

"SAY SOMETHING BRILLIANT, SOCRATES." - Plato

A M B L E

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Perpetrated from the lur at 70 Worrall Road, Bristol 8, Great Britain, by ARCHIE MERCER for the 45th OMPA Mailing during the autumn of 1965. AMBLE is A MERCATORIAL PUBLICATION. Doubtless you all know by now what Yngvi is, but for the record he is a louse.

THE LAIR - recent additions.

PANGBORN, EDGAR

DAVY

A story of life in a post-catastrophe future that is notable for being at least as much fun to live in as is the present (not that that's saying much, but still). I found it so fascinating that the (deliberate) slight chronological disorder in the narrative failed to serve as more than a very minor irritant.

One thing I do miss is a companion-map of the territory involved. Some of the place-names used - Katskil, Nuin, Conicut - are of obvious derivation. Others - Bershar, Levannon, Nuber the Holy City - are (to me) not so. Besides, the coast-line is obviously considerably altered from that of the present day. I'd say that the lack of such a map is the book's only sizable defect.

JUSTER, NORTON

THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH

The tollbooth of the title is nothing but a gimmick for getting the protagonist - a small boy - into a sort of Alice-in-Wonderland-type setup. The continuity is straightforward rather than (as in the "Alice" books) rambling as in a dream, but the fantastic conversations that take place are high reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's. This is a juvenile of course (a Puffin, actually) but (as do so many of such) deserving of a far wider circulation.

THE SHAMBLES

OFF TRAILS 44 (Brian Jordan on
CONSTITUTION our collective behalf)

A usefully informative issue this, even if much of the stuff on which information is given is of such a nature that one tends

to wish that no information had been necessary. In the event it is, and this treatment at some length is, I think, a Good Thing. Good work, Brian. And I accept your assurance, incidentally, that a full third of the waiting list does live in boxes numbered "305" in various parts of the United States. Even though you had to show me their letterheads to prove it.

LEFNUI 6 (Fred Patten)

I'd better let Sister Lindsay deal with her own Ethymology I guess. \neq PaDS is indeed a sort of apa for BSFA members only. I am one half of a two-headed team which is in process of taking PaDS over, incidentally - although I am not myself a member of PaDS and don't intend to be. It isn't many apas where this sort of thing can happen, I believe?

RINGWRAITH 2 (Len Bailes)

I'm entirely in agreement with Ethel over the listing of the first issue of this, Len - from a bibliographical standpoint, the title (?) on the cover was highly misleading. This 'n's better. \neq I like your mailing comments, what there is of them. Your (or Al's) musical catalogue remains beyond my line of sight though.

MEIN OMP-F 5 (Colin Freeman) I think I can see why you decided to scrap SCRIBBLE in favour of MEIN OMP-F, Colin - and I think I agree with you. SCRIBBLE had an "image" that, although worthwhile of itself, was somewhat restrictive. In what is frankly an apazine your scope is far greater. And you make good use of this. (On the other hand, this is what you get instead of personal letters of comment.) ≠ Your hospital-and-landlady reminiscences are hilarious. ≠ I suspect that MachiaVarley's piece is not as exaggerated as one might suppose. ≠ Philosophy, now. You find Occam's Razor to indicate the presence of a Creator. I find the same device to indicate his or its absence. For one thing, given a Creator, one is still left with the problem of finding ^{one for} ~~him~~ or it. (Sorry; I should to be comprehensive have included the feminine pronoun as another alternative.) I find it a lot easier to suppose that everything "just happened". I start by postulating that things exist. (They have to by definition - a thing has to exist because it's the only thing there is for it to do.) What these things are is immaterial - call them the basic substance of the universe. They exist, then. There is an infinity of them. In an infinity all is possible - so sooner or later one moves. This sets up a local disturbance, ripples spread, and things get more and more complex until entities such as Wolf 359 and Colin Freeman are spawned. If there's anything in this entropy racket, sooner or later things will stop moving again. But given things, sooner or later they have to move, and everything else stems from that. ≠ Further to this, I like to think that I have free will - or as much of same as may pertain to one amongst umptillions - but I sometimes tend to wonder.

KOBOLD 10 (Brian Jordan) If the price could be increased a bit, I might think of buying that ~~wedding-dress~~ you offer on the front page - it would make a useful basket for the dog, if I had a dog. Seriously, isn't it just a little bit ridiculous that what is generally considered to be the pinnacle of the dressmaker's art, upon which is lavished the maximum of talent, skill and care, is intended to be worn only once? ≠ I wouldn't know anything about antiques myself, for export or otherwise, but Theo Trunkard says thanks for the tip. (Alliterating well today, aren't I.) ≠ Certainly, to spread the burden of office-holding a bit wider is the only legitimate reason I can think of for attempting to limit overseas OMParticipation. ≠ I think I'm right in saying that out-of-town MPs do have an allowance of so many free journeys per year between their constituency and London. However, I agree that the matter of legitimate expenses could still stand a lot of improvement. I'm somewhat tickled by your picture of an MP "doing MP-like things". By the expression itself, rather. ≠ One possible beneficial result of a near-equality between the parties in Parliament is that there may well be less pressure to make a party issue of something that is generally agreed to be in the public interest. I have no concrete examples to give - I don't watch these matters very closely, nor have I since "The Times" stopped being read by me (it became almost impossible to have it regularly from the newsagent even though on regular order and I quit in disgust) - but it seems very likely to my mind. ≠ When I worked at the Malleable, I used to plug Roncos but nobody took a blamed bit of notice. So now I no longer work where Ronco holds sway, I have bought a Gestetner for convenience of interchangeability of various people's stencils - only to find Roncos suddenly springing up mushroom-like all around me. One can't win, 'twould seem. I'm certainly not interested in multi-colour work, on any make. ≠ I first cut the KOBOLD review with the ribbon on ribbon, hence the above mess.

LUDICROUS PORTRAITS 2 (Don Studebaker) Well, you ask specifically for comments on "Lust and Ludmilla", so I'll try. The story had a few commendable angles, including my favourite - the one about the Irish having to import the English in lieu of their banished ophidiinity. The whole was - is - vaguely and not unpleasantly readable. I don't find it to add up to a really satisfying whole though, however many loose ends may or may not have been tied up. Probably far too much was going on at once for such a comparatively short story. "Amateurish" seems to be the adjective juste. (Sorry, mate. You shouldn't have asked...)

ERG 23 (Terry Jeeves) Personally, I think that the British aviation industry (the same probably applies to that of most countries) is in a ridiculous situation. It's a privately-owned (except for the state airlines) field that can only continue to exist on anything like its present scale with overt or covert support ^(financial) from the government. This is forthcoming largely on the grounds that in time of war it's a military asset. I remember Joy's "This Scoptred Isle" (Part I and only) - in fact I disinterred it during the binding operations a few weeks back. Pity it wasn't completed. The number of fanzine projects that never get past the first issue has to be experienced to be believed.

HAGGIS vol 2 No. 4 (Ian Peters) I notice you don't stop to wonder whether or not I might take umbrage at having Beryl compared to a female me ! For the record, I am highly tickled at the comparison though. I have seen it reported that the late Francis T. Laney (one-time Los Angeles fan, author of "Ah, Sweet Idiocy") had himself (as one might say) penally disconnected with the claimed result that his capacity for sexual enjoyment was noticeably increased. I forget where I saw this. Francis Gerard's "The Justice of Sanders" (after Edgar Wallace) was pb'd by Arrow Books some years ago. Julian Pine was a sort of pre-war Oliver Anderson. I've long been trying to get hold of his "Rotten Borough" (which I found in the City of Westminster public libraries, of all places) - his other title that I know of is "Guilt-Edged". The latter's good, the first as I remember it was brilliant. Whether you're discussing animal-"lovers", demonology or the British Way of Existence, I find myself "hear-hear-ing" all along the line. HAGGIS is now one of my regular OMPA favourites.

SCHNÖRKELSTIL 2 (Dian Pelz) You utilise a beautiful command of the English language to discourse interestingly on sculpture. Inasmuch as one could hardly use sculpture to discourse interestingly on the English language, I remain satisfied that the English language is by far the more versatile medium of the two. It's all right for you, though - you're at home in both media.

SAVOYARD 12 (Bruce Pelz) Suffers from too little Bruce but could well be very much worse.

OZ 2 (Beryl, the kind of female Archie) (The kind of female Archie what ?) (You heard.) I Well, there are differences. I wouldn't use Ron McGuinness's artwork in AMBLE if he paid me, for a start. Or even if he didn't... I Mr. Gaudeamus Higginbottom is based on

the Mercatorial subconscious - I've certainly never encountered anyone remotely like him that I can recall. ≠ My reluctance to describe my characters physically is partly pure laziness - if I were to do so, then I'd have to keep track of what each looked like for future reference. To be honest, I have no very clear mental picture of most of them. I'm not really all that interested. Which is, I think, valid too. ≠ The late Charlie Parker, alto (I think) saxophonist and drug-addict, was nicknamed (I don't know why and I'm not sure that anybody else does) "Yardbird". This was and is commonly abbreviated by the simple process of dropping the first three feet. Now he is generally recognised as one of the all-time "greats" of the modern jazz world - in fact, many would claim that no greater jazzman has ever walked the earth. When he died of (to the best of my recollection) an overdose of attempted suicide, his numerous fans took it very hard and went around muttering "Bird lives!" in a futile attempt to convince themselves that it was all a ghastly mistake or something. What's more, they still do - or did last I heard. ≠ I know that the children couldn't eat viruses, certainly. Daniel nor Dorcas had such a comprehensive education. In fact, I have it on good authority that Dorcas thought that viruses were necessary to anaemic girls... ≠ Nina McDonagh puns like a true Irishwoman. ≠ as for the naked artichoke:

TUNE: "Wait for the Wagon"

The good ship Belinda
 Ran merrily aground
 On some lonely island
 Where cannibals abound.
 They first boiled the bosun,
 And then they braised the skipper;
 When they grilled the carpenter
 He wasn't half so chipper.
 So each tar encountered
 A not much different fate.
 They soft-poached the purser
 And deep-fried the mate.
 At last when the natives
 Were nearly out of salt,
 The Queen told her husband:
 "You must call a halt:
 (Chorus)
 Don' stew de baker,
 Don' stew de baker,
 Don' stew de baker, he makes
 Such lovely bread.
 The Queen saved the baker
 Because she loved his dough,
 And down to the bake-house
 She oft-times did go.
 He practised upon her
 His culinary art,
 And thus through her stomach
 He won to her heart.
 Now at the commencement
 Of every island feast,
 The King and his subjects
 Would bow to the yeast,

(It's OK - with Caractacus
 to back me up, I can afford
 to waste a bit of space now
 and again.)

And when of a surfeit
 His Majesty dropped dead,
 The Queen told the baker:
 "I'll take you instead."
 (Chorus)
 From that time the baker
 Would loaf the hours away;
 He'd sleep through the morning,
 And rest through the day.
 He'd talk with his subjects
 By evening's gentle light
 And take private counsel with
 The Queen through the night.
 In due time a baker's
 Dozen kids he had.
 He taught all his offspring
 To bake like their dad.
 He says: "On this island,
 "If you would keep ahead,
 "Make sure your descendants
 "Are all properly bred."
 (Chorus)

(If that's the sort of thing I come up with the day I fail a driving test, perhaps I ought to fail driving tests more often.)

FENRIS 8 & 9 (Dave Hulan) Those of you who have read the fanzine CON 2 should recognise at once the story to which this cover might almost be an illustration... I notice that although the woman's hair-do is designed with a view to the psychological diminution of the height-differential, she nevertheless wears flat heels. And incidentally, that's a beautiful shade of green paper. Verdure at its richest in fact. Tried any rural landscapes on it? - they might be extremely effective. ≠ I understand that in this country, hovercraft are legally aircraft. Not that this is necessarily the most logical disposition of such vehicles, mind, as you so rightly suggest. ≠ For all the sense that your term "casting out nines" has for me, you might just as well have said "empowering the ineffable" or something.

THE SCARR 8 (George Charters) I suppose the last-quoted poem, your No. 13, is the one that appeals to me most - mainly because it's the only one that appeals to me in the slightest. (I'd still prefer the same thing in frank prose though.) No. 6 might refer to a (so I'm told) one-time notorious London pub, and come to think of it No. 5 almost seems to make sense. I'd hate to try awarding a "worst" title amongst the remainder though. ≠ I see that you too have begun to discover the multitudinous differences between "a cow" and "a hen". Sample: the hen, being a bird, is ornithological, whilst the cow is horny though not logical. Or: the hen is accustomed to roosting in out-houses, the cow to rue stinging-flies. (There are dozens.)

ATFERCLIFFE vol 1 No. 1 (~~Dick/Sch~~ Brian Jeeves and Terry Jordan) Let's do a trade. I (I being, of course, the Arch-Duchy of Mercia - and I do live in Mercia, just)

will grant to you the Royal Borough of Scunthorpe, together with its environs and appurtenances and all who dwell therein (including Phil Rogers, who's only a deported Yorkshireman anyway) in exchange for your small and insignificant county of Hallamshire. OK ?

VIPER 9 (Bill Donaho) I find myself in the somewhat illogical position whereby, being President of this illustrious apa, I don't know for sure precisely how much of this particular issue the generality of the membership has "officially" - or otherwise - seen. I will therefore content myself by remarking non-committally that I found it by no means the least interesting zine associated with the Mailing. Much correspondence is still flying concerning this and allied matters, however.

And here we go again:

When each junior baker
Produced confections strange,
The islanders' diet
Underwent quite a change.
They stopped eating people
With scarcely any tears;
They've ate no'er a person
In the past twenty years.
The flour of their manhood
Will never be the same;
They grow wheat and barley
And no more hunt for game,
For since peace and order
The islanders befall,
They know how to have their bread
And eat cake as well.

(Chorus)

(Incidentally, it does occur to me that a chorus more directly parodying the original might have been: "Don' stew de baker, We prefer baker fried". However, this would most certainly not have been in tune with the spirit of the narrative here provided. I suggest you try to forget it.)

AND THAT WAS "The Shambles". (What's that - you noticed? Good for you mate.)

AND NOW ONE comes (after quite an absence thereof herefrom) to a further instalment of the column in which anything can happen, but seldom if ever does:

OH DIDN'T HE RAMBLE

DEPT. OF APPLIED SERENDIPITY Having completed the running-off of TMOF, I set about investigating how best it might be bound. My own stapler, and those available to me at work, are equally incapable of fastening together satisfactorily upwards of 70 sheets of duplicating paper. Hearing rumour of a machine in fannish possession that might be capable of coping, I ventured to ask its owner if indeed 'twas so, and that being the case if he would be willing to loan it to me for a reasonable charge. He replied by demonstrating conclusively that the machine was entirely capable of performing what would be required of it. However, since he himself was wont to use it on numerous occasions he was unwilling to let it out of his possession; but if I cared to send him anything I wanted stapling with it he'd do the job himself.

Since this latter procedure would entail the shipment of some forty reams of paper across-country and back, it was unfortunately out of the question, and so I cast around for some alternative method. Discarding any notion of buying my own heavy-duty stapler (fred it - hadn't I just bought Caractacus himself?) I contemplated the punching of holes in the finished product and the insertion therein of metal "binders". How, then, to punch the holes? The punches at the office were soon established to be inadequate in a number of ways. What about drilling, then? I have a cheap hand-drill. So I bought some bits of wood at the DIY down the road and constructed a simple drilling-frame, after which I set to work. It was slow going - though by doing five or so per day I could have handled it all in good time. Then I managed to borrow an electric drill off somebody at work - and in next to no time the floor was a mass of sort of minced confetti - but the job was done. I securely taped the spines - and TMOF was ready to hit the waiting world.

Now here's where the serendipity comes in.

For a long time my fanzine-filing system had been getting more and more out of control. Filing a new batch was a nightmare, because one by one I had to pull down two or three dozen cardboard boxes and rake through their contents looking for previous issues of the same title, or previous titles from the same perpetrator. The boxes were organised on an elaborate geographical basis - but since fans don't stay geographically still, this tended at times to be self-defeating. I considered getting a filing-cabinet, as Ella and Ethel have done, but even that would not have taken anything like my entire collection.

So now the idea hit me: what was good enough for TMOF should be equally good enough for fanzines in general.

I thoroughly enjoyed myself going through box after box, sorting through pile after pile of fanzines, assembling runs into handy-sized volumes. Then I borrowed the electric drill again, and very soon the bulk of my collection took its place on open orange-box (painted dark green for safety) shelves, spines taped and labelled and all. Then I went through the (much-diminished) boxes pulling out thin one-shots, odd issues, never-continued first issues and so on - and they, taped and labelled with the best, took their places on the open shelves. I have very few fanzines left in boxes now - and they are mostly continuing runs that haven't yet reached a conveniently bindable place.

I'm really looking forward to filing this OMPA Mailing. And I haven't looked forward to filing any fanzines for longer than I care to remember.

MERCER THE INCREDIBLE Binding assorted fanzines isn't the only thing I've been doing lately, by any means. I've also been shrinking. Not in height - though I haven't checked that recently, come to think of it - but in weight.

Ever since the middle 1950s - if not before - my weight has been around the 15-stone mark - that's 210 lbs to you Americanoramuses. Usually above rather than below, at that.

Right now, as of today, my weight (normally-dressed, as was the 15-stone figure) is 12 stone 10½ lbs. (Or 178½ lbs if you prefer.) And I've set myself

a target of 12 stone by Worldcon-time - that is, 168 lbs deadweight for the London world sf convention this year. I'm pretty sure I'll be able to make it, too, in which case I'll have shed a full fifth of my former weight.

Now, of course, you'll all be agog to hear my secret. Well, it's perfectly simple. I haven't seen a doctor about it. I haven't consulted any dietary recipes anywhere. I haven't taken any pills or drugs of any description.

I've simply been eating less. Feel pretty fit on it, too.

My standard weekday food-intake is now as follows. Breakfast: two small thin slices of continental rye bread, with cheese (various) but no butter, and a cup of black coffee (N.37) including two teaspoonfuls of demerara sugar. Mid-day meal: a cold pasty or pork pie or something, or else a potatoless salad. (If the latter is at a cafeteria, also a cup of milked-and-sugared coffee.) Evening meal: a 1-lb-sized tin of meat'n'veg of which there are quite a variety available, or two ½-lb-sized tins (one meat and one veg) paired at random. And, apart from water or (sometimes) milk, that's all. It represents considerably less than half of my intake up to the Mercatorial decline - which, incidentally, only started this year. Oh, I don't always keep strictly within it of course. But it's what I normally live on now - and it's working.

Going down ... going down ... I'll be ~~21~~ 12 stone for the Worldcon yet !

LATE LAIR

de CAMP, L. SPRAGUE

THE BRONZE GOD OF RHODES

This is the first of the de Camp historicals to come my way - and it's definitely staying my way, too. Set in immediately post-Alexandrian times, it tells (in the first person of Chares, who was afterwards to build the Colossus) of a prolonged siege which the town of Rhodes successfully withstood, and various other matters pertinent thereto.

In a note appended to the rear end, the author says that the protagonist's name is to be pronounced more-or-less as "Carey's". Too Late, mate - by the time I'd reached that far I was accustomed to pronouncing it as "Char-ees", having contrived to overcome a tendency to read the word as "Charles"...

AND AN UNOFFICIAL SHAMBLE ON AN EQUALLY UNOFFICIAL POSTMAILING

THE CON-COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN'S GUIDE (Eney/Scithers) A mind-boggling publication indeed - I see it very self-effacingly declines to admit to a page-count, though at a snap count I make it somewhere around the seventy-mark. How this compares with the average "Proceedings" volume I wouldn't know - though I surmise that it's at least as useful. I observe with a wry shrug that an American Worldcon Committee is now also simultaneously two other bodies in addition to being its own sweet and inherently lovable self. And oh yes - I can recognise Scithers and Eney on the front cover, but no-one else for sure.

AM 11 July 1964