found it hilarious and, apparently, much more approachable than Thurber. And now you have pointed me at Perelman, whom I realise I should have read years ago but for some reason never have. I immediately fished out my only Perelman, CRAZY LIKE A FOX, and dipped into it. Terrific! Why didn't you break my arm and rub my nose in it before now ? Call yourself a friend, huh ? Just because I didn't happen to share your musical tastes (as I believe you were whimsically pleased to refer to them) like Stan Kenton and The Rotherham Steelworks, Charlie Parker and the Yardbirds and Dizzy Gillespie and the Sick Headaches! Anyway, an instant Perelman convert I now am. At his best he gets straight into the Charles Burbee/ Irene Gore class of humourists - although he does have lapses where he drops into a rather Easy-Laugh-mechanical style of humour. Can't find an example now that I want one of course, but you know the kind of thing: "So-and-so stole the scene, but he had to give it back later". A bit squirm-making.

And bully for you for reprinting that piece of Irene's. Her material is still completely distinctive; I have never come across anyone else who can use a combination of insouciance and non-sequiturs quite so devastatingly. Er - can I interest you in an Irene Gore Anthology as a joint project ? It wouldn't be very large at best.

I leave it to others to tell you you have far too much of the goddamned Ashworths in this issue (yes, I know that was my fault, too. What, I begin to wonder, isn't ?) But never fear, the rest of the content redeems it, and that self-portrait on page - er - er - yes, sod it, you must number your pages! (Or 'number number' them, as you say in Clevedon.) Anyway, that self-portrait from the British Dental Association Journal makes up for everything. Hazel cracks up every time she looks at it and I think it is already taking its place as her joint favourite along with that post-holocaust shot of Bob Shaw in the Seacon Progress Report. There were many other goodies too - Philip Collins nice bit on the laying on of hands, Vince's brief notes for what could be a really fine article (can't you imagine what darts commentator, Sid Waddell, could do in that sphere ? "Sid Griggs at 18 stone and twenty pints a night is on the 'ockey now an 'e's going for double-top with a reading of DUNE, but 'e's gorrit all to do, and it looks as though it's Fred Bloggs at 19 stone and ~~twenty~~-four pints a night, known as The Ton-Up Machine who's going to be in the driving seat as he rips through DAMNATION ALLEY. And there it is - ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY!!!!") Of your own contributions - apart from some delightful illos - I think the piece on neighbours grabbed me the most; if the ~~form~~ at Walden had worked out we would have come fairly close to my ideal of not having any, but it now looks as though we are having to sell that. You've certainly had some humdingers in your time; I wonder whatever gave old Aristotle his curious idea about man being a 'social animal' ? (Actually, I don't think he said that; what he said was that man is an animal whose nature it is to live in City-States, which is slightly different. But since no-one has done that for a few hundred years anyway, either we seem to be ignoring our 'nature' or Big A was wrong anyway.)

I am also tempted to write a ream or two agreeing with Vince's observations on how the power-hungry rise to, and hold onto, positions of power, while most people would much prefer to get on with their lives quietly in a spirit of mutual co-operation. I used to think I was the only anarchist around; it's nice to have company. This point about power is, of course, the one central message of Orwell's 1984, which everyone tries very hard to ignore while denigrating it for not socking whatever ideological message would fit with their own beliefs. O'Brien makes it crystal clear that power, and nothing else, is what it's all about, and in this sense at least 1984 is undeniably with us now; whether it's Big Ronnie in the U.S.ofA. or Maggie in London, or Comrade Chernenko in Moscow, power is what it's about and there isn't a principle in the world that can't be sacrificed in order to hang onto it. Vince is dead right, only those people who don't want it should ever be allowed to hold positions of power, but that's a dilemma not easy to solve. The British system which allowed a shift of power into at least slightly different hands every four or five years was a bearable compromise; but I suspect that with the advent of Thatcher that system has now come to an end. I reckon she knows for sure that she and her party are the only people fit to hold power in this country and if it involves a little ballot-rigging by changing boundaries around, well that's a small price to pay, isn't it, to have the Right People running things ? I'm sure O'Brien would agree.

No more, or you'll never get this.

Hast la Vistula and all that,

Mal

When I tell you that the tiger's eyeballs on the cover of XISTER 4 were two of the best things in the issue, I'm not decrying the rest of the 'zine. I just think that they were witty. A witty kitty. (Reminds me, by the way, of the HYPHEN bacover quote: "Tiger, Tiger, burning bright, Can you oblige me with a light?" Your pardon, Sir, I must confess, we do not burn, we fluoresce."). If this animal was drawn by you - inferred as no acknowledgments given - my awe-struck congratulations.

The Woodish recollections of neighbours smooth and easy reading. I don't recall having any really memorable neighbours - leaving aside the soldier's wife who used to try and entertain other members of the Armed Forces in her bedroom only a few feet from mine, the twanging of bedsprings seriously interfering with this young budding astronomer's observations of the heavens through his own open bedroom window - but the way the garden's looking right now I'm probably on two or three people's lists as That Man Who Lets It All Grow Wild...I really must take steps to tidy up Wellings first Nature Reservation outside the back door soon.

I don't know what damaging comparisons Simon Polley was drawing in that quote re 'facile' rocket ships and 'gravelly' French modernists, as I'm not sufficiently up in modern bookcovers to know what the hell he's talking about with 'gravelly'...is this like that pile of arty tricks at the Tate Gallery there was so much fuss about?...but I'm glad to see that bit of serious statistical research on 'facile' (easily drawn?) rockets; a small sampling of 26 pocket books from the nearest shelf (LeGuin to McCaffrey) shows no rockets at all. A few moth-eaten dragons, though.

I was impressed by Phil Collins on several levels, but in particular the way in which whole chunks of expository matter that could have been included...what sort of amateur company it was, the plays in which he'd lost his trousers, etc., ...were chucked out in favour of the bare bones of the anecdote. And very successfully too.

I was thinking of running the next THEME - if there ever is one - on HUMOUR... your Perelman piece would have been great. Well, it is still great. I've often wondered why faans, whose penchant for humour has lasted these many years, have paid little attention in fanzines to the mundane laughter-makers... 'Bramah', Coren, H. Allen Smith, Kington, Kerr, etc etc. Who, having seen W.W. Jacob's Monkey's Paw anthologised for the umpteenth time in some anthology of Great Weird Stories knows that he did some first class humorous shorts? Personally, I first came across Perelman by a mention in Boys Will Be Boys, a first-class examination of old boy's papers, penny-dreadfuls and twopenny bloods and the like. As was common in those days, 48, author, E.S. Turner, took a Nichollosian view of s-f and included a chapter in which he cited Perelman on Captain Future. Incidentally, a few months after reading Turner, and vowing to get as many books of his as I could (I heartily recommend Roads To Ruin the 'Shocking History of Social Reform') I had to - rather unusually - see a customer at the engineering wholesalers where I was clerking. His name was Turner, and, more-or-less to break the silence of a lift journey, I asked him if he was any relation to the author E.S. Turner. I could as easily have said 'H. Turner, the s-f artist.' But his face lit up. "He's my brother" he said, and we were great pals for the further 15 minutes our business dealings lasted.

Mal rambles like mad and remains good reading. Out of sheer curiosity I looked up the R&J quotation at the head of Mal's piece (read 'piece') and see it occurs in one of those flights of Elizabethan wit which read so drearily these days...I wonder what the humour of 500 years hence will be like? Idly turning on a few more pages of the Master - Shakespeare, not Ashworth - I came across "More fierce and more inexorable far/ Than empty tigers or the roaring sea..." Love that 'empty tigers'. Anyway, being pig-ignorant against the might of Mal, I can only say I'd have picked a commoner but just as appropriate quote as a heading for the article: Julius Caesar Act.III Scene II.... "This was the most unkindest cut of all...."

.... I just know that you're going to sneak in another XYSTER before I finish this letter....FATE has been against me, I feel...I was going to make a mighty effort today, then on going into my back room this am. I heard a drip-drip-drip...no, not D.W.'s collection, but water dripping through the ceilingturned out, after I'd taken down part of the ceiling + floorboards upstairs (I could look right through the floor to the room below - interesting experience)- that an ancient iron pipe had sprung a leak. Nothing of value damaged, just some Clayton ASTOUNDINGS...no,no, I'm joking - but it wrecked a good deal of fanning time and tho' the source discovered is not yet mended.

...can you think of any use for the letters β , α , μ , & θ that I have on this machine? Make a good four letter rude word I suppose but it couldn't be taken up by anyone else.

See ya.....

JOHN D OWEN 4 HIGHFIELD CLOSE NEWPORT PRAGNELL BUCHS BK16 9AZ

Hi there, and many thanks for the copy of JUNGLE TALES OF XYSTER. Can't help thinking that this is the issue that should have been called BIG XYSTER, since that's what it is. Looking back on the last few issues, the phrase 'exponential groth' (groth? Hmm, hang about while I regrind my brain valves and get the fingers back into phase with the rest of my body. ...That's better: make that 'growth' back there, if you please.) springs to mind. The next ish will probably end up in two volumes, delivered by Securicor.

This issue is a bit of an Ashworth special, isn't it? I mean, the man pervades the pages, turning up when you least expect him, and when he runs out, and has to stop for a little light refreshment, he sends in Hazel in to deputize for him. Not that I'm objecting, as I'm acquiring the taste for more Ashworth mania.

I was amused by your diverse reminiscences, since I too had a relative that went to live in Canada (an aunt who married a Canadian in the early fifties and went to live in Saskatchewan - er, I think I've forgotten how to spell it!). My aunt used to send me back the funnies section from her newspapers. It was my introduction to the classic American comic strips, things like Lil' Abner, Orphan Annie, etc, and for a while there, I was one of the most popular kids at my school: no one else had such a source of goodies. Then the austerity of the post-war years wore off and such things became commonplace. The end of the Owen period of ascendancy came suddenly, and other factors, like being good at football (not with my asthma), or being able to beat the living daylights out of any other kid, came to the fore. I don't think I've ever gotten over the shock!

Ha, at last, a reasonably thorough dissertation and destruction of one of those nasty British fan 'facts' that have encumbered the field for years. Your figures on the lack of 'rocket-ship' imagery on the covers of magazines and books will undoubtedly be used for years to come (or at least until some other idiot does a more thorough and far reaching survey) to prove that the under-utilisation of phallic symbology in SF is one of the causes of its decline. Maybe we can now see clearly that the 'rayguns and rocketship' perjorative merely hides the fact that it is the absence of such things, rather than their presence, that has degraded the genre. Now, if you would like to go back and do the same thing for the ray-gun, and the brass brassiere, maybe we can get a clearer picture of just what is lacking in modern SF.

I like Vinc's idea of the SF Reading Olympics. Can I suggest that we use both RIDDLEY WALKER and A CLOCKWORK ORANGE as part of the set pieces. The first would give a new vocation for all those Yorkshire miners that MacGregor and Scargoye are so skillfully manipulating into the unemployment figures, as nobody but a Northerner could hope to tackle that work with any aplomb. The second book would really sort the wheat from the

chaff, with the truly skillfull topping the whole thing off with a selection from William Burroughs. Meanwhile, the rest of us can get on with really enjoying SF, unencumbered by any worries about the respectability of it all.

Coo, Sid Perelman. It's years since I've read any of his books, but I agree totally with you. The man was brilliant, a worthy source of material for the budding humourist to study. Sod the Hunter Thompsons, give Sid P. a whirl and improve the breed of fanwriters overnight. I only wish I had some of his books to study myself - I could do with a goose in the humour bumps.

„ Hmm, just a minor point in J. Nicholas, Esq.'s letter - if Joe has little inclination to read the SF of the Fifties, how can he tell that it is 'simply not all that well written'? (Which is the pot calling the kettle black, anyway, coming from Joe.) Personally, I'll take the best works of Heinlein, Asimov and Clarke ahead of such works as THE AFFIRMATION, TIMESCAPE, HELLO AMERICA and even my favourite book of the four Joe mentions, THE MALACIA TAPESTRY. Why? Because the way Asimov, Clarke and Heinlein told coherent and original stories, appeal s to me in a way that the more modern works do not. The modern stories simply do not have the same attraction, mainly because they tell stories very badly, without any panache, because they are often very pessimistic, which clashes with my own optimistic outlook on the world (I try very hard to be a realistic optimist, though), and because I don't think that the modern stories are any more well-written than the older ones. TIMESCAPE, for example, I found to be a real mess of a book, full of plot holes, and riddled with irrelevant detail that did nothing to illuminate character, plot or setting, but merely was there as padding. Guess it's all a matter of taste, innit?

And with that, I take my departure, to the strains of Little Feat, 'Rolling Right Through The Night', off their 'Waiting For Columbus' lp. Onward, to conquer the great mail mountain. Only thirty-six more to go!

JOHN BRUNNER

Q: "Mr Geller wants to know: what comes after om mani padme?"

I think that should ensure that a sufficient number of people hate me for the coming quarter...

Best -



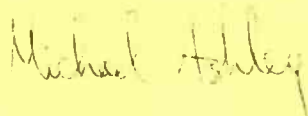
.....and now finally with absolutely no obligation on my part...

MICHAEL ASHLEY 86 ST. JAMES ROAD MITCHEM SURREY CR4 2DB

Thanks for the copy of Xyster, the first unsolicited fanzine I've received for ages. I enjoyed it as well, although -- as Pimlico Joe points out -- it's difficult to add anything extra. I enjoyed the Ashworths' stuff but could have done without some of the shorter pieces which read too much like filler (particularly "And Now, Poised To Start Reading Heinlein..." and the Perelman piece). Every issue doesn't have to be jam packed, you know. Same with letters ie. don't feel obliged to print them just because they're there.

Still you're obviously doing something right. Sorry about the inadequacy of these few comments (possibly when I've had a vasectomy and fondled a woman's breasts on stage I'll be able to comment more fully).

Until then,



IT ONLY TAKES A MOMENT....

MAL-MAL ASHWORTH'S remark about how some of Perelman was not the sweetest of corn reminded me of a small tome I came by recently. The title itself seems as long as some of those so called epics our authors churn out in the name of 'series'. It goes something like this:- 'EVERBODY'S BOOK OF JOKES (Retorts Jests Rhymes Anecdotes Bulls Conundrums and Puns - over 3000 selections Old and New') and was published in London in 1889. As E.L.S. (the compiler) notes, "It is almost impossible to lose or to destroy a really good joke. It comes down through the ages, surviving civilisations and monuments. It is revamped, changed, and disguised by a hundred would-be humorists, but at heart it is the same old joke. An old joke is almost of necessity a good joke.the editor has a suspicion that in this, as in other books of its class, the best things are the oldest, and the least witty those most nearly original."

And of course it is full of political , racial, sexist (I nearly put sexual...) religious and social humour most of which is still floating about. The Irish, black, and wife jokes are very strong in their presence but I wouldn't want to offend any of my readers with such retorts as:- 'An anti-Scotchman (sic) was asked what pleased him most when he visited Scotland. "To see the funerals," he said.' / 'Dennis said his wife was very ungrateful, for when he married her, she hadn't a rag on her back, and now she is covered with them.' / 'Two young Irishmen, to cheapen expenses, agreed that one should board and the other should lodge.' / 'Do you like cod fish balls? I don't know I've never been to one.' / 'A mother was so kind she gave her child chloroform before she whipped it.' / 'Magistrate to prisoner: "You say, Uncle Rastus, that you took the ham because you are out of work and your family are starving. And yet I understand you have four dogs about the house." Uncle Rastus: "Yes, sah; but I wouldn't arsk my family to eat dogs, yo' honah!" / 'Magistrate: "You can go now Sambo; but let me warn you never to appear here again." Sambo, with broad grin: "A wouldn't be here dis time only de constable fetch me." ' and so on and so forth.

No not for this magazine of good taste.....

HOWEVER..... I did find a nice idea for a competition. In the section headed Rhymes I found

the following 'Modern Proverbs' Seems like a nice idea.....

Cryptogamous concretion never grows
On mineral fragments that decline repose.

It is permitted to the feline race
To contemplate even a regal face.

Teach not a parent's mother to extract
The embryo juices of an egg by suction;
That good old lady can the feat enact,
Quite irrespective of your kind instruction.

The earliest winged songster soonest sees
And first appropriates the annelides.

ALL THE SILLY SPELLING MISTAKES BAD TYPOS AND LOUSY LAYOUTS ARE BY:-
DAVE WOOD 1 FRIARY CLOSE MARINE HILL CLEVEDON BS21 7QA

WHO WILL BE DOING IT ALL AGAIN REAL SOON NOW.....

PRINTED MATTER - REDUCED RATE

from Dave Wood
1 Friary Close
Marine Hill
Clevedon
Avon
BS21 7QA
ENGLAND

To :- LEE HOFFMAN
350 N W HARBOR BLVD
PORT CHARLOTTE
FL 33952

USA

