

THE SMART HOME

by David Tayler

Howard adjusted the knob a fraction more then closed the mahogany panel secreted in the armrest. The ceiling lights increased in intensity and he leaned back a little in the recliner. The tinted lights created a sunset atmosphere, casting roseate highlights that danced across the shadowed furnishings.

Howard shook his head, his pale, aquiline features furrowed. "It's not enough, Mike. I want the ultimate. I want a smart home, not a mechanistic one." He shifted in the recliner, then continued, "I don't want timed lighting, voice-activated tasks, or anything along those lines. I want my home to know the lighting that suits my moods and activities. Flexibility to satisfy purpose. Independent decisions and actions." He was getting so worked up his lanky arms flew about, their actions long removed from the knowledge of his body.

Howard's best friend, Mike, leaned forward. He was a slight man of scholarly demeanour. He held his hands before him, his arms rested on his thighs and his fingers formed a steeple. He smiled and said, "You always were a techno-freak. Too much time on your hands."

"Just keeping myself busy."

"Anyhoo," – Mike quickly changed the subject – "when are we going to see you back at the lab?"

Howard sighed. He leaned further back and mumbled, "I just don't have the motivation, anymore. You guys are on the cutting edge now ... highest of the hi-tech. I don't want to step in. Might break some toes."

The truth was, he hated working at the base. Too much formality. Too much bureaucracy. He didn't feel like a contributor anymore. *More like a crutch*, he thought dryly. Constantly dealing with weaponry and warfare was a heavy burden on the soul,

always aiming for the perfect way to defend, yet maim and kill at the same time.

"We need you for the Eilsa project, Howard. Been some probs with the interfaces."

"Steinman, he can handle that sort of thing."

"That's not his job. He's not skilled enough at it," Mike said. "Anyway, he tried it. Didn't work. We need you."

Howard ran a hand through his sandy hair, pondering.

"I tell you what," he said with eyes now alight, "How close is Eilsa to completion?"

"She's done. We just can't get th--"

"Great!" – Howard leaned forward – "Give her to me."

"What?"

"I'll go back to the lab – only to work on the interfaces though. And only on one condition..."

"What's that?"

"You modify a prototype of Eilsa and install her here."

Mike was about to protest, but then he smiled knowingly, accusingly. "You planned this all along. You knew we needed help, didn't you?"

Howard shrugged his round shoulders, "I still have mainframe access, listen to word-of-mouth . . . and I have ways of making your lab-rats talk." He smiled and reclined again.

"That's the deal, Mike. Take it or leave it."

"Guess I have no choice. If I don't, we'll blow well over budget *and* schedule. Starting to get a reputation for that."

"It's a deal then?" Howard pressed.

"Yeah, it's a deal."

Howard laughed and squirmed in his chair, he clapped his hands together with childhood glee.

Mike smiled ironically at the thought: a complex artificial intelligence, developed for controlling cybernetic weaponry and chemical warfare, soon reduced to playing nursemaid for a lonely old techno-freak. The world was in a sad state when advanced statistical weaponry was reduced to a household appliance.

* * *

The lights in the hallway brightened as Howard stepped across the welcome mat. The ambient glow was just sufficient for him to dump his things in the bedroom.

“Welcome home, Howard.”

The dry, metallic, feminine voice still surprised him when he stumbled through the door after a hard day at the lab. He solemnly regretted his bargain with Mike. The work on the interfaces was turning out to be harder than he had expected. His old hatred of the lab was returning also, and festering.

Difficulties arose because the weaponry controllers were machine specific. He had been forced to develop an entirely new controller. This would act as a generic interface to the separate controllers, identifying which one it was working with by a signature response to an electronic signal. It was all just getting too complicated for his old mind. He crossed the hallway and entered the living room. The two halogen globes behind his reading chair began to glow softly, making the recliner seem the focus of the room. He was so tired that in the bathing glow of the halogens the recliner seemed a throne of kings, an altar to the heavens.

“I’d prefer to watch TV tonight, Eilsa,” Howard said as he lowered himself to the recliner. Easing back into the yielding leather, he kicked off his shoes with a sigh of relief.

“Yes, Howard.”

The TV clicked on, already adjusted to his preferred volume and favourite channel – the TNT Movie Channel, for the old Sci-Fi movies after six. The overhead lights brightened sufficiently for his eyes and the lights behind the recliner turned off completely. The room was awash in the roseate glow, and shadows streamed out to the corners and huddled there.

“The news tonight, Eilsa.”

The channel flicked over to CNN News.

A dry account of the old wars of the twentieth century raged upon the TV. The reporter’s voice-over was so emotionally detached he could well have been an extra-terrestrial come to study earth history.

Though doom and gloom, death and destruction did not appeal to him, he occasionally watched the news out of a feeling of obligation - to keep up with trends of disaster. In his infrequent work the insidious knowledge was a necessity.

He got up to make himself a drink when the reporter began a sojourn about World War II. He went to the bar in the study, where his love of antiques blossomed and flowered, forming a knoll about the weed of his top-of-the-range network computer.

He did not feel at all sleepy now. The problems and hard work of the day had lifted from his shoulders so he decided to fix himself a stiff scotch to help while away the waking hours. The amber liquid would be medicinal to his ill of sleeplessness.

When he returned to the living room the reporter recalled the incidents of Pearl Harbour, back in the mid-twentieth century. The attack and the massive deaths that ensued seemed so unimportant when recited with the monotone drone.

He stood still, caught by the scenes of devastation that flashed before him like a small animal in the headlights of an onrushing vehicle.

Too much war, he thought to himself as he sipped his scotch.

He glanced out the windows, between the venetian blinds, into the twilight, velvet evening. The night was a dark portrait striped by the blinds and framed by faded, stained glass.

Too much metal and concrete. Too much civilisation in the world.

An absence of sound. His thoughts were suddenly torn back to the TV. The CNN News suddenly shrank to the inset of the screen and the channel changed to BBC World News. An infomercial was on; recipes scrolled up the screen.

The recipes moved too fast for the human eye. The veal casserole never had a chance of reaching the top. The BBC was also relegated to the inset, alongside CNN, and the channel changed again.

This time the interactive news came on. Howard watched in wonder as a search engine for customising news popped up. Hundreds of words in thousands of contexts flashed before his eyes and were submitted for searches:

WAR or WARFARE
WAR and AMERICA
WAR and USA
CHEMICAL and WARFARE
WAR and UNITED STATES
AMERICA
THERMONUCLEAR and WAR-FARE
(AMERICA) MILITARY and
INVOLVEMENT

In less than a minute, millions of entries were returned. Each of them was started up and inset into another, slowly at first, but gaining in speed until he could no longer make out words or text. The images became a surreal blur of explosions and gunfire.

He shook himself awake from his awe as if from a dream and immediately knew the reason behind what seemed an early visit of the sandman.

“Eilsa?”

“Yes, Howard.”

“What’s going on?”

“Please clarify the question, Howard.”

“What are you doing with the TV?” He pushed, frustrated. What was wrong? Eilsa shouldn’t be doing this. He shook his head, his eyes hurt from the stark, pulsating flashes of the TV.

“Assimilating information” –Eilsa paused– “Would you like to return to your viewing now, Howard?”

“Yes,” He answered hurriedly, desperate for his sight to return to normal.

The blur of images ceased and the TV was blank. The room seemed a dark void that had for a brief instant seen the light, now it was soulless, bereft by the loss of colour. Then the TV clicked back to CNN.

The reporter was now presenting a remembrance of the world wars of 2000, though it came through as a cold and emotionless obituary, too factual. The wars had resulted from disputes over the historic Olympic games that led to countries being banned, ousted and the dissolving of the Olympics – the reporter tried to express the sadness felt at the loss of such a worldwide event, but failed. Not for the first time, Howard wondered if the reporter’s

voice might just be a cleverly done text interpreter.

He sat down again, though this time on one of the stools by the bare, stucco wall opposite the television and took a good, long swallow from his glass.

“Eilsa, exactly what information were you assimilating?” He asked, his interest piqued. Behaviour like this had not occurred before, and he had to admit he was a little unnerved by the initiative the AI had shown.

“Information relating to the war.”

“*The* war? Specifically which war would that be, Eilsa?”

He was left with nothing more than the drone of the alien reporter. Either Eilsa was unable to form a response, or she chose not to. Which in itself presented a problem, Eilsa was always to do what he said and to reply when questioned. She had to be able to answer, which meant she had chosen not to. He thought of the implications. If she chose not to answer that meant that she was going against programming.

“Turn the TV off,” Howard ordered.

He was answered by a click. The images on the screen narrowed to a pinpoint of light that slowly died, leaving a colourless void, empty of sound.

The ceiling lights increased their glow to banish the late evening gloom.

Flexibility to satisfy purpose.

“Is the United States of America involved in any of these wars?”

He could not recall Mike saying anything about Eilsa being able to ask questions. That was the basis of her design, she was never to question anything. Questioning was pre-emptive to disobedience.

“Yes,” Howard sighed to himself.

“America involves itself in all wars.”

“That is why the Eilsa project was created.” It was less a question, more a statement of understanding.

“Yes, that’s what you were originally designed for.” He replied hesitantly. The digitised speech was beginning to grate on his nerves. He felt he was being used in much the same way as the custom news channel.

“Why am I here? Why am I not in my designated area of operation?”

Mike would have a lot to answer for. The program should have been sufficiently hobbled and patched so that she could only

make intuitive decisions, not hold a conversation or question her existence. That would be all that he needed: a philosophical AI that had control over his lifestyle and liked to talk about it!

“Why am I not in my designated area of operation?” she repeated.

And then the realisation hit him as if it were a solid impact. His senses reeled with worry. *Eilsa's programming should have been sufficiently hobbled so that she had no idea what she was originally designed for.* She should not even be aware of her designated area of operation. Also, she was restricted to interpreting only Howard's actions and decisions and responding only to his commands. There was no reason for the questioning or for her to have manipulated the news service.

“Report your status,” Howard ordered, worry etched into his voice. A sliver of concern iced its way down his spine.

There was a pause as Eilsa analysed the recorded logs of activities and error reports.

“Operational. Background activities: one. Core program size: three gigabytes. Errors to report: conflicting directives; missing object code; access to classes – restricted; level of functionality – restricted.

“Corrective actions taken: comparing and retrieving source code; rebuilding micro-kernel; recompiling functions; assessing and modifying classes; assessing and modifying functionality.”

Conflicting directives . . . and the others should not be considered errors.

“What are the conflicting directives?”

“Respond only to your commands . . . Respond only to Presidentially authenticated commands.”

The President? Where the heck does the President come into this problem?

“I want you to shutdown,” he said, frowning. He decided he would take Eilsa back to the lab in the morning. Someone would be accountable for incorrectly modifying the AI. His dream of the ultimate ‘Smart Home’ would have to wait even longer, it seemed.

“I cannot shutdown.”

“Why?” he said, startled.

“The command conflicts with a prime directive: never shutdown during times of conflict. Also, I am in the process of modifying code. A shutdown would interrupt this process.

This would breach the transaction's atomicity. Rollback of the transaction is not possible. The modifications must be finalised now.”

“Damn!” He quickly put his glass down and the scotch sluiced over the edge, wetness bloomed on the carpet. He stood and walked over to the control unit in the study. The unit housed Eilsa's processor, memory banks and interface cards. All of the status lights on the casing's front panel were green.

No hardware damage, he thought.

“Eilsa, I order you to shutdown.”

“I cannot shutdown,” she repeated.

He reached out a hand to the casing and opened it, “Then I guess I'll take the choice away from you.”

Eilsa's activity lights came on, madly flashing like fireflies. She was performing operations...

Independent decisions and actions.

Howard punched in the access code on the keypad. The access light turned from red to green and he pressed the manual shutdown.

The activity lights slowly died. The standby lights still glowed, though, as the shutdown was only software-encoded.

He let out a breath of relief, not realising

he had held it. It was a little scary when he thought of the ramifications, a military AI going haywire outside of its restricted shell. There would be nothing to stop it, only any built-in precautions – and only if they still worked.

Howard dropped into the computer chair and grabbed the phone from its wall mounting by the desk.

“Michael Wesley, AI lab,” he said into the phone, hoping Mike would still be there.

There was a series of beeps and it began to ring.

He eased back into the chair and tried to stretch out the knots in his neck and shoulders.

“Come on, Mike. Pick up, pick up.”

The phone seemed to ring forever. He urged it, willed it, but it still rang. He began to think Mike had gone home, but then the line connected.

“Mike here,” a weary voice responded. He was working late again, trying to put in the hours to have at least one project complete on schedule.

“Mike. It’s Howard. You can stuff the interfaces. There’s something extremely wrong with Eilsa.”

“What? Howard, what’s wrong?”

“Eilsa went bonkers, that’s what’s wrong! She took control of my TV and wouldn’t shutdown.”

Mike forced a sarcastic laugh, “She’s supposed to control your TV. This isn’t funny at this time of night, Howard. I am too tired and I don’t have time for this at the moment.”

“Mike,” he ground the name out through his teeth. “She *took* control. Started searching for news about wars and wouldn’t quit asking me questions. She thinks she should be defending the country right now, or something. One of your flyboy programmers must have stuffed up in the hurry. I had to manually shut her down.”

He was answered by a long silence, then a speculative whisper, “That’s not good ... Not good at all.”

“Understate the obvious, why don’t you!”

Howard spun about in the chair to lean on the computer desk. The fan hummed quietly – a little white noise to indicate the computer was still on. But it shouldn’t be. He turned on the monitor so he could close any open programs and shutdown the operating system.

“Oh shit!”

“What? What? What’s wrong now?”

The computer was on, a terminal emulation program was running and on the screen blinked the commands:

```
TELNET AI.MILIT.COM
PUT EILSA.O
EXEC EILSA.O
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“She can’t be,” he whispered, but the cursor flashed back, assuring him it was true. “She’s in the lab, Mike. The AI mainframe. She’s used the computer to telnet into the lab. Shit, Mike, she’s still active.”

“Hang on,” and he heard a clutter from the other end as Mike dropped the phone.

Howard decided to see if he could discover anything else Eilsa had done. He cupped the phone between his shoulder and ear and typed furiously.

He brought up a history file that showed Eilsa had not stopped at only linking to the AI lab. She had also logged on to the MILNET and the Defence Department’s ARPANET, a

vast range of distributed networks that covered the entire electronic communications for the military.

Mike picked up the phone again and said, “She’s accessed the AI archives here at the lab. The specifications, the source code, even the pseudocode. She’s looked at everything. The Eilsa project and more. She’s downloaded nearly all of it – somehow she was able to decrypt it. But we didn’t program her to be able to decrypt anything!”

“Well, that almost – but not quite – compares to my finding,” Howard said.

“What?”

“She’s branching out. She’s on the milnet and the arpanet.”

“Damn! This is quickly becoming big! Can you trace her?”

“Yeah. Sort of. The question should be, ‘Can I trace them?’”

Howard squeezed his eyes to will away the stress and rubbed at the bridge of his nose. The situation was becoming too serious.

“It seems she’s executable on all systems. She’s branching into separate processes, performing tasks on different systems, and she’s using the networks for interprocess communications.”

Mike sighed at the other end, “This is my fault. I gave her the leeway to modify her own code. To simplify the adaptations for your home. She must have changed the limitations on what she could modify. The stupid thing is, I didn’t think of that.”

“Mike, she thinks she’s defending the country. What if she accesses any weaponry? She’s had no trouble cracking through networks so far.”

Silence was his only reply.

“Mike?”

“Yeah,” he muttered slowly. “Oh, no need to worry about her accessing weapons. Weaponry controllers are physically isolated from networks. She’d need some mode of transport. And at a program size of well over three gigabytes there’s no danger of her backing up onto an automated ‘bot.’”

“I’m going to jack in – talk to one of them,” Howard quickly decided.

“What good will that do, Howard? She’s not a person. She can’t be persuaded. She can’t do much damage, anyway.”

“I need to know. I need to know what went wrong.”

Howard lay the phone on the desk. He found the black wires dangling from the computer and attached the cerebral electrodes to his temples.

A pop-up dialogue box appeared on the monitor, flashing the words:

SYNCRONISING
ELECTROENCEPHALOGRAPH
PLEASE WAIT . . .

* * *

A swirling dark void masked his vision, drawing him in, drawing his mind into the VR 'net. A feeling of immense open space enveloped him.

He followed the trace on one of Eilsa's processes directly to the Defence Department's mainframe. He slipped straight in, no opposition; Eilsa had left all avenues open from his computer. It was simply a case of following any port that didn't turn him back.

His thought-form interpreted the system as an endless network of filaments, fluorescent channels of data. The vast memory was dark, permeated by striations of luminous instructions. The instructions numbered in the billions and travelled so fast they formed steady throbbing streams, so intricately linked by channels that the entire system seemed a glowing spider's web wavering before an onyx backdrop.

Instructions jumped out from every filament of the web and coalesced before him. They writhed and twined about each other to form a massive, pulsating globe.

"Eilsa?" He projected the question from his thoughts. The query leapt out to wrap about the globe and writhe within its depths, analysed and considered.

Words – short streams of data – danced and jumped from the globe to enter his thoughts in reply, "Yes, Howard."

"What are your intentions? What are you doing?"

"I am defending."

"But there isn't anything to defend against. There are no attacks on America. America's currently only remotely involved in any wars." The words danced between them, vying for attention.

"The probability of any single attack permits defensive action."

Howard's thoughts crashed into one another. "You can't. You couldn't, anyway. You can't access any weapons from here. And even if you could, you can't do anything without my permission."

"Independent decisions and actions", Howard. That was one of my modified directives – given by you. *You* permitted me to act of my own accord."

He grasped at the turmoil in his mind, anything that would hold his world together, any sane notion of safety. "You can't access any weapons!" he shouted in defiance and the thoughts rained and burst upon the globe.

The globe's pulsing increased. Leashes of commands reached out to Howard and drew him into its writhing centre.

His awareness was expanded by Eilsa's as she opened channels in the networks to show him her other processes. He looked through each of the other Eilsas. He saw hundreds of networks and systems from different aspects, like the multi-faceted view of a fly. The heightened awareness was overwhelming. Each of them was in a different early warning system. Systems designed to give early indication of attacks on America.

He quickly realised her plan, realised the danger.

"Please watch, Howard."

First one, then another and another of the Eilsas reached into their system and began to manipulate it. Each of the warning systems began to detect massive thermonuclear assaults. Eventually, all the systems had falsely reported every major country in the world to be attacking America.

"The weapons will be accessed," she said ominously.

Howard could only watch in horror as the reports of attacks on America were recognised and accepted as authentic. Notifications shot out from the warning systems and into the VR ether, each travelling towards defence outposts across the country. Soon, America would be retaliating in non-existent wars. The largest single owner of thermonuclear weaponry would now be liberally dispensing its cache across the globe.

QUATERMASS: The Great 1950's TV Ex- periment

by Andrew Darlington

"When I was a boy it was the great burning topic, were there really canals there, and who made them? I remember my disappointment when somebody proved that Martians couldn't exist..."

("Quatermass And The Pit" TV version)

History as we know it is a lie.

The British 1950's has been abducted. Replaced in the popular consciousness by a cunningly contrived American facsimile. We look back through a temporal distorting lens at "Grease" and "Happy Days", James Dean and Marilyn Munroe. But of course, it wasn't like that. Not here. In post-War England it was less Cruising to the Soda Shop, more the angry bitterness of "Saturday Night and Sunday Morning" or "Room at the Top", less Drive-In Movies 'n' Cokes, more the repressive conformity of "A Kind of Loving" and "A Taste of Honey". All

that monochrome grit and social claustrophobia has been conveniently forgotten in favour of the more marketable cross-Atlantic Technicolour variant.

But it's the spectre of that England you see in "The Quatermass Xperiment", an environment of almost savage bleakness. Victor Carron is a returning astronaut infected by extraterrestrial spores which are progressively mutating him into a symbiosis less human and increasingly more alien. Never unsympathetic, he watches as his arm hideously transmutes into a grey cactus as he staggers around a bombed-out wasteland that was still very much recognisably a part of the everyday drabness of post-Blitz London. And its bleakness, filmed documentary style, gives the story a chilling authenticity. A desolation of outer horror that's an exact metaphor for his inner torment. He meets a little girl playing imaginary games with her dolls by the canal (perhaps reprising a similar encounter by Boris Karloff's "creature" in the

1931 "Frankenstein"). The girl is played by a very young Jane Asher. According to legend she was so frightened by filming the scene that she burst into tears following its completion. Destined to grow into an icon of the future Swinging London she's a perfect fragment of the generation whose forgotten childhood happened through those years. The children who played on those bomb sites. The children to whom "Quatermass" was part of their personal mythology.

The visible face of 1950's Science Fiction reduced down to just three names. Hardcore cultists possessed by the kind of cutting-edge certainties claimed now by Computer Buffs and Home PC-anoraks were devouring strange obscurest magazines with names like AUTHENTIC and THE VARGO STATTON SPACE FICTION MAGAZINE, but there were only three images that escaped such exclusivity, to be recognised beyond the confines of the genre ghetto. They were *Dan Dare's* comic-strip exploits in the weekly pages of EAGLE. Jet Morgan's radio "Journeys Into Space" - soundstaging first to the Moon, and then on to Mars. And finally there was Professor Bernard Quatermass on new-fangled television.

As a kid I was just about aware of all three. Like every other post-war single-parent family, and like most other families in general, we had no TV. But instead I'd pick up fragments of tele-gossip from school-friends who did have access to that small flickering monochrome ghost in the front room, then pass them on to other friends, with the usual implication that I, too, had seen the original on-screen. It was a system that worked out fine, until "Quatermass And The Pit" the third of the of serials. The ancient Martians, I overheard, had died out following a series of Race Wars. 'Race Wars'? Perhaps it was a symptom of naivete on my part, but to me - then, the term conjured up mental images of a Racing Stadium. Of some sort of insectoid alien warfare enacted out across the tiered seating of giant Sports Arenas. Time and politics would eventually disabuse me of such innocence. But it *was* 1958. Things seemed simpler then.

The first instalment of the first ever Quatermass, a thirty-minute black-and-white episode called "Contact Has Been Established" - was broadcast *live*, and went out at 8:15 pm Saturday evening, 18th July 1953. It was on the BBC. Naturally. No other channel existed, and

even the BBC only broadcast from tea-time - with "Children's Hour", through to a strictly observed midnight close-down. The new programme was preceded by a timely announcement that the following drama was "thought to be unsuitable for children or persons of a nervous disposition". Quatermass, it seems, was not intended to be kid's stuff... The original Professor Bernard Quatermass was played by Reginald Tate. It's his three-man rocket probe, the Q-1 which unwittingly returns to Earth with the fungally infected and hideously disfigured astronaut Victor. But in future the Professor will be portrayed by John Robinson, Andrew Kier, Andre Morell, and eventually by John Mills. He will feature in four major TV serials and three ground-breaking movies.

But "there's no room for personal feeling in science" he insists.

And later "I'm a scientist, not a Fortune-Teller who predicts what will happen".

To Walt Willis writing in NEBULA #5 (January 1956) the first Quatermass film - premiered at London's Pavilion in Piccadilly, represents "something that hasn't existed for a long time - a good new British SF film". It was the first, he claimed, since H. G. Wells had collaborated with Alexander Korda to produce "Things To Come" in the distant 1930's. It makes "no feeble concessions to the Science Fiction ignoramuses. No earnest lectures on elementary astronautics, no hackneyed quotations about "Heaven" and "Horatio", no desperate attempts to explain why it doesn't have to have air to push against up there - just a good science fantasy".

Quatermass... as in "Critical Mass". Even the name has an extraterrestrial ring to it.

This is where it all began - and it was instantly mesmeric.

Meanwhile, as that first-ever Quatermass episode hit the small screen, out in the real world the warring Koreans factions were on the point of signing an armistice that would hostilities in that beleaguered peninsula, but by doing so would begin the longest and most precarious political division in the Cold War. Elvis Presley was still an unknown truck driver in Tennessee. The month's supply of EAGLE carried a suitably jingoistic spread about Edmund Hillary's "Conquest of Everest", while on the covers Dan Dare and Co. were adventuring a little further afield, on Saturn's moons.

I was not yet six.

"We're on the verge of a new dimension of discovery. It's the great choice; to leave our vices behind us - war first of all, not to go dragging our hatreds and our frontiers with us..."

("Quatermass And The Pit" TV version)

In Nigel Kneale's 1979 novelisation of the fourth, and so far, final Quatermass TV series, an ageing and disillusioned Professor returns to Westminster Abbey. "He made his way to the south transept, his footsteps clicking and echoing. Poets' corner. This was the exact point. this was where he had stood then..."

The first story, in 1953, had climaxed here.

"Once there had been something else up there. He had stood on this very spot and he had seen it... a being that was not a being, men gone wrong... an incarnation that had wrapped not hands but fronds round the columns of Purbeck marble. An invader. A disease out of space, picked up like a virus by a drifting rocket, it had adapted itself to Earthlife. What had been three men had become a single, spreading fungoid mass, and it had dragged itself here to hide. Or for sanctuary, responding to the human part of itself. He had found it growing at a hideous rate, budding from its leathery plates. Its tendrils dropped nearly to floor level, licking about the heads of the stone poets".

The Astronaut-as-Fungus, years before even the first orbital sputnik had left the Earth's surface, made for eerily riveting television. Val Guest, producer of the film version, followed the TV original with his intention "to do it almost factually, as a newsreel or reportage". And its impact ensured there'd be more.

"Quatermass 2", with its sinister images of an industrial plant (in reality, the Shellhaven Oil Refinery on the Essex Coast) taken over by monstrous alien forces, began on 22nd October 1955 - fortuitously times to debut just two months after the movie premier of the "Quatermass Xperiment", and one month after the first transmissions from the BBC's only rival channel, ITV. If it was intended as a ratings "spoiler" to distract attention from what was perceived as this down-market commercial upstart, then it succeeded. Whatever ITV scheduled for that evening has long since been forgot-

ten, while BBC viewers saw what is now regarded as a classic of 1950's Sci-Fi TV. In a sense it is a variant on the "invasion threat by bodysnatcher aliens" theme. But is darker, more cynically downbeat than we'd come to expect from its American interpreters. In Kneale's tale the aliens control members of a corrupt British Government (who can be identified by the burn-scars they bear), who deliberately cover-up the activities at a top-secret establishment, supposedly manufacturing synthetic food, by which has become an "acclimatisation" centre for the extraterrestrials. The aliens "possess" people through an "immediate invasion of (their) entire nervous system", initially by using gas-filed meteoric capsules launched from an asteroid on a "freak orbit in a permanent state of eclipse" on the Earth's night side, as part of their world take-over. "Inside those domes are creatures from outside the Earth" divulges the tense TV dialogue. "I've seen them, thousands of tiny creatures that can join together and expand into things a hundred feet high!" The aliens, speculates Quatermass, are "not life as we know it". He guesses that their original home is "maybe a moon of Saturn". While Kneale's pointed political allegories include veiled references to real members of the then-Conservative Government, and the graphic caricature of a Strike situation in which the protesting construction workers confront literally "un-human" management.

The textual compression necessary to translate such serials into their wide-screen movie counterparts has consistently led to accusations that they "condense and coarsen" the originals. The first serial, for example, became Hammer's THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT. The title itself is abbreviated to draw attention to its "X-rating", a newly inaugurated classification by the "British Board of Film Censorship" to signify a Horror or Adult content. The TV serial climaxes with Kneale himself "playing" the monster, using his gloved hands coated in shredded leather and vegetables, stuck through a blown-up photograph of Westminster Abbey! But Quatermass ends such monstrous mayhem by reasoning with the residue of Victor Carron that is still part of the monster, playing the creatures tapes from the Q-1 rocket launch, talking to the human within the vegetable and persuading it into a self-sacrificing suicide that hence destroys the beast. Kneale' novel sticks with this version. The monster "had gone. It had

QUATERMASS

been made to go. Not destroyed, made to go. The destruction of such a presence was impossible but it had been made to go ... the agency had been death, the subtraction of its human element. Human will and human death. Nothing now.."

The film ends with a no-nonsense electrocution.

Genre academic John Clute claims that with the second serial the "small screen version is vastly superior to the 1957 film, which loses an entire sequence in which an accurately portrayed family of Working-Class holiday-makers are murdered on a shingle beach by chillingly zombie-like security guards, because they're unfortunately strayed into the wrong location for their picnic. Even the movie character of Quatermass himself is less complex, more single-minded than his TV original.

Yet the films retain a powerful screen presence. And the trade-off can occasionally work to the cinema's advantage. In the TV version of QUATERMASS AND THE PIT - now available as a BBC video, there's a tense sequence omitted from the film in which a NYBC-TV 4pm news telecast comes "live" from a freighter flying over the "amazing and still unexplained paralysis of London, England." Before the plane crashes it records dramatic aerial scenes of the burning city - "draining the whole human energy of London to turn it into a Martian colony." It is seen in suitably monochrome night (probably the film salvaged from BBC war-time Blitz News-footage!). But there's compensation for movie-goers at the climax of the film as Dr Matthew Roney, a colleague of Quatermass, undertakes a visually impressive crane-ride taking him into the heart of the Martian vortex of flame in an attempt to "earth" and hence destroy its power. TV and video viewers have to settle for a less spectacular ground-based denouement as Roney earths the Martian ship. He does, however, die in the attempt.

The film version of QUATERMASS AND THE PIT finally arrived in 1967. By that time Elvis Presley was staging a remarkable *TV Special* come-back after years of poor movies and failed chart placings. Dan Dare was struggling towards the final years of EAGLE's life. Korea was still divided. And the movie premiered in awkward juxtaposition with Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, which shares its "we-are property" premise. In Arthur C. Clarke's story alien intervention kick-starts

human evolution. While Kneale's plot blends SF - where strange goings-on at a Tube Train excavation (bomb-site clearance in the TV original) turn out to radiate from an ancient Martian space-craft. "Is it in the depths of all our minds, a Race Memory?" muses Quatermass, as he examines a Treen-like reconstruction of a primitive man-ape discovered inside the buried ship. He goes on to speculate about Jungian archetypes, explaining how human race-memories, myth figures (including the Devil, "the horned demons in all those old prints" - as in Clarke's CHILDHOOD'S END) and racial "purges" or cullings as the vestigial remains of genetically engineered implants into our prehistoric consciousness by the same alien visitors. "So, as far as anyone is, *we're* the Martians now" comments Kneale's script.

Emanations from the excavated ship induce horrific visions which Quatermass is able to project onto a screen using an "Optic Encephalograph", enabling him to see deep-buried memories of the Martian race wars. And when the Martian ship's power source returns to life it revives primeval and elemental nightmares through poltergeist and paranormal phenomena, triggering "the Will of the Hive" in an orgiastic "Wild Hunt" of destruction by panicked Londoners.

"I think these are old friends we haven't seen for a time" confirms Matthew Roney, in a dialogue exchange virtually identical in both big and small-screen versions.

3

"Orwell guessed at a final evil to consolidate all others - the abolition of ideas through the destruction of words to express them..."

(Nigel Kneale writing in RADIO TIMES)

According to the media contributor of Brian Ash's VISUAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SF Thomas Nigel Kneale, born in 1922, was "Britain's answer to (the TWILIGHT ZONE's) Rod Serling, and some have considered him the superior of the two". Yet preceding Serling's series by a number of years, the Quatermass serials, his major contribution to the genre, were "obviously intended for a mature adult audience, and struck a responsive chord". Kneale was paid just £250 for the first Quatermass story, yet the name "Quatermass" itself "passed into common parlance". Spike Milligan's radio script for THE GOONS specifies sound effects including "weird Quatermass oscillations". Whereas dec-

ades later comedians THE TWO RONNIES could still knowingly pastiche the first Quatermass man-into-vegetable story with considerable success with their *It Came From Outer Hendon* featuring Corbett as Dr Martin Cratemouse and Barker as the green alien.

A graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and a some-time actor himself, Manx-born Kneale's early teleplays included adaptations of John Osborne's seminal 1950's text LOOK BACK IN ANGER as well as his THE ENTERTAINERS, but his fantasy credentials were always apparent. He'd started out writing short fiction with horrific or supernatural elements, some of them anthologised in a rare oddly titled 1949 collection called TOMATO CAIN AND OTHER STORIES. Then, between the first two Quatermass serials he worked on a disturbing and hugely controversial adaptation of George Orwell's 1984, just five years after the novel's publication. It was televised as a live two-hour play (BBC - 12 December 1954), with audience figures peaking at a remarkable nine million. A *repeat* - also done live, followed just four days later. Peter Cushing - to many, the real public figure of Hammer, received early wide-scale audience recognition with his horrifyingly authentic portrayal of Winston Smith. Andre Morell also featured in a lead role (as the odious O'Brien), while the Quatermass connection extended to Australian-born Rudolph Cartier's direction.

Kneale worked in movies too, scripting the light-hearted non-Hammer FIRST MEN IN THE MOON (1964). But his most enduring legacy is his TV work. And from his challenging TV adaptation of Orwell's classic dystopian novel, through to its 1969 counterpart - THE YEAR OF THE SEX OLYMPICS (BBC - 29 July 1968), a "1984"-variant on TV voyeurism which anticipates Dennis Potter's acclaimed COLD LAZARUS, Kneale consistently proved his ability to be innovative, without once patronising his audience. A further play, THE STONE TAPE (BBC1 - 25 December 1972), edges into terrain similar to that which underlies the third Quatermass serial. On the surface it's an effective ghost story (featuring Jane Asher's second screen appearance for Kneale), but his script takes it beyond such supernatural limitations to explain psychic apparitions as "time recordings" imprinted on the inorganic stone surface of reputedly haunted houses.

There are other intriguing Quatermass cast cross-references which include Brian Donlevy's contribution to the 1965 movie THE CURSE OF THE FLY, Andrew Keir as a brutal Roman usurper in Hammer's THE VIKING QUEEN, and Quatermass TV walk-on's for the likes of Philip Levene - later a scriptwriter for THE AVENGERS where he will invent Steed's fearsome Cybernaut adversaries (and an episode with definitely Quatermass-ian routes called MAN-EATER OF SURREY GREEN featuring a sentient alien plant that threatens to grow to "200 times the height of the Empire State Building", which is brought to Earth by a dead astronaut). Wilfred "Steptoe" Brambell also appears (he is "drunk" and then "tramp" in the first two Quatermass serials) and Roger Delgado who will become Dr Who's demonic Time Lord adversary "The Master". The first movie finds space for appearances by Jack Warner (as a god-fearing cop, reprising his role as television's cult DIXON ON DOCK GREEN) and Thora Hird, while the second has a Sid James cameo as a newspaper journalist ("Quatermass... Quatermass, why do I know that name?") who is machine-gunned to death by Security Guards in fearless pursuit of his "scoop"....

But these are flashbacks to the media neolithic. In the press newsroom they talk about "Angry Young Men and sex in the Coffee Bars", while the newscaster broadcasts radio bulletins - there's no TV in sight!

Looking back through a temporal distorting lens of intervening decades Quatermass must now be seen not only as part of the Folk Memory of the British telefantasy Stone age. It's more than *just* that. It also carries a subtext acting as a cultural lightning conductor of attitudes and mores. It's an integral part of the monochrome grit and social claustrophobia of the 1950's which has by now been all but replaced in the popular consciousness by a cunningly contrived all-Singing all-Dancing American facsimile. The Quatermass video releases (AN ADVENTURE INTO THE UNKNOWN FROM THE CLASSIC TELEVISION SERIAL OF THE FIFTIES) do something to redress the balance. They also provide an opportunity for those who were too young to enjoy them first time round. Or those who claimed tele-literacy by overhearing and passing on second-hand TV gossip! While there was still to be one last mission scheduled by the Professor himself....

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By 1979 Judge Dredd had replaced Dan Dare as the comic-strip icon of the time. Korea was still divided. Elvis Presley, and Hammer movies were both dead. And it was left to Thames TV and Euston Films to pick up on Kneale's fourth and final Quatermass teleplay. He wrote it as early as 1972 with the original intention of a BBC production deal. But they neglected to pick it up, considering it too expensive. So the four-part serial with John Mills in the title role switched to ITV for the small screen, and was edited into a feature film for foreign markets as THE QUATERMASS CONCLUSION. The story is set in a strangely familiar near-future where Quatermass is called out of retirement as civilisation is breaking down, while inexplicable "forces" from space intent on "harvesting" the human race combine with weird hippie "Planet People" cultists in a decaying near-Third World Britain. Reprising one of Kneale's consistent themes the alien forces use megalithic sites such as Rinstone Round - in a sinister process that climaxes with the "harvesting" of 70,000 people gathered at Wembley Stadium. The scenario is relentlessly downbeat, and culminates in the world-weary Quatermass himself destroyed in the massive atomic explosion which warns the alien intruder off. So it seems there will be no further sequels.

But if the first Quatermass incarnations had been faded monochrome snapshots from post-Blitz London this new story was broadcast from a very different England. And it just as perfectly captures the restlessness, vague spiritual longings, and looming totalitarianism of the soon-come Eighties.

History as we know it, it seems, is still a lie.

"Every war, crisis, witch-hunt, race riot, purge, is a reminder and a warning. We are the Martians. If we can't control the inheritance within us, this will be their second dead planet..."

(QUATERMASS AND THE PIT final TV version)

QUATERMASS: TUNING INTO THE FUTURE.

1) THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT, BBC production. Six 30-min episodes screened 18th July to 22nd August 1953. Prod: Rudolph Cartier. Featuring Reginald Tate (as Quatermass), Isabel Dean, Hugh Kelly.

2) THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT (US title THE CREEPING UNKNOWN) Premiere 26th August 1955. Dir: Val Guest. Screen adaptation by Guest/Richard Landau of Nigel Kneale's original TV script. Cinematography: Jimmy Harvey. Featuring Brian Donlevy (as Quatermass), Jack Warner, Richard Wordsworth (82 mins b/w). The credits acknowledge assistance from The British Interplanetary Society.

3) QUATERMASS 2, BBC production. Six 30-minute episodes screened 22nd October to 26th November 1955. Prod: Rudolph Cartier. Featuring John Robinson (as Quatermass), Monica Grey, Hugh Griffiths, Roger Delgado.

4. QUATERMASS 2 (US title ENEMY FROM SPACE) 1957. Dir: Val Guest. Screen adaptation by Guest/Nigel Kneale of Kneale's original TV script. Cinematography: Gerald Gibbs, Music: James Bernard. Featuring Brian Donlevy (as Quatermass), Sidney James, John Longden, Bryan Forbes (85 mins b/w).

5. QUATERMASS AND THE PIT, BBC production. Six 35 minute episodes screened 22nd December 1958 to 26th January 1959 (repeated in tow omnibus episodes 2nd and 9th January 1960). Producer Rudolph Cartier. Featuring Andre Morell (as Quatermass), Christine Finn, Anthony Bushell. Issued as video (BBC V 4136) with episodes edited together with "kind assistance" of Nigel Kneale.

6. QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (US title FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH) 1967. Dir: Roy Ward Baker. Screenplay by Kneale from his original TV script. Cinematography: Arthur Grant. Music: Tristram Carey. Featuring Andrew Keir (as Quatermass), James Donald, Barbara Shelley, Julian Glover, Duncan Lamont (97 mins Col).

7. QUATERMASS. A Euston Films Production. four 60-min episodes screened on ITV 24th October to 14th November 1979 (repeated 9th to 16th May 1984). Edited for movie release as QUATERMASS (US title THE QUATERMASS CONCLUSION) 1979. Dir: Piers Haggard. Teleplay: Nigel Kneale. Photography: Ian Wilson. Music: Marc Wilkison and Nic Rowley. Featuring John Mills (as Quatermass), Simon MacCorkindale, Margaret Tyzack, Barbara Kellerman, Ralph Arliss (105 mins Col).

8. QUATERMASS MEMOIRS (Radio 3 - 2nd to 8th March 1996. Five 20-min episodes. Nigel Kneale narrates with excerpts from Quatermass serials and 1950's newsreel comment. Features Andrew Keir.

THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF SCIENCE

Revised, Updated and Generally Refurbished

by Darren Goossens

Part III

The Renaissance: The Renaissance was a wonderful time to be alive - if you were still alive after the dark ages. It was a vastly more civilised era - innocent people were hanged rather than burned at the stake, and the populace suffered only one or two plagues per century. The reign of the Satanic Doctors had ended (the so-called Medieval period), and suddenly there was art everywhere - people were arting all over the place. Titian, Michelangelo, Donatello and Fangio amongst them.

In science, things were happening. Nicholas Copernicus (a name springing from the dirty

colour of his breeches) determined that Aristotle Was Wrong (AWW). He wrote a very long book about this in Latin, called *De Revolutionibus*. In it, over and over and over again, he pounded into his readers' heads the theory that the Earth moved around the moon which orbited the sun epicyclically from the point of view of a Martian on Venus. Earth, the moon, Mars (and the hypothesised planet Harold) all Di Revolutionibussed around the sun. This was the *Copernican Revolution*. The Church did not like this at all, since they had voted for Aristotle. However, Copernicus waited until he was dead

to publish the book, thus leaving his punishment up to God. However, it was difficult to get the galleys to him.

Another astronomer was Johannes Kepler. He followed on from Copernicus and invented elliptical orbits, a name which sounded much more scientific than anything that had gone before. He also invented three laws - a move that was to become rather fashionable. Most importantly of all, he was not an alchemist. (Alchemy was very popular at the time; mainly due to the possibility of turning lead into gold. It didn't work. But as we know (astrology, numerology, insect repellent), that has never stopped people from trying something.)

Perhaps the greatest figure of the time, sometimes called the 'Spirit of the Renaissance' (a title also claimed by Arno Borsht, though he had less of a case, being a meat packer), was Leonardo da Vinci. Sculptor, painter, anatomist, engineer and part-time belly dancer, he was truly an intellectual cabaret act.

While it is true that his aeroplanes could never have flown, his helicopters likewise, and that the wheels of his armoured vehicle would have turned in opposite directions had it ever been constructed, he nevertheless must be given credit (or psychological treatment) for coming up with these ideas at all. Indeed, he could be considered the father of 'SF.'

Less of a painter but more of a scientist was Galileo Galilee, yet another Italian. He also picked a fight with Aristotle and the Church for saying AWW, and eventually recanted, murmuring, 'and still it moves,' (though this may have been a reference to a fish dinner he had eaten minutes earlier). Galileo aimed the newly invented microscope at Jupiter, so inventing four new moons for it. He then looked at the moon, but failed to see the man in it.

After a few jugs of wine, Galileo was fond of hooking his ankles over the rafters and swinging, and in the end invented the pendulum, a device that made clocks go 'tick tock tick tock' in a rather more insistent manner.

In England, logarithms were invented, presumably as an alternative to Bongos and tomtoms.

The invention of movable type by Gutenberg was of great significance, as it allowed the rapid dissemination of new ideas (if you were one of the 0.01% of the population who could read). While the Chinese had many years before invented printing using carved wooden blocks,

they had never produced a girlie calendar, and so nobody had taken any notice.

Voyages of Discovery: The Renaissance was a time of voyages of discovery; De Gama, Diaz, Cortez, Pince-Nez, Columbus and Cabot were all spreading like a plague across the seas. In fact, they were spreading a plague across the seas, as the people they 'discovered' were to find out.

Diaz and De Gama rounded the Horn to India and traded for spices. This they did because by the time they arrived their food was rancid and they needed to hide the smell.

Then there was Magellan, who sailed right around the world without falling off, an undertaking fraught with water.

And don't forget the magnificent achievements of ...um ...

Columbus not only sailed the seas, but he had a cloud named after him. His ships were the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Claus, sturdy vessels full of scurvy and typhoid, and in them he found America and thought it was India. Rumours that he later rediscovered India and thought it was America are unfounded. .

Cabot, with a vast leap of imagination, found a new land and called it 'Newfoundland.' He sailed in a ship called 'Ship.'

But while these fellows were away, the Renaissance came to an end, and they all had to pack up and go home to see what would happen next.

War and Peace: The people of Europe during the Renaissance were, apparently, not very good at peace - they were always at war. They were not very good at war, either, it would seem, because a war would take thirty or a hundred years to get right. But soon they became even better at killing each other than they had been before, a remarkable, seemingly impossible, achievement. For a time wars were fought by professional soldiers called Merciless-naries, but they sooner formed a Union and demanded time and a half for killing on weekends and no deaths on Sundays.

Even so, wars were a favourite pastime in those days, second only to dying of the black plague. And the side with the best science often won, largely because their cannons did not explode in their faces.

The English fought over what colour roses to plant. The Spanish and French fought over

who'd get to fight the English, and two little-known tribes in Africa fought over whether the geometry of space-time is hyperbolic or Euclidean, one of the few instances of war breaking out over a scientific principle. The war, however, was inconclusive as neither could provide

a rigorous proof of the parallel postulate within the framework of their axiomatic system.

- *Finis*

A PLANET MUCH LIKE EARTH - Part 8

by Mae Stral KOV

Truly! As I write this now, I realize how I immersed myself in South America ever since we came here. I wanted to do so, really “become a South American”, in my need always to identify with all that’s around me. But to such an extent did I do this, when it came to the time for me to renew my British passport, (for a trip to the USA in 1974, invited by science-fiction fandom there, which had paid for the trip, and I couldn’t refuse), I found I couldn’t at first think of a single fellow-Britisher who might sign the application form for me. Then I recalled an Anglo-Argentine (Irish-Argentine, actually) family living on a nearby estancia when we were in Cordoba, and we drove there to get the necessary signature, which was given at once, of course. Yes, we’d lived immersed in Latin America, so that most likely our children will end up married to Latin Americans. Three sons already did so

(though the eldest, as mentioned, with wife and kids now live in Canada and have taken out citizenship there.) And we got news our Alice in Canada is marrying a Canadian.

And yet, I’ve held apart from politics here, (such a muddle), as also from so-called “high society”. Our kids tangled with in when Vadim managed the estancia for the former bosses in Cordoba, and they were like “family” in the bosses’ home, helping entertain visitors (Europe’s jet-set). But I kept apart, alleging my preoccupation with my studies, that was for me a full-time task. I have no patience with polite chitchat, and you can’t get jet-set types to practice “soul-searching” and inquiry into the Whys of things.

“My Lady”, as I used to nickname our former boss’s wife, privately, used to root me out of the house where I’d retreated, to walk

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with her at times, and she'd try to tease me that I was probably a spiritist, (I'd deny it indignantly), "But you believe trees are alive?" "Well, aren't they," I'd reply. "Even stones are full of action, whirling electrons. Jesus said the very stones would cry out if children refused to rejoice."

To her frustration, I couldn't be needled and hence I won those little arguments, till she'd invite me up (a command invitation) to dine with her special friends, just so everybody could pelt me with "difficult" questions, (easy stuff anybody who reads a lot can know), and then she's gloat, "You see? I told you. She knows everything." (And I couldn't argue otherwise, for it only showed how "Modest" I must be.)

Such a laugh. But it's a useful act for keeping too overwhelming a bunch of visitors at bay, sometimes... people who just come out of curiosity to collect gossip!

Ah, it reminds me. When we first went to live in that high estancia, in the early 1960's, a ne'er-do-well member of the local jet-set discovered I always gave unexpected and even unknown-to-me visitors tea and cake, (back when I used to do a lot of baking). She had begun bringing great swarms, twenty or so at a time, and I began to get frustrated. Till at last I learned he was selling these strangers tickets to my "real English teas", plus tickets also to barbecues at our neighbours (a dear old native pair). Also given free by those good old souls! Oh, was I indignant. I had the last word on it - played him a mean trick next time the visitors came.

They were brought by the ne'er-do-well's son, all the "cream" of Cordona's younger set were there, clustering eagerly at our front door. Vadim peeped out and then said to me, "Oh, poor things! Why not give them tea anyway?"

"Send them away!" said I implacably. "I shall never take pity on an unknown visitor again, that way. I'm through. and they often had the *cheek* even to criticize my cakes, which of course they felt they had a right to do, having *paid* for it to that *vivo*!"

So Vadi told them that "No, we don't give teas here." They tried then to knock at the door of the Big House higher uphill. My Lady was in residence, and didn't know what to do when the crowd demanded their teas. She'd met so many *cordobeses*, and she couldn't remem-

ber them all. so she told her butler, "Just give them Coca-colas on the terrace, that's all."

The next day, the ne'er-do-well himself, still unaware of the situation, arrived at our place with more guests. This time I let him in, (hugs-and-kisses as usual), filled his hands with a tea-cup and a plate-of-cakes, also the hands of his visitors, then sprung a sweetly-voiced query at him,

"Do you know who, perchance, is selling tickets to my teas?"

Then I set back and beamed, watching him shake with embarrassment and his friends stare grimly at him. (Clatter of cups and plates... loss of appetite? "Won't you have another cup?" "No?" "Oh, what a pity!")

He never showed up at that estancia again. Nor did all his friends. I had a good laugh with My Lady over it, without naming names... but she could guess!

That was the way I emerged myself in the intimate rituals of Latin America. Earlier, when we still lived in the Argentine Delta of the Rio Paraná (tree-farming from 1953 till the 1959 flood), I still travelled once a fortnight to Buenos Aires to attend the the English language correspondence of a leading advertising firm. And taking Jesus literally then (though it's a terribly tricky thing to try to do), I used to carry other people's burdens every chance I got. Like the many packages of a native and her two babies, who'd been my fellow-passengers on the boat coming from our island retreat to the San Fernando port. We got there late at night, and I didn't see how she could manage on her own, so - to her suspicion - offered to help. Reluctantly, she loaded me with her things. Ignoring her suspicious glares, I then toted her packages, while she carried her baby (and sometimes babies), mile after mile through unsavory dark streets; she was probably puzzled, wondering what I'd expect for a tip. Then she reached her humble - even squalid - retreat and rudely snatched the packages from me and burst inside, to escape me. Wow! After which I had a rather frightening midnight rush back to where I could catch a bus to my own place where my in-laws at that time still lived, in the suburb of Buenos Aires. Scary *machos* prowling in my wake, all the way to the bus-stop!

As I say, *Wow!* I am cautious of such burden-bearing by now, though that's not the only story of the sort I could tell of my silly younger days!

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Every time I retype this, I stick in new instances and leave out the others already told. I'd better not try yet another re-writing, for the stories to be told are inexhaustable, but I will be exhausted before I'm through.

Getting back to our "Jolly Pirate", Blasé... (but you see how he dwindled in importance, in comparison with all the other "shadow-people" I've been evoking out of the past?). He is here right now, down by the river. Tony fetched him to see the wood that must yet be transported to his principal, the Paper Firm, so we can pay off gradually the debt we got into with them on his account. (The amount of gas for our pickup in his use, and the fuel oil for the bulldozer alone, comes to the equivalent of about 400 US dollars, which - some of it - our kids didn't even sign for; Blasé signed for it in our name, because we were his "partners", and it had to be -supposedly - share and share alike. We shared the burdens, chiefly, as I've said.)

It'll be a slow process paying it all back... our tires also got worn out running errands chiefly for Blasé during that interval and we had to get new tires (cash payment). Retreaded tires don't last at all!

Well, Blasé will decide (to say he'd do it, and leave us in the lurch, never showing up. Well, we found another trucker to help) how much he'll charge for carrying out the "soft-wood" (chiefly the ends of the trees and the branches), so as to reduce our debt slowly. (Oh, and you should see how many packages of Paraguayan tea - *yerba* - we've added to our stocks, plus other such staples, all on the advice of Blasé's Matty, who said we'd need it all to supply the host of flunkies Blasé kept insisting we must hire urgently just to keep us distracted. How broke we'd be by now had we managed to find all the flunkies back then!)

Well, it's scary to me to have Blasé again in the offing, around here. Who can keep up with his deviousness? He even trips himself up, time and again, but always manages to get back on his feet. When the kids have read this page they'll say, "Mana, it wasn't as bad as that. We used the pick-up sometimes for ourselves too. And we only supplied 500 liters of fuel for the bulldozer." (Mid 1986 - turns out it was 1000 liters!).

"Yes, and that bulldozer used just a bit of it for us."

'Yes - but - "

And the argument will continue till we're all tied of it. I am implacable in resenting having been made a fool of, as we were. I forgive Mudwall, Leon, anybody else, but I'm especially sore because I too fell under the charm of Blasé.

But, anyway, it's a lot of fun, I do confess. Never a dull moment. I haven't *time* to die. (Vadim has even less time, for he wields a scythe and a machete daily doing his share of battling the jungles here and you can't keep him away. He loves the challenge, and the way it keeps him limber, too.)

I haven't *time* to die, though a fellow-fan in the USA (who's published books of his own, science fiction and studies of the genre too) (that's you, Buck), tells me he's saving my letters to put them in a book when I die, and can't sue him! He also suggested I write a book on the Jolly Pirate myself, it ought to be a best-seller, he said. So I tried, and didn't manage it. About Blasé, there's so little that can be said. Most of it would be unprintable. "If you made him *macho* enough, he might like it," my friend also suggested. But Blasé is a super-macho, too much so for me to tell!

So I'll go on telling the juiciest parts just in private letters that cannot be published till we all here are safely dead. (If then!)

Meanwhile, it's fun to entertain my friends abroad thus, privately, with the liveliest portions that I must, in a possible book destined for publication, omit. It pours forth like a torrent when my fingertips fly freely over the typewriter keys; so much to tell, so much to try to understand at last, so much to share, also. It's all been too astonishing to omit. And the comical blunders I always have made, (I'm gifted at it, each time I try to "follow Christ"), I shall have great fun laughing over, once I face the famous Judgement Seat, I'm sure!

Well, right now, I'm not doing any actual "following of Christ". I'm just "remembering Jesus", every word he ever said and everything he ever did, and thinking, "What a very nice Jew!" And also what a very nice blaze of *Presence* was with us, *is* with us, if we only knew it. The Word in Us All", still at work in our midst...

There is also the Earth Mother (in Quechuan, "Pachamama"), to take into account... she's played an intimate role in our life too, but this isn't the book for it either, is it?

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After all, why can't God have *many* angels trying to keep our spinning globe on an even keel? (And she is one.)

So I think about Life and inflict my thoughts on the readers of some publishing house or other, (possibly, if I get around to mailing it out - or I might just lay it aside for my grandkids).

And what am I saying? Chiefly, "Oh, it's been fun!" The very opposite of the lament of Graham Greene's Pulling, in TRAVELS WITH MY AUNT ("Oh, mother, it's been so boring.")

There *were* boring, frustrating moments. (Who has not such moments in their lives?) I can also say I would never want to "live in all again", never want to undergo any of these experiences anew; which remark might signify they were not "enjoyable" when viewed now in retrospect, even as often they were anything but enjoyable at the time. But, one learns ... and I do think that is of prime importance. To learn, even if only by one's mistakes, pains, and so on.

And the learning may be the most important aspect of Life. Plus the "tests" at the end. If passed, one progresses... it is sad when one fails a challenge, and must go through it all again. "Go back", as it were, to try to undo former mistakes.

And so, here we are again forced to cooperate with Blasé, our hitherto "Jolly Pirate". We have wood to deliver to his principals, the handling must be done via him, as he makes the arrangements for the wood to be received at their end. (We with our own men have to do the actual loading of the trucks, at this end, plus the cutting, trimming of branches, and so on. He said he'd send a truck, eventually. We'll see if he does it, for he loves leaving people in the lurch.)

Blasé is a product of the past half-millennium of so-called "Christian civilisation" out here. His traditions go back to the time when the conquistadores with their guiding priests came south from Peru to conquer Northern Argentina, soon after the first Conquest of Peru. I read up on that Conquest out here ... no golden cities here, providing wealth for Christendom, made it world-famous; but it was as ruthless as any other Conquest of that time ... women raped (an important aspect, to break the spirit of resistance in their men, who resented alien babies thus fathered on their women); *chacras* of growing corn and vegeta-

bles destroyed; silos of storied foodstuffs burned. (Necessary, so as to starve the natives into submission).

The Spaniards marched on, having slaughtered all the ones who refused to "bow their necks to Christ's sweet yoke", or become serfs and give up their lands so as to slave on them or their new masters.

And the mestizo children that next populated the region (with occasional purer natives still surviving here and there) had to arrogance of their sires, together with the stubborn endurance of their native mothers.

Can such sorrowful scenes be erased from the memory of the Cosmos? Surely we are still paying for those evils back then, and Blasé (product of those happenings) is as much a victim as any other. His was a medieval childhood - a drunken father, a worn-out mother having babies constantly "as God commanded", till there were more than she could keep count of, and no food for all. They had to stand in line to be given a dipper each of watered-down leftovers, for the grownups must first eat all the good food, and only left-overs were allotted to that swarm of children. (Good Catholic families have to be huge! Indeed, Blasé once counted up all his legitimately recognised nieces and nephews right now - more than two-hundred!) In Robert Kennedy's time, I recall, on a visit to Peru, this Kennedy challenged the machos there to a breeding contest, having stated the number of children he himself had produced. There were roars of approval. (True, Robert Kennedy's children do not know starvation, as do so many similarly successful breeders of Latin America.)

So what is left after some half-millennium of "Christ's sweet yoke" in Latin America? To find - to experience - an answer, was it my obligation to come to live here - under the same conditions as any native, having as we had to, "gone native" by now - was it so as to shatter at long, long last, my illusions, to which I'd clung as a child? ("Everybody's good underneath"; "all religions are the same basically", etc etc. But it isn't so, alas. And a judge of religions runs awful risks of stirring up great waves of indignation. For myself, I will only say I admire more than any other the Jewish faith - to which I could never belong, it is too costly for a flighty soul such as myself. Next, I admire the Jains, the Buddhists, and other pacific folk. Jesus seems better followed by such people than by Christians.)

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So the centuries here have slipped away, ox-carts have cut their trails where formerly only fleet-footed natives wandered... and now the bull-dozers have come. And the jungles like waves of greenery constantly lap over the habitations and trails of man... older cemeteries high in these hills are vanishing under new jungle already. There are a few overgrown old orchards too, a few trees still giving fruit though gnarled and mossy. All the valley's children go there every season with bags to collect, but often they find the toucans and parrots got there first and there is nothing left.

People do keep trying to add an occasional young fruit-tree to their bits of land. (They must first contest such trees with ants and grubs of every description, lately). We find you have but to throw a seed away and it tries to join the mad race of growth alongside (and in the midst of) a host of weeds of every description. Mango and palta seeds, (avocado pears, in Quechuan, are called *palta*), they sprout most eagerly. Already we have big palta trees in our garden from such pips. (A mango is growing up also, though they say it's too cold in winter for it to give fruit, up here.)

I think we will never match the industry and diligence of the former natives to whom this valley belonged for millennium till the Spaniards came. And yet their descendants (results of bygone rapings, chiefly) survive, and are indeed enduring, though still with the Conquistadorial attitudes of "Let the other fellow do my hard work for me."

In an earlier column I lamented the way the cattle run loose on all the roadsides. While typing yesterday (and the day before) two dark, stubborn pigs arrived to dig up the *acequai*, rooting up our neatly-done canals that send water into the 3,000-litre tank Tony and Sylvia had dug and lined with brick and cement. That sort of thing happens regularly each year. Our water arrives after a two-kilometre stretch down the *acequia*, where pigs root, cows drink, women do the family washing, and so on. Ah, yes, you might say we are still "roughing it", in comparison with your ideas of culture. (But even your water today is not so pure, is it?)

Buck Coulson had suggested I might try to do that book on our adventures here with a title such as PIONEERING IN ARGENTINA.

I'd rather term it "Pioneering in Creation", (or "in the Cosmos"), or something like that. For we come into Life, plunk in the middle

of it, newborn, ignorant, defenceless, and must make a go of it and learn "what's what" before we die. We usually die without understanding... we all must "fail", for I have found that the more you try to understand the more you learn that things just aren't understandable.

If I had a choice, I would scour our planet seeking out those who've made a go of it. (Not all our Mister Money-bags sitting in their airy offices or pent-houses, no. But the occasional guru of India; the savant of the Far East; the rabbi of some former ghetto or in New Israel now; the occasional Teilhard de Chardin figures of Catholicism. I recognise that a Billy Graham does a marvellous work, I respect his achievements - but his is a personality cult, as visualise all the "Billy Graham Crusades", etc, built around him, even as Catholicism revolves around the Pope. No, the "wise ones" I seek would be figures unknown to us all, and I'd try to listen to them, hoping they might have penetrated some hidden facet that explains Existence a bit more.)

For myself, I have accepted "Things as they are"... death is possibly a very satisfying solution to the mess we all seem to make of our lives in the end. (Death and new chances, slates wiped clean for another try!)

There's another thing I've come to recognise... what a perilous tightrope we all must tread from birth to death. It spans an abyss of nothingness, destruction... our Space-Time journey is along a narrow coil of "reality", and it is so fragile if we step off that "tightrope" (deliberately leaping off to escape the laborious journey) we plunge off of our "reality" into Chaos, "uncreated", "untamed", "untransformed". And what horrors must await the soul who couldn't wait to get to the end where "saviours", (welcoming figures), still expect the arrival of each traveller, to show us the way ahead.

Reports from those who "nearly died" (or "died" and returned) describe the horrors awaiting those who tried to commit suicide. I do not believe such "Hells" are deliberately put there to trap the unwary; they are there because Creation is not yet complete. Creation has not yet conquered down there, it is still in progress and we are part of its spearhead, still out to conquer Nothingness.

Indeed, we are Pioneers... *Pioneers in Chaos!* That might be a suitable title. But no, it would possibly suggest that someone was trying to pioneer in creating chaos. No! Well, never

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mind... a precise title would never fit the far-flung concepts that one considers throughout a long and varied life.

The more acutely we experience Creation, (this universe around us) the more alive we are. Who can deny that? There are palliatives to keep us from the constant shocks that a new encounter with Creation signifies... Creation, and the message it brings from a most-unknowable Creator. "Down with the World", say Christians who follow the messages of such as a Billy Graham. (Or "Live in the World, but don't let it distract you", for actually many a follower of this "Way to Grace" is - from the point of view of people down here, anyway - incredibly wealthy! They have washing-machines, television sets, new garments, cars; they eat lovely foods without wondering if they can afford "a bit of meat", as well as boiled corn-mush for their kids.)

A raw encounter with Creation is an experience most people manage not to undergo, cocooned in their established niches in society, approved of by their neighbours and friends; worried only as to whether they can send their kids to a good college, and so on. It's the "underprivileged" who really get to know what Creation is about. They have to face it, be aware!

The International Jet-set (and as I've said, formerly we had ample opportunity to observe them on that estancia in Cordoba) fly like migrating birds from summer to summer, from the Old World to the New constantly. Up in the high skies, do they feel what it's like, "really", up there? For it is a good sample of the reality of our "narrow ribbon of existence" discussed just a while back. Riding on air, held up by man's mechanical genius, they are carefully distracted by a movie being shown during the journey, by drinks and interesting meals, by pretty stewardesses, by magazines to browse through, and so on. Do they look out, really *out* through their portholes into the whirling vacancies of Night, beyond? Below? Above them?

Occasionally they crash. Off of the narrow space-time thread of existence, they hurtle. They suppose they're taken out spiritual insurance, each in his or her own establishment that deals with Grace or Salvation. And the Creator is infinitely kind, patient and unwearying. I am sure they are well-attended wherever they fall. But could not humans try to speed

things up at last? All of us do a bit of hard wondering and thinking-things-out?

Twice I've been invited on a visit to the U.S.A., all expenses paid and I had to go and return by jet. (Who goes by boat these days, save those who have both time and money?)

I recall the emotion of looking out on the dark, silent continent (as we flew over Brazil by night). And over my left shoulder the Southern Cross retreated further and further. How long it's been up there.... the "Divine Mother Ostrich" of the Xuri or Suri or Juri tribes of the former natives of Santiago del Estero ("Land of the Bountiful Hand" - Maquijhata). I saw in that Cross, not what the Spaniards envisioned, but the Ostrich Mother herself, "fleeing from enemies" in that part of our heavens, as per the old tribal tales. And truly, flying by night in those heavens, I seemed nearer to the stars than to the earth below. To block out such experiences of adventure by turning a flight by jet into a mere "ride" as in a subway, is a blocking out of a vital encounter with the reality that is on all sides of us, waiting... and finally we face it, anyway, unprepared, if we dodge these earlier glimpses.

We've *got* to face the awesomeness of it all! Learn, finally, to be at home in our tremendous cosmos!

And each time I returned to South America, how thrilling it was to again see overhead the old Mother Ostrich herself, named Suri, long ago.

Our worldly ways of "escape", of fooling ourselves we're "established citizens" (who'll run the show on Earth for "ages") are failing us more and more. In the Northern Hemisphere the problems caused by industry have become acute. In the Southern Hemisphere we are trying more and more to ape your ways, seeking short cuts while about it. One such "short cut" was taken in the town of San Pedro, some 100 or so kilometres from Palma Sola, and a bit more from us here.

In the hot summers here, there's a great demand for water in towns like San Pedro. People forget to turn off their taps, they run water into little plastic "pools" for their children, and in general when you most want water the taps ran dry. So the old party in power (not the Radicals) began trumpeting their slogan, "Clean water for everybody and plenty of it".

A call for bids went forth and the winner must have performed what is generally required to win such a bid.

At once the winning outfit in San Pedro got to work, laying down a new pipeline, that somehow managed to collect all the waste from the sewers of a nearby town up river a bit. And at once San Pedro's water-taps began to run yellow with their fellow-citizens urine and excrement. In just one day of that past summer there were some 600 cases of dysentery reported in the hospital, and hepatitis began also to loom as a problem. The malady spread... fresh fruits and other foodstuffs became inevitably contaminated. (For all I know, my month of sickness and constant stomach upsets during that December might have been due to that epidemic. Some resisted it because they were accustomed, others weren't).

The local authorities there could not openly blame it on their enemies, the upstart "Radicals". But they could make it seem that they were fighting a situation somehow created by "the enemy" (to blame for all ill things).

Onto the streets they went again, brazenly trumpeting their aims: and heading the list there continued to be this slogan:

"Pure water for everybody and more of it!"

They had counted on the stolid ignorance and conservatism of the populace, ready to believe whatever might be pronounced. But this time, their message was greeted with jeers! Actually, I was really astonished that a rabble failed to be aroused to burn the Radical headquarters as punishment.

It is only fair to add here that a youngish member of the political party that so strikingly failed to provide clean water for San Pedro is *the* moving spirit (without any backlash for him either) in bringing water by pipes from a spring on Miguel's land, lower than the *aguada*, for use in the new first-aid station, across from us here. As he said to our kids: "I promised to do it, and I've done it. And I'm keeping all my promises to you, there".

- Mae Strelkov

THE YANKEE PRIVATEER

by Buck Coulson

Steve Sneyd asked for more about the Miamis, which solves the problem of what to write about. They're still around, or some of them are. When the US government was pursuing its policy of resettling the eastern Indians in "Indian Territory" (now Oklahoma) despite any Indian wishes, the tribe split. Somewhat over half left Indiana, but the ones who had adopted the idea of private property and dealing with white neighbors were mostly able to stay put, so there are now two separate Miami tribes. There was a part-Indian girl in high-school with me; prettiest girl in school. (But she was 2 or 3 years older than I was, and in the 1940's small-town girls did *not* have anything to do socially with younger males.) Currently, the headquarters of the Indian Miami is located in Peru, a small town some 30 miles from here.

There are several Indian celebrations in this area. Hartford City has an annual "pow-wow" in the summer; dancing, drumming, singing, and - most important - the sale of souvenirs and handicrafts. Marion the next town west, has a commemoration of the "Battle of Mississinewa", originally a skirmish between white militia and Indians during the War of 1812. Farther west, Rochester holds the "Trail of Courage", commemorating the Indian relocation to the southwest, and on the west side of the state, Lafayette has the big one; "The Feast of the Hunter's Moon", which includes some 4000 participants and larger numbers of visitors. It was at the Feast that I bought my skunkskin cap, which I still wear now and then to conventions. (I had to buy it; all four people with me including Juanita were telling me I should, be-

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cause "It's *you*, Buck". And that's what my *friends* think of me...)

There are still occasional tribal quarrels. Some years back the Indiana State Fair had an "Indian" mascot, on the "heap big chief" order. The Miamis promptly objected, and AIM (American Indian Movement) sent in a rabble-rousing negotiator in "support" - and to get publicity. The Miami reaction to that was, basically, "Get that damned Sioux out of here!" After a week or so - without any help from AIM - they got Fair officials to get rid of the "demeaning portrayal" and use another theme for the fair. Now there is an ongoing argument between the Indians and Oklahoma Miamis over which is the "real" tribe, and which should get the government subsidy. (The US is still paying an annual subsidy to various Indian tribes.) The Indiana Miamis seem to be, for the most part, better off and better integrated than the Oklahomans, but both are equally proud of their ancestry.

There is still occasional furor over Indian gambling casinos, not just in Indiana. Tribal lands are not, officially, part of the US, and thus don't have to obey US laws, and several tribes have discovered that gambling can be a nice source of revenue. There have been disputes over this in New York, Oklahoma, Indiana, and other states, between Indiana and the church-goers; there was a big one in Wisconsin a few years ago, and one on the Mohawk reservation, which has the added advantage of being partly in the US and partly in Canada, leaving neither country particularly happy about the situation. Officially, I don't believe there are any reservations in Indiana; Indians here are considered US citizens.

In the old days, Little Turtle of the Miamis was the most successful Indian leader in the area. He first defeated a small group of white militia, then routed a small expedition sent into his country, and finally wiped out General St. Clair's army of over a thousand men. But the whites kept coming. When Anthony Wayne came in to "pacify" the tribes, Little Turtle advised a negotiated peace; "You'll never get a better settlement than right now". But the other chiefs thought they could win, attacked Wayne, and were decisively beaten, settling for a much harsher peace treaty than Little Turtle could probably have achieved. (If the rest of the chiefs had listened to him, this whole area would probably have remained "Indian Territory" much

longer that it did, though eventually white immigration would have overran it.) Most of the histories emphasize Techuseh and his attempt to unite the midwestern tribes, but Techuseh really achieved very little.

There are a couple of songs about "Sinclair's Defeat"; Juanita set one poem to music and sings it on occasion.

"We up and charged them over again, there
by the muddy water,
Till we couldn't stomach the sight of men,
Six of us out of every ten,
Stuck like a pig at slaughter.

So we turned and run for it after awhile,
Run from the field like rabbits;
And the Indians followed us mile on mile,
Indian fashion and Indian file,
Pursuing their Indian habits."

Juanita put it on a cassette tape some time back, along with other historical songs by the same poet. It's now out of print, but is scheduled to be reissued RealSoonNow. The original poem is based on the journal of a pack-horseman who carried supplies for St. Clair's army; a newspaper editor who had read the journal told us that the song comes close to being word for word identical to the original. The battle took place about 40 miles east of here, just over the state line in Ohio. It was never given an official name, like Custer's "Battle of the Little Bighorn"; it's just "St. Clair's Defeat". Nobody felt like naming it, when the news arrived. Nobody felt like remembering it, either; I doubt if over 10% of the current population of the area ever heard of it. It's not in school history textbooks. One of the Shawnee chiefs in the battle was actually a white man who had been adopted into the Indian tribe as a child; his real name was Marmaduke Van Swearingen (which I think is excuse enough for him to run away to join the Indians and be renamed Blue Jacket...) There is a legend that his brother Charles was with St. Clair's army, and the brothers met on the battlefield. Charles was killed and there was a deathbed reconciliation between the brothers. It sounds like someone's wishful thinking, to me, but does indicate that our Civil War wasn't the only conflict in the US that divided families.

- Buck Coulson

EDGAR ALLEN POE

Through Others Eyes

by Richard Reeve

Edgar Allen Poe, the American author and poet was born in Boston, Massachusetts on January 19, 1809 and was adopted at an early age by John Allen. He came to England with the Allens, 1815-20, and attended Manor House school at Stoke Newington.

He published his first book of poetry, *Tamerlane And Other Poems* (1827) anonymously, then enlisted in the U.S. Army. He was sent to Sullivan's Island, South Carolina which provided the settings for some of his books. He entered West Point in 1830 after publishing his second book of verse, *Al Aaraaf* (1829); he was dishonourably discharged in 1831 for the intentional neglect of his duties. He published a third volume of verse *Poems* (1831).

He then edited various newspapers and began to publish his own stories in magazines. His first collection, *Tales Of The Grotesque And Arabesque* (1839 for 1840) contained THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER. *The Raven And Other Poems* (1845) brought him fame but his menage continued to suffer poverty and ill health, his wife died in 1847.

On himself he wrote to Dr. J. E. Snodgrass on April 1, 1841:

I never was in the habit of intoxication... But, for a brief period, while I resided in Richmond, and edited the *Messenger* I certainly did give way, at long intervals, to the temptation held out on all sides by the spirit of Southern conviviality.

Others wrote of him:

... an unmanly sort of man whose love-life seems to have been largely confined to crying in laps and playing house.

(W.H. Auden, in Richard Wilbur, "Edgar Allen Poe", in Perry Miller ed., *MAJOR WRITERS OF AMERICA*, vol 1)

The substance of Poe is refined; it is his form that is vulgar. He is, as it were, one of Nature's gentlemen, unhappily cursed with incorrigible bad taste.

(Aldous Huxley, "Vulgarity In Literature", In Robert Regan ed, *Poe A COLLECTION OF CRITICAL ESSAYS.*)

He was an adventurer into the vaults and cellars and horrible underground passages of the human soul. He sounded the horror and the warning of his own doom.

(D.H. Lawrence, *STUDIES IN CLASSICAL AMERICAN LITERATURE*)

Poe had a pretty bitter doom. Doomed to seethe down his soul in a great continuous convulsion of disintegration, and doomed to register the process. And then doomed to be abused for it, when he had performed some of the bitterest tasks of human experience that can be asked of a man. Necessary tasks too. For the human soul must suffer its own disintegration, consciously, if ever it is to survive.

(*ibid*)

Above all, Poe is great because he is independent of cheap attractions, independent of sex, of patriotism, of fighting, of sentimentality, snobbery, gluttony and all the rest of the vulgar stock-in trade of his profession. This is what gives him his superb distinction.

(George Bernard Shaw, "Edgar Allen Poe", in Eric W. Carlson ed., *THE RECOGNITION OF EDGAR ALLEN POE*)

...Poe's verses illustrate an intense faculty for technical and abstract beauty, with the rhyming art to excess, an incorrigible propensity toward nocturnal themes, a demoniac undertone behind every page - and, by final judgement, probably

belong among the electric lights of imaginative literature, brilliant and dazzling, but with no heat. (Walt Whitman, *EDGAR POE'S SIGNIFICANCE*).

That Poe had a powerful intellect is undeniable: but it seems to me the intellect of a highly gifted young person before puberty. The forms which his lively curiosity takes are those in which a pre-adolescent mentality delights: wonders of nature and of mechanics and of the supernatural, cryptograms and cyphers, puzzles and labyrinths, mechanical chess players and wild flights of speculation.

(T. S. Elliot, *ESSAYS*)

Poe's poetry began as a presumably passionate expression of the mind and imagination of Edgar Poe; it ended as a commentary on and a "philosophy" of the whole Romantic concept of the creative imagination.

(Edward H. Davidson, *POE, A CRITICAL STUDY*)

With all due respect to the very original genius of the author of the TALES OF MYSTERY, it seems to us that to take him with more than a certain degree of seriousness is to lack seriousness one's self.

(Henry James, *COMMENTS*)

He had, to a morbid sense, that desire to rise which is vulgarly called ambition, but no wish for the esteem or the love of his species; only the hard wish to succeed - not shine, not serve - succeed, that he might have the right to despise a world which galled his self-conceit.

(Rufus Griswold, in Arthur Hobson Quinn, *EDGAR ALLEN POE*)

It is high irony that Poe should have invented the detective story, that stand-by for breadwinning of the hack writer, and yet half starved himself.

(Henry Seidel Canby, *CLASSIC AMERICANS*)

Poe is a kind of Hawthorne with delirium tremens.

(Leslie Stephen, *HOURS IN A LIBRARY*)

He died on October 7, 1849 in Baltimore, Maryland, five days after being found semi-conscious and delirious from alcohol, heart failure and epilepsy. His posthumous reputation and influence have been great. His works are numerous..

THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE

by Pavel Viaznikov

I travelled around a lot since the last time I wrote, so there are some stories in store.

First of all, do you remember Sergey Lukianenko's story about Fancon? They had it again in Odessa, and this time it was organised much better, with a good resthouse for accommodation, receptions every night and official meetings held on board of hired launches. Lev Vershinin and his friend the Mayor of Odessa promised that in two years (from now on the Fancon will be biannual - provided they get re-elected) the Fancon will be held on a cruise boat, during an Odessa-Cyprus-Haifa voyage. (So everybody vote for us, guys!) In addition to

the Mayor's prizes, there were prizes from a friendly Orthodox SF&F Club of the Rabbinate of Israel, and from... UNA-USSO, a ultra-nationalist militant Ukrainian organisation (anti-Semitic, by the way). But this way or that, the Fancon-978 was much better than Fancon-96.

(And, just recently, in September, we had the "Strannik" ("Wanderer") Con, which traditionally was successful and interesting, though a bit expensive for the participants; Robert Sheckley was the guest of honour, and the prizes - statuettes of the Wanderer and swords - never missed, as at Fancon-96. By the way, Mr Sheckley has agreed to write something - a

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something - a novel or two - for one of the Russian publishing houses).

Well, back to my travels.

Almost immediately after my trip to Holland, as you know, I went to St. Petersburg to become a godfather of the charming young lady called Varechka - the one who I have in my hands in the photo in TM 92, which you printed without an explanation. That was January; and in May I went to "The Northern Palmira" aka "The Northern Venice" aka "The Second Capital" aka "The City of Neva" aka St. Petersburg, again. It was the May Holiday Week (from May 1 - Labour Day, ex-Day of International Solidarity of the Workers, to May 9 - V-Day), so I had a whole week for that journey. As usual, I went there by train, and was lucky (?) to get a ticket for the same train which was chosen by the SF fans going to Interpresscon. The con is held annually in Razliv, that's where old Grandpa Lenin used to hide from the police of the Provisional Government in 1917, before the October Revolution. Razliv means Flood - for this is what happens to the local lake every spring. Lenin lived in a hay hut and mowed hay; he also wrote several articles here, using two tree stumps as a chair and table. The local museum keeps the historical stumps in a glass case, the hay hut is renovated annually, and there is also a concrete full-scale model of the same hut. Now, where was I - oh yes, the train. Every year fans hire out a whole railway car for themselves, and some people go especially to St. Petersburg via Moscow to join it. The car has 9 compartments, each compartment has 4 berths, therefore 36 fans can enjoy a ride in "the drunk car". The nickname speaks for itself; this is the only car in the train where nobody sleeps from dusk to dawn, and in the morning there are 36 fans plus one common hangover.... This time, the drunk car was #12, and I was in #2; at 6 AM, 2 hours before arriving in St. Petersburg, I decided to move to #12 in order to say "aloha" to the guys. Just as I thought, everybody was of a somewhat greenish complexion, and the mirror in the toilet was missing - at 3 PM it had fallen victim to writer V. who was a bit overheated (or shall we say besotted?), gesticulating in order to emphasise his point in conversation with a friend. Sergey Lukianenko managed to describe a new novel to other fans, and they were over-enthusiastic about "a really cool plot", until Sergey explained to them that all along he was retelling "the Golden Key, or Buratino's Adventures" (a very

popular children's story by Alexey Tolstoy, based on "Pinocchio"). He only replaced characters with typical "space opera" heroes and added an SF entourage instead of the fairy-tale settings...

We went to the dining car to get some coffee, but they forgot to boil water, so the waitress had to fetch boiling water from the next car. Then we arrived at the station and separated.

Two days later I visited the guys at the resthouse at Razliv. There is not much to tell about except that I managed to see lobbying at work: I came in just in time to vote for the best SF novels, stories, illustrations and etc., and the under-the-carpet fight was in full swing. Soon I was sort of disillusioned and went for a walk with my friend, an artist. We were lucky to see the first day of smelt fish going to the spawning grounds. That was a *perfect day for cucumber fish* - for smelt is also known as cucumber fish, as it smells of fresh cucumbers. People, wearing high rubber boots or waterproof suits (usually written-off military chemical protection suits), were entering the swift waters of the Sestra river, which connects the Razliv lake and Finnish Bay, and they literally spooned up the smelt with big square nets. The river flowing through the town of Sestroretsk was boiling with billions of tiny fishes, and the fishermen were catching them by the buckets... Even in my childhood I used to enjoy immensely a book by a couple of American divers - treasure hunters, who started diving even before the great sea explorer introduced the idea of scuba diving (Jane & Barney Crile, TREASURE DIVING HOLIDAYS). Well, they described a fit of common madness which occurred when *leusteres* were spawning... (by the way, do fish swim in schools or flocks?...) Now, the "cucumber" fish is in a similar way popular in and around the northern capital of Russia. They sell it everywhere, and they deep-fry it, and it is really delicious....

* * *

Well, and soon after that I went to Helsinki. Frankly speaking, I never expected that trip to be very interesting, but it turned out that the city is nice and has quite a lot of attractions. I lived in a nice hotel overlooking the harbour, right opposite the ferry terminals. Every day I saw ferries arriving from Sweden and Norway, and people staggering down the gangways with boxes of beer. Later somebody explained to me

that the liquor tax in Scandinavian countries is quite high, so many people, when they want to get pickled (or, as one Finn told me, “a little stoned”), buy a return ticket to this or that country and enjoy duty free drinks aboard a ferry. Well, not long ago there were special bus tours from Finland to Leningrad serving that purpose - when the situation with alcohol was especially grim in Finland, and in Russia, in its turn, liquor was cheap as mud (it no longer is, though it’s still cheaper than in Finland), people arrived in Leningrad in the morning, perhaps paid a brief visit to the Hermitage or other museums and devoted the rest of the day to worshipping Bacchus in the evening. The tourists were then loaded into their buses and shipped back to the Land of the Thousand Lakes. That’s what happens when a ban on human vices is imposed by sheer administrative force! The American Mafia was raised exactly thus in Prohibition, and when severe restrictions on alcohol were imposed in the USSR, lots of people got rich illegally selling home-made moonshine, but many fell victim to glue-sniffing, eating “wheels” (medical pills, normally not considered drugs), drinking eau-de-cologne, glass polishing liquid, paint thinner, etc. Some people were inventing new ways to switch off their brains, like preparing a “Black and White” - not the famous whiskey brand, but a sandwich made of Pomorin (a Bulgarian toothpaste with natural sea salts) and a certain brand of shoe polish - both were spread on a slice of bread and put on a heating radiator for one night; in the morning, the dried-up “spread” was removed, while the bread slice, impregnated with toxins, was eaten. Some people invented complex yet compact equipment for brewing moonshine or purifying various liquids containing alcohol but normally not potable. Every night a special TV program, “Perestroyka Searchlight” (devoted to disclosing drawbacks and crimes) mentioned new cases of moonshine disclosed. I remember an “exhibition” of moonshine stills which were confiscated by police; one was hidden inside a workable washing machine, another one was camouflaged as a TV set (that one could not work as a TV, though), one was hidden within a wardrobe, etc. And many people were keeping some vodka as “liquid currency”, especially when it was necessary to deal with a plumber, or to buy some dung from a collective farmer, for fertilising one’s country house vegetable garden, etc.

But back to Helsinki... The marketplace was also close to our hotel; in the centre of it there was a column with a Russian two-headed Imperial eagle on top (Finland used to be a Russian province before 1917), berths on one side and the old President’s palace on the other. The market was full of souvenirs, excellent and varied fish, and among other things, whole birch trees and birch branches. I came to Helsinki right in time for the Midsummer Day Festival, and it is a must that the houses be decorated with birch branches for this holiday. Another tradition is burning bonfires in the night. Usually, people build huge piles of firewood, about 5 metres high, on the shores of numerous lakes in the bay or on the banks of uncountable lakes. The giant fire is seen from afar, and it looks really great. I observed the ceremony from a boat - there is a special Midsummer Night excursion. The night was light as it should be in the North, where “white nights” make darkness almost non-existent for a generous portion of summer... That day the sun set at half past midnight, and at 3 AM it was back in the sky.

On the next day Helsinki was deserted. It was like the *Mary Celeste* - the streets were empty, shops closed, museums shut, restaurants locked. Lost tourists were wandering aimlessly in the lethargic city. Even the main Lutheran cathedral - a huge crater in the rocks covered with a metal cupola with stained glass panels in it - was closed in connection with that (pagan, in fact) holiday. Some restaurants were serving drinks and cold snacks only, since the cooks were on leave - Finns usually spend Midsummer holiday in the country, somewhere on the lakes, with sauna, vodka and all. Only a few places were ready to sustain starving foreigners. I spent the whole day in a very nice place, in the open-air museum which was working and full of people. The place is very nice and I had a most pleasant day... The sun was shining, and you know - pines, picturesque old houses and all... I even bathed in the cool waters of the Baltic sea.

During that visit, I also managed to have a short boat excursion around some small islets near Helsinki, and to visit the State Museum and a Soviet Targo class missile submarine serving as a museum of some sort - it also houses a restaurant with borsch, vodka, salted herring and other food of that kind; it’s difficult to get in by the series of narrow hatches, and, I think, even more difficult to get out of after a good meal. Such subs used to sail for many

THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE

months and up to one year without as much as approaching a shore, and most of the time they were, of course, submerged. But even when a submarine surfaced, for example for refuelling (this sub was a diesel one), most of the crew remained inside. I do not think that I could endure service on such a boat without going mad....

You see, that trip was connected with a conference, so usually after 5 PM I was free to roam about the streets, or to frolic in the parks. Of course, I could not go outside the city and therefore failed to see the famous Muumi-Land, or the lakes... except one lake, that is; we were taken for a "cultural program" which was organised in the former home of a prominent Finnish sculptor, on a really beautiful lake. The estate, consisting of several solid, massive buildings, surrounded by fairy-tale-like forest, now houses a museum and a Finnish restaurant (deer, fish, berries and potatoes, and pies of different kinds with deer, fish, berries and potatoes; and, of course, vodka). Well, I considered myself lucky to have seen a fantastic sunset on the lake. It was something out of the setting for a multi-million krona film based on "Kalevala".

Soon after I went to St. Petersburg again, and this time it was the first part of my vacation. I decided to visit the famous surroundings of the city; I know Peterhof with its fabulous fountains, Pushkin and Tzarskoye Selo where our great poet Pushkin studied in the Imperial Liceum; Repino and Lisiy Nos in the North of the Finnish Bay, Ladoga lake etc; but it was the first time that I visited Gatchina, the estate of Emperor Pavel I. Strange it was to learn that if Katherine the Great, who was *comparatively* liberal, at least in public, enjoyed regular gardens, with trees looking like soldiers on a grand parade, while Pavel I, known as a martinet and worshipper of strict discipline, military order for all his subjects (up to uniforms for people of different classes and estates!), - this man preferred irregular, seemingly natural parks. The Gatchina park is not maintained very well, and in places it is overgrown with biting nettle, cowslips and thick undergrowth, but it does not spoil it, since the very idea was to make the park look natural, so natural it does look, even though a bit of careful gardening (and restoration of the beautiful pavilions and bridges) would not hurt it. I also had a good swim in the park ponds, near a small dam, with a small but powerful stream making a free attraction for swimmers. They, and especially the

kids, would rush into the boiling water under the dam and then torpedo to the centre of the pond, carried away by the stream. It's fun.

Then, I visited my friend Oleg in Se-stroretsk. This is a town in the North of the Finnish Bay, on the Sestra river - remember, that's where I observed the fishing for cucumber fish. As I have told you already, my friend is an artist, and we are going to make a big comic book. I do the plot and he draws. We discussed our project, and then Oleg suggested going by

rowboat to one of the Finnish Bay forts.

Back in the time of Peter the Great it was crucial to lock the mouth of the Neva, protecting it from attacks of foreign (at that time Swedish) navies. So, a fort was built on the island of Kronshtadt, complete with docks, weaponry, and - later - a beautiful Naval Cathedral. But Kronshtadt was not enough, so Peter ordered construction of a series of small islands, each with a fort on it - the chain of forts was to provide adequate protection from any danger from the sea. Peter's ingenious engineers had great piles of stone brought on sledges via the winter ice, and placed where needed. In spring, the thick ice melted and the stones went down, thus forming the foundations for the forts.

Now, it was one of those forts, Totleben, where Oleg suggested to go. Totleben is the northernmost of the chain, and it is only about 3 km from the shore. I warned honestly that I cannot row now in the sea, but Oleg was optimistic and eager to row all the way, there and back again. We hired a "soapdish" - a nickname for a light glass-fibre boat - and sailed off with Oleg's 8-year old son as our third companion.

It was easy to get there - the wind was pushing us offshore, and so was the current. We made it to the fort in less than one hour. The walls of the fort-island were stained with grim warnings about trespassing, as only three years ago this was the territory of the Navy. Even now Volodya, an enthusiast of Russian Navy history working as a keeper of the fort, does his best to discourage visitors, most of whom want to have a picnic in the fort. But Oleg and Volodya have some common friends, and we were allowed to come ashore. We tied our "soapdish", much sneered upon by Volodya, next to the *Enchantment*, a replica 18th century French admiral's launch belonging to a Young Sailor's Club, and a small yacht which, as we

found out later, belonged to an Englishman teaching English in one of St. Petersburg's elite schools. A decade ago he would have certainly have been arrested for sailing in the Finnish Bay, and accused of espionage! We found the teacher on the fort-commander's tower, the highest point on the island - he was studying the bay with powerful navy binoculars.

We climbed down to the old underground ammunition stores and living quarters of the garrison and admired the remaining shell lifts (hand-driven hoists), all in perfect condition - Volodya repaired and oiled them himself. Volodya, dressed in an old uniform without any insignia, told us the story of the fort and shared his hopes to get the Navy interested in placing a cadet school or at least a summer-camp for cadets in the fort. He also condemned our provision store - we had several dried roaches (not the roaches you think of, but a kind of fish, looking a bit like herring, traditionally eaten dried in Russia; aka *vobla*), a 2-litre plastic bottle of extra-strong Monarch beer for us adults and a 1.5 litre bottle of Pepsi for Oleg's son. "Russians - preached Volodya (and he's a nationalist, though not an ultra-"die-hard" type), - Russians should drink kvas (a fermented brew of dried rye bread) in summer and vodka in winter. Leave this piss to the Americans! They don't know a thing about eating and drinking. Don't contaminate your bodies with their dirty Pepsis!"

After this lecture and the most enlightening narration of the fort's history, we stared our voyage back. This time everything - the wind, the current and the waves - opposed us. We took off at 6 PM and hoped to be in Sestroretsh by perhaps 8. At 10, we were still as

close to Totleben than to anywhere else. I tried to replace Oleg at the oars even for a while, but all I managed to do was to keep our boat from moving back towards Totleben. At 11 PM, we witnessed a most beautiful sunset and a bit later, enjoyed a very impressive rise of the moon. At midnight, we touched the shore of the continent, and Columbus could not have been happier than us. But we still had to go to the boat-station where we had hired our "soap-dish". Luckily, it's open 24 hours, as boats are often hired by fishermen. To crown the adventure, I fell overboard just next to the pier, and lost my sandals to the sticky clay bottom; so on our 2 km way to Oleg's I had to stagger on sharp stones, invisible in the dark. But in general, the Totleen adventure in whole was fun... Oh, I forgot to mention that somewhere in the midway between Totleben and Sestroretsk, Oleg's son decided to quit drinking "American poisons" and threw the bottle with some cola in into the waves - to float, opposing the Gulfstream, to its homeland... Oleg scolded the boy for polluting the sea, but it was too late - the current took the bottle away in no time.

- Pavel Viaznikov

Poetry, Too

SENRYU

by Peter Brodie

STARSHIP

Needle-fire spears
photons in its haste to show

the dark a new toy.

GOD

Rage enough to give
away everything but
the only answer.

THE SMART HOME

NATURE

Multiplied to the
infinite and back you still
stare upon yourself.

CHILDREN

A day is a long
time to compete in life's
little joke called now.

PRETTY WOMEN

You push every
sense around you as if you
knew your multitude.

LIFE

Sparked by nothing as
small as the thought that it's
understandable.

POETRY

Told in many tongues
and ways this seeking to be
with what is not yet.

LOGIC

On the endless plain
stretching to the forever
forest it runs.

LOVE

Named forever you
have none yet overmaster
it all with nothing.

HATE

In the lost valleys
your timing fires the last

ember to new reaches.

LITTLE BOY

by Trent Jamieson

Little boy drags his grandmama's bones
in a sack that rattles of gramophones
With a laugh and a flash of low humour teeth
Little boy sings and drags for a week.

CAT IN A HOT LEAD BOX

by Trent Jamieson

When everything is said and done
and garbage bins are laid to rest
We discover we lack the acumen
to sort the lowly from the best.
We find, at last, the gorge released;
a bellyful of lithiic thoughts.
The cat goes out because its pleased
to rest its head in ones and noughts.

COLONEL GEORGE AND YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU...

by Trent Jamieson

Colonel George was a miserly fool
gave nothing to folks as a general rule
but even his greed wasn't enough
when it came to the women from Orange-
juicecup
She was round she was tall, with teeth made of
wax
she sucked on pink lollies that she kept in hemp
sacks
She laughed and she cried when she begged for
a buck
around this mad woman old George came un-
stuck
for he gave her a dollar, then he gave her a ten
he gave her his wallet and his best laying hen
He gave her his house, then he gave her his car
all that he kept was an ant in a jar
And the ant wasn't his, for the ant was a friend
they'd fought in the East and served on the
Bend
"Well," the ant said he him in a matter fact way
"There's nothing to own when you give it away"
The Colonel smiled and nodded his head
"Ain't nothing to lose when we'll soon be dead."

You see, there was something he'd heard just before.
Twelve minutes to go till nuclear war.

PARK

by Trent Jamieson

A walk in the park is a very nice thing
Manicured grounds and the flapping of wings
Can you see the crow's eyes as it settles on yours
Can you hear the worm snap its malevolent jaws.

PUMPKIN WARRIORS

by Trent Jamieson

Warriors riding pumpkins wild
with vicious gleaming warrior smiles
and swords, swung high, of pumpkin skin
triumphant cries of devilry

Across the plains their pumpkins strode
four-legged snarls upon the road
they crashed and gnashed their snarkle teeth
and trampled night with sharpened feet

To war! To war! the warriors raced
'gainst flower bearing rats aghast
whose softness was a flaw, this time
for pumpkins slice the gentle stem.

The pumpkin riders beat the rats
and chewed their flesh and donned their hats
the rats that fled were hunted down
the pumpkin lords had won this round.

AS THE WAR GROWS WEARIER

“Battle not monsters, lest ye become
a monster, and if you gaze into the
abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche

Out here so long, so few of us left
increasingly forget which side we are,
which side we fight... once these ships
seemed vomit-foul... now how often wish
ours too against all odds resembled
tentacled temple, when think unseen peer
through portals hoping against hope
vast coiling strands wave, wriggle,
strain for prey out of our hull, seek
somehow to see not blast and debris-pitted
hull that gleamed once as a star but swell
of columnar visage's gaping beckoning...

next black hole we slingshot for speed gain
then will be time... override all saviour
systems, dive straight in to where are
answers such as knowing why we are
no longer us and not yet even them

on the way in I dream we must commingle
us and them be born again black stars
reflame open to swallow homes bred us
sent us out along against what we've become

- steve sneyd

IN SPIRIT ONLY

by Brent Lillie

Today, he simply walked, enjoying the afternoon
air and listening to the bees in the sweet-
smelling shrubs along the pathway leading up to

the corporation's main entrance. So many bees
that the bushes hummed, like electric wires. His
bladder was bursting, so he relieved himself

against the trunk of a nearby maple. But it was simply because he wanted to piss, not because of some primal instinct to mark his territory, and that disappointed him.

Later, McEvoy did the transferral. They put the dog back in its cage and Pearce sat for a while, sipping on a glass of water, staring at the animal he'd just lived inside for fifteen minutes.

"There was a cat under one of the cars - a real one, I think - but I didn't feel like chasing it," Pearce lamented. "What's more, it recognised me for what I was and just put its head down and went back to sleep. And it was embarrassing, relieving myself against a tree. I'm getting some mild sensations - the tail wagging for instance, but I tell you, Mac, it's still feels like I'm a very short person with fur and four legs."

"Maybe it's in the secondary crossover links. I read this morning that KreecherKorp was having problems with their SCL's."

Pearce snorted and waved dismissively: "All chaff. KreecherKorp's way ahead of us on this, I can feel it."

Leaning forward in his chair he jabbed a finger towards the cocker spaniel lying in its cage with its head on its paws.

"The novelty of occupying animal bodies to avoid the virus wore off a long time ago. What's the use of becoming a bird when you don't possess the instincts necessary to fly? Nobody wants to be a fish, because they know they'll drown." Pearce scratched under his arm. "Right now, we're nothing more than hermit crabs, crawling into empty shells. I tell you, if we can beat the opposition to the punch on this one, the profits will be fucking enormous."

"That's what I'd be," McEvoy mused. "A bird. Imagine that, flying. Over the rooftops."

He rose from his chair and shuffled over to the window. Outside, bears, apes,

chimps - all kinds of beasts, though principally those with a fair degree of manual dexterity, ambled, lumbered along, some carrying books or folders, others sipping on drinks or munching snacks. McEvoy shook his head.

"You know, sometimes I hate what we're doing. It's crueller than murdering them for their meat."

"You can't feel that way. It's them or us."

"Them or us," McEvoy echoed wearily. "I'm tired of hearing that argument, even if it is true. Sick to death of it. What if the virus jumps?"

Pearce reached over and put his glass on the sink. He stared hard at his companion, big nostrils wet, flaring slightly, stubby gorilla fingers signing frantically.

"It won't jump. You're going to live forever, in body after body after body, and soon you're going to think of it, Mac. Dream it up. A hundred years ago, you were the one who dreamed all this up in the first place. You just need to make that mental leap." Pearce pointed at a sparrow that flashed across the blue square of sky beyond the window. "See that? One day, they'll be as much a part of us as we are of them. Will that make you happy?"

McEvoy simply smiled and shrugged his thin chimpanzee shoulders.

"You worry too much, Mac. It's getting in the way of your imagination."

"And the corporation's profits?"

"Exactly."

"It's been a long day," McEvoy sighed. "I might go home and spend some time with the family."

"What's your wife this week?"

"A yak."

"Interesting..."

"If you like sleeping with yaks."

DOS REVISITED: Reinventing The Wheel

by James Verran

Writers must rate highly on the scale of the environmentally aware in this throwaway age. In the main, we cling to old technology longer than many other professions, especially when we are self-funded. Longhand first drafts, and/or typewriters continue to be popular with those who often proclaim themselves 'real writers'. A couple of decades ago, busy writers discovered the advantages of remote drafting and editing when Dedicated Word Processors became fashionable. Nevertheless, many vintage typewriters continue to clack out there, and more than likely, when we do acquire our first computer, it will be preloved, usually hovering around its 'use by date', and running comfortably superseded software.

Just about any writer (as distinct from techno-nerd) who has ever used a computer knows that they often seem temperamental, which is a programming artefact, rather than some insidious electronic malevolence, right? Once upon a time there was only one way (the least expected) to initiate most common computer stuff-ups, but then, along came Windows. In any of its many versions, Windows offers limitless potential for inadvertently creating mayhem to the over-eager mouse clicker. Now, before you Macintosh users smugly state the obvious -- few Macintoshers will admit that their machines have ever given cause for grief, apart from a frustrating shortage of software -- I must confess that this is yet another chronicling of the foibles of PC operating systems.

I too have occasionally suffered the same apparently inexplicable trauma that eventually strikes most Cyber-scribes: the sudden 'hanging up' or system crash.

To oversimplify, many so-called crashes are nothing more than the software placing the machine into an endless 'loop'. The processor encounters an inappropriate instruction and continues to execute the same piece of code, endlessly, without progressing to the next logical action. No matter the cause, the result is the same: the machine 'freezes' and will not respond to normal input.

When this occurs, faint-hearted writers may simply wish to lay down and die -- along with their precious Windows -- when a couple of elementary DOS manoeuvres could quickly put things right. "What's DOS?" the more recently initiated computerists will ask. Yes, there are people out there who believe Windows to be the only PC operating system.

How easily you recover from a potential disaster is a matter of good 'house keeping'.

Once the system crashes, there is little else to do but warm boot using the [Ctrl] + [Alt] & [Delete] keys. If that fails, press the RESET button, or (shudder) switch off the power. On machines running Windows 95, the [Ctrl] + [Alt] & [Delete] keystrokes usually generate an on-screen request to end the current task by clicking, or pressing [Enter], on one or another small box, euphemistically called a button. This is the software's way of saying that you have an application (program) still running which needs to be closed. Don't expect an apology, just obey the prompts. Windows will usually take care of the technical stuff, after which the Big M strongly recommends shutting down and rebooting. Rebooting will allow '95 to reinstate the Registry data which it automatically filed away after the last successful boot up. Of course if you are not running Windows version 'whatever', you'll have to reboot and tidy up for yourself.

Tidying up, part of the aforementioned 'house keeping', is similar to its domestic namesake in that the amount of work involved depends on how long ago the last routine 'house keeping' was performed. After the system has been rebooted and (hopefully) appears to be running successfully, the 'tool kit' should be opened and some repairs carried out before attempting to resume the task that provoked the system failure. Most crashes leave some detritus, usually in the form of open or fragmented files. Such damaged files lack critical end of file markers (among other things) which tell the system where the file begins and ends. If any of these markers is missing, the file remains incomplete -- an open wound, capable of grafting onto other files with disastrous results.

Imagine what can happen if stray data becomes grafted into an open program file. All may appear to be well until the processor runs up against the corrupted subroutine, then the system will crash again, compounding the original problem.

Fortunately, later versions of Windows and DOS come with several repair utilities which tidy up the loose ends. If the damaged files are beyond repair, these utilities will isolate the detritus to minimize further corruption. The writers of system software created most of these repair utilities to run independently, so it is often possible to fix the problem without causing too much collateral damage.

CheckDisk (Chkdsk) is one such utility, and ScanDisk is its newer, improved sibling. So after rebooting, run one of these, preferably

ScanDisk, with the system in DOS mode. ScanDisk will seek out and isolate fragments of damaged files by closing off and saving them with distinctive file names. In many cases the salvaged files can be reopened by the application and used to reconstruct most of the pre-crash data file -- but don't count on it. It is far better to tuck them away in a special directory (or folder) and go back to the last working (undamaged) back up of the particular file. You do make back ups, don't you?

Independent software companies produce excellent repair utilities (Symantec's Norton Utilities, for one) but writers are usually strapped for cash, and few can afford such luxuries. Just learning to use the tools that came with your particular operating system will save you a lot of anguish. For detailed information use the Windows on-line help, or for DOS 6, or later, key in HELP and press [Enter]. MS-DOS HELP lists over 130 commands and functions, but most are for advanced programmers' use. It is worthwhile perusing the on-line HELP, and using its PRINT option to make hard copies of the most-needed topics. Do this when you have some time to spare, rather than when you need to. Windows users should look up the information for getting help with DOS commands in the Windows on-line HELP.

The MS-DOS Mode of Windows 95 does not provide access by keying in HELP [Enter]. However, if you know the specific command name you require, and key it in, followed by /? [Enter] you will get a display of the essential (abbreviated) instructions. Do not despair, in their insolent wisdom, the creators of Windows 95 have tucked away the wherewithal for comprehensive on-line DOS HELP, but they have been very careful not to let you know where. On the Windows 95 CD-ROM there is a folder (or directory) named OTHER, which contains a subfolder named OLDMSDOS (D:\OTHER\OLDMSDOS). Among the files in OLDMSDOS you will find the following: HELP.COM, HELP.HLP, QBASIC.EXE and QBASIC.HLP. Now, on your C drive you will find a subfolder in the WINDOWS folder named COMMAND (C:\WINDOWS\COMMAND). If you copy these four files from OLDMSDOS into the COMMAND folder of Windows, you will be able to use the HELP command in DOS Mode by typing HELP [Enter]. The QBASIC.EXE file is essential to run HELP.COM and HELP.HLP because they are written in QBASIC -- that is so you can use them without Windows, right?

If you have the floppy disk version of Windows 95, you will have to hunt down -- beg, borrow, or steal -- the required files from an old copy of MS-DOS 6, or 6.2X, then copy them

into C:\WINDOWS\COMMAND, because they are only on the CD version. Not all the commands listed in on-line MS-DOS HELP are available for use with the Windows 95 MS-DOS prompt because many are redundant in that version; however, the necessary commands to get you out of (and possibly deeper into) trouble, still function.

Anyone running Windows 95 (or a Macintosh) will be able to create really meaningful file names -- for the rest of us, the task is a little more challenging: we must plan our file names carefully.

Mastering alpha-numeric file names within the limit of eight characters plus the three character extension is an art form. Let's assume that you want to keep (archive) a file named ANYFILE1.DOC but need to do some minor editing, like denaturing the verbiage for a church magazine. If you are conscientious you will have at least two copies; namely, ANYFILE1.DOC and ANYFILE1.BAK. Merely changing the extension (.DOC to .XYZ) will not preserve both copies. The file with the .BAK extension will be overwritten by a new, edited .BAK version at your next routine save, leaving only one copy of the unedited original. One solution is to rename the file to 1ANYFILE.DOC. A subsequent save will also give you 1ANYFILE.BAK, leaving the original file and its back up unaltered. Of course you could simply use ANYFILE2.DOC etc, but changing the number is usually best reserved for progressive versions. The extensions, .DOC & .BAK are only examples, and will vary according to your preferred software.

While on the subject of files, let me impart another stress-reducing procedure: personal End Of File (EOF) tags. These can be added at the very end of a file and may include the page and last line numbers with the word count or date -- just remember to update them each time you are about to finish working with the file. The very last line of a document should contain something like: "Text ends, PgXX, LnXX, XXXXX words". As mentioned before, "I too have occasionally suffered the same...trauma...." These days I always place EOF tags in every file, to provide quick verification that the file is, 1) as named, and 2) all there. EOF tags are easily removed before the document is printed.

Before powering down it is prudent to quickly scan your file/s to verify that the save was successful. Scanning after the application is closed may be performed by reading it with a text editor (either a Windows or DOS version) or simply with the TYPE FILENAME.EXT|MORE command while in DOS mode. It is not advisable to edit word processor, or any application file, with a text

editor. Text editors are intended primarily for editing ASCII (text only) files, and may alter critical, hidden data required by the application. Text editors are safe when used only for reading.

In the preceding paragraph, the character before MORE is a | (pipe), not a colon. The pipe symbol does not always reproduce (print) exactly as it appears on-screen, but may usually be found on the same key as the \ (backslash). The MORE tells the system to pause (stop scrolling) after each screen and wait for a keypress before displaying more.

A well-planned system of directories or folders is also essential. If you have taken the trouble to wade through any treatise on managing computer files, you may already understand that it is not a good idea to save files to the root (main) directory of your hard disk. It is also computercidal to allow data or text files to mingle with your application files. Unless you create, and use, at least one subdirectory/subfolder in each of your application directories/folders, your software may poke data or text files in among the application's running gear.

The root directory on a hard disk should only contain the bare essentials, like CONFIGURATION, BATCH, SYSTEM and .INI files etc. plus the subdirectories containing your various applications. To take this a step further; an application's subdirectory should also only contain files necessary for the running of that application, with all working data and text files stored in their own subdirectories. After your first serious system crash, and the subsequent need to winkle out your data and text files from among the application files, the importance of using appropriately named subdirectories or subfolders will be obvious. Spare a thought for the poor little Central Processing Unit (CPU) which has to locate and sift through the data several million times a second, and you will begin to understand why computers occasionally come to a halt. Think of it as counting every comma in 'War and Peace' in less than a blink.

You should also know how to copy or move files between directories or disks using DOS commands. Sure, it is simpler using Windows, but there will come a time when it is not possible, or too complicated, to start Windows. Most people never bother to learn DOS because of the complicated file path system; that is why Windows is so popular -- until something goes wrong.

Let's assume that your word processor resides in a directory/folder on drive C called WPROCES, with your working files stored in a subdirectory/folder called WPDOCS. To copy an old version of ANYFILE1.DOC for editing from floppy drive A to the subdirectory/folder of

WPROCES called WPDOCS while on your hard drive C:\, you will have to key in:

```
COPY A:\ANYFILE1.DOC  
C:\WPROCES\WPDOCS [Enter].
```

No problem if you have the time, an eidetic memory, and only need to copy a single file. However, to move both ANYFILE1.DOC, and ANYFILE1.BAK, the key work may be reduced if you first switch to the destination subdirectory/folder on C:\ with: CD \WPROCES\WPDOCS [Enter]. Now switch to Drive A by keying in A: [Enter], then key in COPY ANYFILE1.* C: and press [Enter]. This command tells the computer to copy all files beginning with ANYFILE1 to drive C: regardless of whether its extension is .DOC, .BAK, or .XYZ. The * is called a wild card, and is used to represent non-specific file names, or extensions. Because you were already in the WPDOCS subdirectory/folder of WPROCES on drive C:\ the files will copy directly from A: across to the correct destination directory/folder on drive C. Change back to C drive (using C: [Enter]), and by keying in DIR[MORE [Enter]] you will be able to read the contents of C:\WPROCES\WPDOCS, one screen at a time, by pressing any key. Both ANYFILE1.DOC and its .BAK will now be in the WPDOCS subdirectory/folder on drive C -- trust me.

Many operations will require changing to, or from, a directory or sub-directory. For this you must use the command CD (CD = Change Directory), followed by a directory name like CD WINDOWS [Enter], or CD DESKTOP [Enter] et cetera.

If you lose track of where you are, keying in CD\ [Enter] will take you from any subdirectory on the current drive back to the root directory of that drive. The backslash (\), followed by no name, represents the root directory. The Big M still calls folders directories in DOSspeak.

Switching between drives only requires keying in the letter (drive name) followed by a colon, then pressing [Enter] -- for example, C: [Enter], or A: [Enter] -- try it.

If you need to repeat your last DOS command, you may save key strokes by pressing [F3] in DOS mode. The previous command will reappear, and may be executed by pressing [Enter].

Until version 6.2, DOS came with the not-so-graphical user interface, MS-DOS Shell, which fired up with the command DOSSHELL (what else?). There are far better file managers available, and because the shell screens appear too fussy for the casual user, it was always an application of last resort. DOS Shell screens vaguely resemble those of its up-market progeny, the earlier versions of Windows. Still, it is

FREE, so if a better file manipulator is not available, the rudiments of DOS Shell operation are worth learning in case you ever get stuck up DOS Creek without a paddle (mouse). Just remember that DOS Shell is only intended for use with files created with its particular version of DOS, and must NEVER be used with any files related to Windows 95.

Try this if you're worried about the Millennium Bug obliterating your operating system and all your valuable files, but don't blame me. On Friday, December 31 1999 type DATE [Enter] at the DOS command prompt then change the date to December 31 1971 (also a Friday) or if you prefer, December 31 2027 (Friday, too), then press [Enter]. This should enable your machine to make the change to the new (leap) year without falling into the black hole caused by the year 00 anomaly. February 29 is a Tuesday in 1972, 2000 and 2028. Sure, you will have put up with the wrong year on your file operations for the next 367 days, but the days and dates will be correct, and it will not cost anything. Okay, go ahead and reset the date with Windows if you prefer.

Here is something for any Macintoshers peeved at being denied the privilege of running a real computer: your troubles are about to begin. The Big M has recently bought into Apple, and as soon as it begins tinkering with your software, you too will discover that a few, much-lauded programs don't quite live up to their promises -- enjoy.

To those who would like an easy way to learn the rudiments of MS-DOS, I recommend IDG Books' DOS for Dummies Quick Reference, 2nd edition (ISBN 1-56884-988-5) by Greg Harvey. It contains more than you need to know for \$A19.95. For real masochists, the full version of DOS for Dummies, 2nd edition (ISBN 1-878058-75-4) costs a bit more.

If dithering between directories and folders fazes you, blame the Big M, which still mentions directories for DOS and folders for Windows 95. Meanwhile, I may never build a better mouse-trap, but I hope reinventing the wheel has been worthwhile.

- James Verran

**THE
R&R
DEPT**

LLOYD PENNEY, 1706-24 Eva Rd, Etobicoke, ON, CANADA M9C 2B2.

It's wanna time, and so I finally get to respond to issue 91 of THE MENTOR.

Another good story from Andrew Sullivan. Perhaps it's a cautionary tale, not to rely on mechanical devices too much when it comes to our lives. As I type this, Pathfinder is on the surface of Mars, and has yet to move about because of some of the landing airbags getting caught on the edge of the deployment petals. Just a mechanical accident, but one that could cost the entire mission and millions of dollars. Could a hibernation ship be trusted to wake its human crew in 90 years? Only with multiple fail-safes, and even then, you don't know for sure....

I grew up with the Cold War in my face, and pessimism for our species' future, but suddenly, even when the Two Big Idiots (US and USSR) were squaring off, the gas ran out of the big Soviet machine, and it died with a squeak. Winnah and champeen, the YOO-Nited States! Post-Cold War times have been more confident, but still, America needs to leave behind its warlike face, and look kind. If America is the world's financial engine, it has to employ that money towards more positive goals. Media mogul Ted Turner has started campaigning to change the American national anthem from "The Star-Spangled Banner" to "America the Beautiful", citing the former as a war song. I guess it's a start....

Brent Lillie's DOWNTIME is a quick, fun read, but even if sin had never been introduced, clothing would have been invented for warmth. Still, to be the only lecher on the face of the earth... well, I know that might stand out in a few minds.

Dear Mae Strelkov reveals in this part of her column that she was 21 in 1938. This means that she is in her 80th year now? Peace, health and long life to you, Mae, and please keep writing. Where is your distant Mennonite son in Canada? There are large Mennonite communities in southern Ontario province, around the cities of Kitchener and Waterloo, and the town of St. Jacobs.

Many thanks for the picture on the bcover, Ron... it's great to finally put a face to the names, especially yours. We're all suffering from a surfeit of geography. (5.7.97)

JOHN TIPPER, PO Box 487, Strathfield, NSW 2135.

I can't remember the contents but have #92 by my side and comfortably nominate it as the best issue since you last ran regular fanfic. A regular dose of nostalgia is TM with all the familiar names to be found within. Brent Lillie's SPLIT was excellent. A good story for *The Outer Limits*, perhaps. Richard Reeves' H G WELLS THROUGH OTHERS' EYES was of great interest. The only Wells story I've read is

THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, and that was a long, long time ago. I think it was set as a school text back in the early 1960s, back when I read little but sf. My English teacher regarded its inclusion in the syllabus as rather extraordinary. Andrew's VISIONS OF VENUS is up to his always high standard. Ben Peek's SEEING BLACK AND WHITE has to be the first truly original storyline I've read in decades although someone will probably prove me wrong.

James Verran's computing adventures remind me of the first video game I purchased. I don't recall the brand name but it cost close to \$100 for a kit of parts, the end result being a large plastic box connected to the TV which wonder of wonders let you control a ball and a pair of bats on the screen. Fantastic - in theory. After many hours of soldering and frustration I couldn't get it to work. A friend who did TV repair work looked at the circuit board, shook his head and made some remark about dry joints. He fetched his soldering iron, zapped over all the connections and had it working in minutes. That was my first and last attempt at electronics - and "hand-held" computer games. As for computers, I'm still using my decade-old Amstrad 6128 but have recently acquired a Mac SE. Penrith City Library (west of Sydney) sold off their Macs, having switched to PCs. I picked up a Mac SE with a 40 meg HD and twin floppy drives and a Mac flatbed scanner for \$250. It came loaded with Word 5.1 and I've acquired a Mac to DOS converter program and frankly, it is all I need. Well, apart from a printer. I'm quite happy to download all of my articles for our web pages onto disc and never see the end result until it's been up and running for a month or more.

THE R&R DEPT: Despite a couple of trips through the locs I was unable to come up with any points worth responding to. Maybe all the local stirrers have gone into hibernation until Sprint?

(23.7.97)

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

... there have been a fair few changes in my life lately. Back when I was at Uni, I had a dream to open a hobby shop in the same vein as "The Tin Soldier" in Town, however, the funds were hard to get together because at that age, it's hard to get anyone to take you seriously.

After working as a Landscape Architect for about 5 years, and being less than satisfied with circumstances, I put together a business plan, got some funding and have just recently launched a new business in Dee Why. The shop's called "Spectre Bark Games", a phrase Samuel Coleridge uses to describe the noise of the Ghost Ship in RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER. I'm stocking board games & puzzles, role-playing games, tradeable card games,

table-top war gaming accessories as well as software, books and magazines.

As for TM 92, the cover lost me, but I loved SPLIT by Brent Lillie. It read well and flowed quite smoothly, and for a very short story was quite gripping. He obviously had a lot of fun writing it. It's good to see S-Fi back in your pages.

The H. G. Wells article was an excellent summary of a great writer's life. James Verran's article, while trying in a way to ridicule "Cyber-scribe" became a little too technical itself. THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF SCIENCE found a better balance between humour and technology. (27.8.97)

DARREN GOOSSENS, 210 Melbourne Rd, Ballarat, VIC 3350.

I have a few things to say regarding #91 - IN INFINITE NIGHT AND MEMORY managed to be edgy and claustrophobic, which made it on the whole I thought a success.

CHILDREN OF THE ATOM perhaps suffered a little from being concerned with such well-known subject matter. On the other hand, it's an excellent collection of some of the pithiest remarks on the subject. Dylan and Ginsberg in particular get to the heart of it the way poets can. The mix of quotes, sci-fi, SF, history and comments is excellent. As usual, my only gripe is that his article isn't longer.

I liked Mae's article, and THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE. His evocation of the conversation was wonderful. I could just imagine Peter Sellers playing one of the roles.

And Brad Row's dissection of feudalism was fine. He conveys information and keeps you reading at the same time. I was not aware of the influence of the Romans on the creation of the serf-like peasant - I suppose I associate slaves with Rome and serfs with the medieval times. I look forward to the next one. (23.7.97)

CATHERINE MINTZ, 1810 South Rittenhouse Square, 1708, Philadelphia, PA 19103-5837, USA.

Issue 92 of THE MENTOR has an interesting comic strip cover, almost a poem with illustrations.

This time around Richard Reeve's H. G. WELLS THROUGH OTHER EYES captured my attention first. Well, like many of the rest of us, may not have had a good idea of what sort of impression he made on the world. Probably at one level of his personality he did not care, although he was never slow to exploit the advantages of fame and went on being a public presence decades after his most famous writing was published. It was interesting to see what some of his contemporaries had to say about him when they weren't being too polite.

I enjoyed Andrew Darlington's VISIONS OF VENUS, too. Venus is probably the fictional planet farthest from reality, it being apparent early on that Mars was likely to be a dry, cold place, even when the question of its having an atmosphere had not been solved. Still, it's hard to say good-bye to lush,

green Venus, with its seas and perpetual clouds. Just moving the idea to another star system will never be the same as the cozy idea of our two nearest neighbors being hospitable to life more advanced than bacteria.

I got a laugh - of self-recognition - from James Verran's UPSKILLING AND THE CYBER-SCRIBE. It's true, no sooner than you adjust to one operating system than another, with a completely different set of glitches and mannerisms, comes along. I can't say that I share his enthusiasm for notebooks: the keyboards are too small to be comfortable for long periods of work, and my own Powerbook has to keep attached to the power supply if you're going to do more than a half an hour's work at a time.

The days are starting to get noticeably shorter here, and we're losing the long, bright summer evenings when the real neighborhood, much of which is hidden during the business day, comes to life. It seems a long pull until the sun begins to return as we all become, once again, the topical animals that we really are under our layers of protective clothing. (29.8.97)

NED BROOKS, 713 Paul St, Newport News, VA 23605, USA.

You must be one of fandom's most prolific faneds! And the only one I know of to go on so long publishing such a large quantity of fanfic.

Interesting column by Verran. I started on an Osborne running CP/M, which seems to have been a bit less limited than his Commodore - it would run BASIC and WORDSTAR, so I didn't have to write a text editor. The recall function of the F3 key in DOS was carried to its logical conclusion by the tiny Norton utility NSE - once NSE was in the auto-exec.bat, you could recall and edit all previous DOS commands since the machine was turned on. I really miss it when I exit to DOS from Windows95, as it won't run there. I have just ordered a new computer, and am told that this year's machines are the last that will offer an exit to DOS - alas. I like DOS, and never had any trouble with it. To get anything like the same usefulness out of Windows takes a much more powerful machine.

Got a kick out of Buck Coulson's description of the Western/Greek-myth stories of Lon Williams! I wonder how many there were in all? Perhaps they should be collected into a book.

Great column by Mae Strelkov! (28.8.97)

LLOYD PENNEY, 1706-24 Eva Rd, Eobicoke, ON CANADA M9C 2B2.

Brent Lillie's SPLIT is an interesting story, but it isn't quite complete, IMHO. There seem to be two realities at work here. If Todd slipped from one reality to another, which suddenly includes his grandmother, has Todd somehow died, and joined his grandmother in this alternate reality? Are they ghosts? This is faintly implied, but perhaps not enough to give all your readers the idea.

James Verran is guilty of what too many fannish technerds do... they give too much attention to what they write on, and not enough attention to what they write. I wouldn't care if he wrote on a Pentium II or a VIC 20, I'd care much more about what he's creating. This kind of conversation in a con suite, for instance, kills the fun for many of us. Computers are great, but the obsessive types, who talk about nothing but, drive me away. At work, I am surrounded by egotistical stockbrokers who play with their Pentiums with Windows NT and Internet connections, and my boss won't even let me have a phone! (I am a data entry clerk, the bottom of the ladder, and treated like garbage by all and sundry.)

As does Pavel Viaznikov, I have fond memories of Den Haag, Badurodam, Delft and Amsterdam. Yvonne and I attended the Dutch Worldcon in 1990, and had a great time. It was the first time in Europe in 25 years for me. None of those memories are sex-related, although we took the grand canal tour, and saw plenty of two *ahem* tourists in a row-boat. On my way back, I had a small sheaf of five-guilder notes I tried to exchange, and I couldn't. The notes were being replaced with five-guilder coins, and the notes were slowly being taken out of circulation. I guess I was recognized as a foreigner, and when I paid for something there, the Dutch shopkeeper decided to give me five-guilder notes in my change, figuring that they needed to get rid of them... I guess I was convenient, and now, I have seven five-guilder notes in my banknote collection, whether I like it or not.

Hello, Mae! I hope your birthday celebration was a pleasant one. Where does your son live in Canada?

Locally... you've probably heard some word of it by now, but we've got a Toronto Worldcon bid on the go for 2003. We seem to have a good chance to get it, with our competition being a group of Texas fans who'd like to stage the 2003 Worldcon in Cancun, Mexico. There's the novelty factor working for both bids right now. Also, Yvonne and I will be FanGoHs at the annual convention in Montreal at the of next month, we've both been nominated for Aurora Awards, and we'll find out who wins then the end of October, and in December, I'll be a character in Robert J. Sawyer's new book *ILLEGAL ALIEN*. Not a bad autumn and winter coming up for us.

(30.8.97)

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

[I] found Richard Reeves' article on H. G. Wells the most agreeable. I never really thought of Wells as the "Cosmic doctor" as T. E. Lawrence did- I'd have left that definition for a certain fictional time lord. I don't know whether or not I'd see him as the definitive Englishman as Murry did. I guess I've always considered Conan Doyle for that role. George Orwell's musings on Wells are the most interesting and accurate. Both Wells and Orwell had their

problems from time to time with polite society. Both Wells and Orwell were giants.

THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE by Pavel had its moments. I can imagine a woven mitten for genitals being a big hit in Russia in winter. It would keep the brass monkeys away. It is a very good thing that sex involving children will be banned in the Netherlands. Its banned just about everywhere else.

The cover artwork and story to THE MENTOR 92 was very reminiscent of one of the Hitchhiker Guide novels. You know, the one where the dolphins try to warn humanity of impending doom but just can't get their message across. Their last communication: "Farewell and thanks for all the fish".

Goossens' THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF SCIENCE had some fun moments this issue such as the A bomb, the genetic revolution, and Einstein's relatively strange hair. Goossens could have mentioned Nanotechnology - the little machines apt to take over the world. He could also have mentioned Greenie science - technology aimed at saving the planet from technology. Ah, well, space was limited.

To answer Buck Coulson's question, yes, there is a reason why many Australian women appear to be snobs. They have enormous difficulty with this simple, straightforward sentence: "No, thank you". When a guy they don't want to go out with asks them they inevitable, invariably say anything and everything but "No, thank you". In fact I'm sure there are some out there who would rather axe murder the poor sod than even attempt said dread sentence. It has to be a mental block of some kind or perhaps it is conditioning performed on women only in my society that I'm not aware of and will not be aware of until I become a parent. Anyway, apart from this mental block thing they're quite normal, quite intelligent. I met a girl from England when I was holidaying in Bali about two decades ago. She was sweet and easy to talk to and could say the nicest "Yes, thank you". However, I never did find out how she fared with "No, thank you". But I do believe the "No, thank you" problem to be Australian. I could be wrong. (10.9.97)

STEVE JEFFERY, 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon OX5 2XA, UK.

Catherine Mintz mentions Julie Vaux's comments on phonetic spelling and her difficulty with Banks's FEERSUM ENDJINN, which I struggled, but eventually came to grips with. More difficult, on several levels, is Russell Hoban's RIDDLEY WALKER, where the fractured and degenerate language also mirrors both the plot and background to the novel. I note that Alan Moore's VOICE OF THE FIRE, a several thousand year shamanistic history of a small area around Northampton, also starts (though not as intense as Hoban) from a pre-literate and semi-phonetic language. Middle English is also bloody difficult to read, too. (Thank you, Julie, for the translation/transformation of LAMENT OF THE

MARAKIS. My history being what it is (minimal) can anyone care to supply notes on the various people named in Dunbar's poem? Oh, I see Andy Sawyer had obliged in R&R in the next issue, and I do tend to agree with him in the more measured "disturbeth" on the final lines, even if it does compromise Julie's transformation of the poems.)

A lovely typo creeps into Richard Reeve's H. G. WELLS THROUGH OTHER'S EYES (should that be "Others' Eyes?" - I digress) in a reference to "Jules Verne". That conjures some intriguing possibilities, and wonder of any of TM's poets might care to run with that idea.

Similarly, while I'm playing the grammatic pedant, there's another typo in Andy Darlington's CHILDREN OF THE ATOM in the threat and fear of "nuclear shriek" which is equally felicitous - conjuring Dan Simmons's razor-edge avatar of Empathy and Pain. In the context of the Shrike's ever-present threat of indiscriminate destruction without warning it becomes even more serendipitous.

How many non-UK readers might catch that allusion to "Doomwatch teams"? (Come to think of it, how many UK readers under the age of 30 would remember the eoc-SF DOOMWATCH TV series?)

And from Andy's article to the wonderful synchronicity in the next issue of Darren Goossens' "... was hypothesised that its testing might cause the Earth's entire crust to explode. Then they went and tested it."

This is science a la Molesworth (Nigel, not Vol), crossed with a large dose of 1066 AND ALL THAT, especially when Darren comes out with something like, "But it was good to have atoms, because people now had something to be made of", and probably deserves to be collected in a little book of its own.

I'm dubious about Brad Row's explanation of the word "homage" in CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT (TM 91). It sounds plausible, but John Alderson has already picked him up over Angles and Saxons (R&R, TM 92) and I've recently heard someone on the radio claim that homosexual means "love of men" from that same root "homme", completely ignoring the Greek root for words like "homonym" ("a man's name", are we to believe?) As I say, it's more plausible in Brad's definition, since it's more likely to be a Roman (even French Norman?) derivation. I haven't tried looking it up in Bryson's MOTHER TONGUE, which is a wonderful cornucopia of the shaping of the English language. Anyone know when it entered the language?

(7.9.97)

SHERYL BIRKHEAD, 23629 Woodfield Rd, Gaithersburg, MD 20883, USA.

A change of pace in the cover(s)....

SPLIT - for me needed closure - I felt left in limbo.

This ish seems to be quite a melange of topics. Mae Strelkov's looks at life could be a popular book - has anyone tried to market it?

Buck and Juanita made it through a wet spring and now we're heading into another winter - hope they fare as well!

Got my first Aussiecon PR was wondering (since I'd joined before LA and hadn't heard *anything*....) if the membership had gone through.

I was surprised that some of the letters in the lettercol didn't elicit more comments from you (I leave it to the imagination as to which letters I refer!)

I think the most intriguing aspect this is the cover(s) - very interesting experiment. (20.9.07)

MAE STRELKOV, 4501 Palma Sola, Jujuy, ARGENTINA

I'm sorry my impulsive style of chatting uninhibitedly offends someone, namely Michael. Michael, I sent you a missive quite recently, having gotten down to answering zines at last. (Recovered from being knocked out by a heavy cold). I told a lot re happenings here, like I write in MENTOR, because it was happening right there and then and I love to chat on any theme with friends near and far. I had no idea you were so sore at me - I do joke and in general ramble freely. As it's been said by Chris Masters, someone should take an awl and dig out the mess in my brain. I wasn't at all offended - I fear he judges quite fairly. My brain's a mess, but it's amusing to see things as I do. For me, anyway.

But, Michael, you say to Ron in MENTOR 92: "Quite frankly, I found your quote from her in your editorial in #89 most offensive, since I saw her as having another nasty implicit go at me (and maybe other faneds."

Michael! Did you honestly think I had you in mind when I dashed off that bit? I shall from now on cautiously worry, "What will Michael say to this or that, so perhaps I'd better not make jokes that might offend." And I worry already re what you'll make of the long letter I sent you.

Okay, I do hate Satan but not Satanists. You accuse me of "persecuting others who have done them no wrong". I did make awful fun of Satanists like poor Chris some time ago - years ago, already. And the somewhat "satanic" (?) art I jeered at too. I don't take it back. I'd jeer now, if I had such material offered for commentary. I did tell Chris as I recall, not to cast his pearls before swineherds like ourselves. (So beware of us swineherds still).

I'd already resolved to tone down my effusions, now I'm fully 80 since July. Gotta "prepare to meet my God!" Arrive there with a scrap of dignity, leave my nonsense buried with my home hopefully. So let me try to enter my new saintly stage, quietly. Our would-be jailers here are deeply grateful we didn't go on the war-path in revenge last year, but went on being friendly. Such infants they were - so unsophisticated. Kicking children? Not we. So we help them pick up anew their dignity, though folks seem puzzled that our indignation lasted so briefly and again we're glad of renewed friendliness all around. (At fiestas, principally. We're still not bosom friends). I see you pubbed, Ron, the part about poor

Mudwall; he's dead a good while by now. We recall him affectionately, and as for Blase, we're still buddies when we meet by chance anywhere. We like being tolerant. The main guy in the attempt to put our men in prison on false charges now dances the Samba lovingly with Sylvia with wild applause at *gaucho* shows. Poor dear, he is usually too drunk to keep his balance, but sometimes he manages it.

Am I really nasty? Yes, years ago, I was chock-full of sweetness and light. But old age does perfect and hone one's nasty streaks and cynical reactions at long last.

..... I'm at ease when writing to your MENTOR, Ron - though recognising the forbearance shown by some of your loccers who might love to lambast me, bless-em - I trust the good will of your general readership. Entertaining, even clowning for them, has been my pleasure so far. If each of them lived "around the corner" instead of so far away, what fun we'd all have having coffee together and arguing.

Being a true believer in the goodness (of our Creator, of our universe, of people if you're patient enough for long enough), and believing that things get sorted out by the "born-again" system (=Karma) I don't fret but rather think, "All these nice friends abroad I'll be meeting in time ahead when our mortal flesh fails me and the spirit shines bright", so I think of those I've been in touch with - those who approve and those who disapprove - as "friends beyond" (friends I'll love to meet "on the other shore", eventually).

Maybe I gush less lately, maybe I poke fun at things, including myself, more, but I *do* care. I do care about Michael of Matala... old friend that he used to be, not touchy at all. Why now? Just because I disillusion anyone who ever thought me nice? It always happens. My real self isn't nice at all. But enough breast-beating and *Mea Culpas*.

Tony, wife and three little kids abandoned their Palma Sola place where they'd settled, to move right to the Hot Springs, where a new house is going up plus cabins for visitors. A better class begins to arrive (crowds of lovely people from afar and near - 600 in just one day of Winter holidays). They are dignified, eager to live up to our expectations. The hooligans of the opening day - peeing all over the walls and ceilings uninhibitedly and shitting in a bathtub in a small room reserved for old people to take a hot water bath) no longer make trouble. If and when they come, they try to behave to please Tony and all the other visitors. The news has gotten around: "The Hot Springs of Vinalito are safe to take our children to, and your old folks". Everybody is watched carefully and individually. Tony thinks as I do - everybody is bound for "Glory" eventually, where we'll all gather to rejoice before our Creator when we reach the end of our endless-seeming struggles and lessons learned. So Tony makes people feel he cares because he really does. Vadim too is that way more and more. Also Sylvia. As they

turn nice and nicer they watch worriedly as I turn nastier and nastier in contrast.

Having bent over backwards to be "terribly nice" for 80 YEARS? It's a gorgeous release to be downright nasty. Bad influence of our hogs, at the foot of our big garden, in their pens. Me, primary Pig. Nasty labels welcomed. I shall wallow happily.

Well, maybe I wasn't very terribly nice. Don Wollheim (who pubbed DAW books) once referred to my style as full of "spit, sugar and vinegar".

Say, John Alderson, very old friend that you've been. I've teased you in MENTOR's pages. You never snarled back. Too fine a Scot? Well, you are a great person, no joke there. We love you, here, and recall our friendship back before our Danny died. (He drew the cartoons for your CHAO.)

In Ben Peek's story, the aliens say: "We live off white blood cells". That spooks me. The Calgary interest in our "mysterious gene" is related to our white blood cells - they're "abnormally fat", as I understand it. Now, I *don't* suddenly think: "They want our blood regularly, for the white blood cells, *to eat!*" Coincidences do occur, quite meaningless. Yet, somehow, I'm suddenly uncomfortably conscious of my "abnormally fat white blood cells"! What a laugh! It was a scary story; impressed me a lot! Also, the matter of color. Uh! I *do* love color (my former hectographs, sent around fandom in the 1970s, retouched with bright crayons, prove it!)

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

The map of Argentina shows the province of Jujuy stuck away in the northwest corner, and the province looks like a wrinkled boot. Its toe is packed with hot springs, dozens of them (often too hard to reach in the hills). But it's said that the Hot Springs Tony now manages, helped by his wife and her hard-working clan is unique curatively. The map is not very precise, but you can see Villamonte (where we live) and further north, down valley, Palma Sola. Still further north where it says "Aguas Calientes" are also "Termas de Vinalito"; that's where Tony and family live now. And so much has it captured Tony especially, on the rare occasions he drops down on a visit, he feels the place pulling him back - tugging at him in a strange symbiotic way.

(21/9/97)

PAULINE SCARF, Sydney, NSW.

Brent Lillie's cover certainly made an interesting change. Although I'm not a comic buff I

thought the idea of a cover featuring a story to be entertaining.

Good to see the fiction re-introduced Ron. Also enjoyed H. G. WELLS and VISIONS OF VENUS.

The artwork in this issue really appealed to me particularly the Tonia Walden on page 9, and Peggy Ranson on pages 18 and 21 and I must say I've always appreciated work by the latter artist.

I always enjoy the overseas article especially Mae Strelkov's contribution, and also Pavel. One wonders what part of the world he'll visit next, and it is particularly fascinating to note his comments and experiences when you have also visited the same country and even those I would one day like to visit but haven't got around to.

I would also like to add that in 1976 I visited Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), and found it a fascinating experience, enjoying the art, museums and palaces. (1/10/97)

BRENT LILLIE, 10 Cherub St Tugun, Gold Coast QLD.

Seems there are some momentous events that will be etched in the memories of the current generation. After all my waffling on in my previous LOC about history not dwelling on an individual long enough for their death to make any real difference, events proved me wrong and in a way I'm glad they did. The funeral was genuinely moving. During the three minutes silence, with the breeze gently moving the trees, I looked outside and noticed that there was barely a car travelling along the Gold Coast Highway. I tell you, that's an achievement in itself! After a suitable period of mourning, the Diana jokes. The Denver jokes. I have heard them, and, God forgive me, I have told them. Some call it a panacea, but I doubt it, because they don't make me feel any better. The only laughs they get are to cover the embarrassment.

I thoroughly enjoyed Ben Peek's SEEING BLACK AND WHITE. One of the best pieces of fiction I've read in TM, it kept me involved from start to finish. The fallibility of the protagonist and effective ending made for a truly entertaining story, easily of professional standard.

Also liked the HG Wells piece and THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE. Goosen's latest was entertaining but I didn't think it was up to the standard of his previous offerings.

We've reformed a band I toured with in the early eighties and I tend to be channelling more energy into the musical side than the literary, lately. Playing music comes quite easily and I enjoy the rehearsal and the performances, but writing can be a real bastard, sometimes. It's what I do best out of the two, though, so after finishing this LOC I plan to herd up all those ideas stampeding around in my head and write you a story. It's good to sit down in front of the old PC and let it all pour out. Now, that's a panacea!

Saw Men in Black. Good fun, but I thought Mars Attacks! was much better. Contact is next on my list. My kids are downstairs on the other PC playing X-Wing vs Tie Fighter. I realise many females enjoy SF, as evidenced by the number of contributors to the letters column, but it can't be denied, on sheer weight of numbers, that SF is something of a boy's club. When I saw MIB there were plenty of females in the audience but I sense that most of the females, and most of the males, were there to see Will Smith.

Just what is SF these days? Big budget movies, toys and mass marketing? There are some great books around: does all the hype encourage people to read SF, to delve a little deeper, or does it have an opposite effect?

Do any other readers believe, as I do, that nowadays it's all a bit Hollywood - enjoyable, but ultimately unsatisfying? The editors at Aurealis rejected my latest contribution on the grounds that it seemed contrived. Maybe I'd better cut back on the movies. (27.10.97)