

A M B L E Perpetrated during the summer and autumn of 1965 for the
2 4 46th OMPA Mailing by ARCHIE MERCER, whose address is intended
 to be featured below. A MERCATORIAL PUBLICATION. Yngvi is.
 (A louse - what else ?)

And the address, man ? The address ? Uh - let's see (think-think-think) -
 Oh yes of course:

SEE BACK PAGE

THE LAIR - like I've been buying books again.

THREE RING MAD)
GREASY MAD STUFF) They're MAD pbs, so I get 'em.
THE SELF-MADE MAD)

ANDERSON, OLIVER

PAINLESS EXTRACTIONS

An early specimen (first published 1952 - and apparently only the second of the species) that has appeared in pb all of a sudden. Internal evidence dates its origin from before the time the author rounded out his private "mythology", and hence the Julian Pine influence shows through very strongly indeed.

SMITH, CORDWAINER

THE BOY WHO BOUGHT OLD EARTH

The "Galaxy" short-novel, together with its continuation "The Store of Heart's Desire" from "If" - which together make up the most satisfactory chunk of (to coin a word) cosmithology I've so far encountered.

HUGHES, PENNEITHORNE

WITCHCRAFT

Now this is a useful book. Not being written for any obvious axe-grinding purpose, it fills in the gaps between the others I've read very nicely. The picture it presents is of a survival-religion from way back when, basically unaffected by the Celtic and Teutonic pantheons, gradually getting watered-down as disaffected ex-Christian elements infiltrated during the Middle Ages until it finally bore very little resemblance to what it once had been. The author virtually apologises for recounting a few of the horrors of the witch-persecutions - which although they make me wince certainly are relevant. That angle aside, the book is full of fascinating information and suggestion - ranging from speculation on the extent of humanity's paranormal potential to a common-sensical between-the-lines (between the lines of a footnote, in fact !) explanation of the reputed sexual prowess of the negroid male.

FARMER, PHILIP JOSE

FLESH

One of my fannish female friends gave me this with the remark that it was very sexy but absolute rubbish. When I eventually got round to reading it, I found it highly stimulating indeed - but mentally rather than sexually. Farmer presents a situation in which the wheel has turned more or less full circle, and the religious situation obtaining in a future post-catastrophe America closely parallels that obtaining in pre-classical Greece. Sex is, of course, very much involved - but it's what the author does rather than how he does it that in this case appeals to me.

THE SHAMBLES

SHEILA THARI 5)
 STUFFYING STORIES 75) (Dick
 LING O CYCLE c/w PHENOTYPE) Eney)

Although Common Law as applied in the various United States of America is ultimately based on British Common Law (as it was when, or something), it would be somewhat imprudent to accept Speer's dicta as necessarily applying to actions before the British courts without sampling local opinion on the matter. The article(s) in question is/are nevertheless accepted as a constructive contribution to a situation badly in need of constructive contributions. / But there being no central clearing-house for lapel-pins, we might sooner or later find ourselves clashing with some other mob. Perhaps we could take a leaf from Jean Bogert's book and wear pins in our hair... / Of particular interest I found the article about Robert's Rules of Order. / Although the tunes for the longer Ring-parodies are given, I notice that that for the fragment on the cover is not. For the record, I place it as descending from Red Ingle's version of "The Alphabet Song" ("A, you're a-dopey-gal") - unless the equivalent octrain (?) there was itself directly derived from elsewhere. / I dunno though. Supposing, say, Luxemburg was to produce a potential equivalent to Winston Churchill. I very much doubt if he'd ever get a chance to realise said potential. (I mean the country, Mush, not the radio station.) / British newspapers are delivered house-to-house, both morning and evening - usually nowadays by adolescents of either sex - but the service is organised by the newsagents (ie, the paper-shops).

OFF TRAILS 45 (Brian JordAE) Speaking as a member rather than as President, I would like as forcefully as I may to press the point that, although I object to censorship of any kind, my objection is to the law - or apparent law - that makes it advisable rather than to the individual who feels obliged to apply it in his own defence because of that law. That every OMPA member should be able to read in full that which is set before him by any other member would obviously be a desirable state of affairs. If I were (again) AE I would not, legal things being as they are, guarantee to pass without qualification anything and everything that was set before me. Therefore I cannot object to the AE-in-residence covering himself where he deems it advisable. / The locational membership breakdown on the bacover does point up sharply the short supply of OMP-Administrators these days. Good idea, Brian.

AMBLE 23 (me) I'll just say that believe it or not, when I committed to stencil the "Don' stew de baker" verses I had not the least idea that Don was himself about to break into artichovially naked verse. Beryl doesn't believe in coincidence, so you'll have to accept my assurances that the matter was entirely fortuitous.

CRABAPPLE 1 (Mary Reed) D'you remember asking me in correspondence whether I thought the creatures in "On the Planet Shayol" (or is it "A Planet Named Shayol"?) were fireflies, and I replied that perhaps they were luminous puffins? Since then of course I've read the story in question (and loved it) - but obviously, they can't have been luminous puffins. Unless perhaps they were very small luminous puffins... / "Virginia Water" is a big fraud. The water's un-getatable to us common folk. / My impression of "The Man Who Travelled in Elephants" was that Heinlein set out to do better than Brad-

bury at the latter's own game - and succeeded. / To be strictly truthful, the Mercatorial room at 70 Worrall Road is, and always has been, on the first (ie, just-above-ground-floor-level) floor. And it might also have been politic to mention that at the time you fell off my bed I was myself nowhere near it. And you just sat on top of either the floor or Mike (whichever was nearest) laughing all the dust to the sides of the room. / The Tribal index is certainly an idea. Etymologies would help in places though.

ST-OMP 1 (Arnie Katz) Hello. Any OMPAn known to me would feel insulted to be addressed by anything but his/her given name, accepted diminutive, or nickname. The apparent exception (Ron Bennett) is only an apparent exception because Bennett's his nickname as well as his surname. Of course, being an introvert I seldom address anybody by name at all but that's just my little foible. / But why is the process called "casting out nines" ??? What the fred has it to do with nines, with out, or with casting ?????? / I'm lost. Whose remark about Anglo-American cooperation was "pretty indiscreet" ? Prompt me somebody please, since the matter's apparently addressed to me.

OZ 3 (Beryl) Generally speaking, the poetry (though I dutifully read through it all) is lost on me. The occasional breathtaking phrase (such as the one about singeing off the tips of the poet's soul) seems lonely all by itself out there in the middle of the paper. It'd be an asset to prose though. By contrast, the bits of admitted prose around the edges are worth the poetry a dozen times over. / Well, I don't care all that much for rum or any other spirit (even whisky, Heinrich !) though I agree that pouring it over the side is a waste. But even more so is breaking a bottle of perfectly good champagne (which I do like) over the bows of a new ship. Us landlubbers are somewhat more civilised I think. / (Er - I was just talking about nakichoke-poetry back there, of course. You know what I think of your own stuff, but for them others I'll just mention my theory that to understand poetry one has to understand the mind of the poet. In most cases I simply can't be bothered, though of course there is the occasional exception...)

MORPH 38 (John Roles) 38 - just my age (or at least as it was two years ago). / I suppose I could be big-headed and say that I've been studying writing ever since I first learned to read. Certainly not been taking any formal courses in it, though. Even if writing attracted me per se, courses don't ! Tower for the kind words though - and likewise tower you sundry others who've been making similar appreciative noises. / I have the (shortly post-WWII) Cherry Tree edition of "The Last Spaceship". I've re-read it several times since, and enjoyed it each time. (The original novelettes seem to be even more shortly post-WWII.)

HAGGIS vol 2 no 5 (Ian Peters) I heartily commend your diatribe-type thing on the question of censorship, the law, etc. Put very well. / Which human does not have a bias, somewhere ? At least Lord Cobbold admits he has one. On this subject, by the way, I was disappointed two or three years ago when the common-sense move to amend the Lord Chamberlain's powers of dramatic censorship making them essentially permissive rather than restrictive was voted down in parliament. Under the suggested new procedure, a play might be submitted voluntarily and if he approved it it would be immune from

legal action as regards its content. The right would, however, exist to put on a play without the Lord Chamberlain's approval in which case those responsible would have to stick their necks out and let the law, if any, take its course. Thus the positive side of the present situation (freedom for an approved play from police or magisterial activity) would be preserved without an absolute embargo necessarily being put on anything that was too strong for the Lord C. to stomach. But 'twas not (yet) to be, alas.

DIABLERIE 1 (Stephen Barr) Ah - another new 'un. Hello to you too then. I may say that I was horrified that the Syracon bid received as many votes as it did. While at the same time being vastly relieved that they didn't actually constitute a majority. On the other hand, by no means all the arguments advanced in favour of the Tricon bid struck me as all that valid either. In my opinion, the continued steady rotation was more important than the actual location of the Con - which is why I voted for the Tricon. We also disagree over Cordwainer Smith, I see. However, your review of "The Virgin of Orleans" certainly whets the Mercatorial appetite. Some day I think I'd like to read that one.

ANOTHER ONE 2 (Heinrich Arenz) Another one two? Anyway, I've met you before but welcome to OMPA anyway. I understand that one or two negroes have from time to time hung around the fringes of Amerifandom, and in fact one fanzine that comes my way every so often is published by two West Indians (Brent and Travers Phillips) last heard of in Jamaica. I've never met a coloured fan myself though. If I did meet such a one, I'd at first feel somewhat awkward not because his colour made of itself any difference, but because I'd expect him to think that it did. It's something I too would dearly like to see happen though. As for Jews, both British and American fandom have members of this persuasion. I have seen it said that the proportion is roughly the same as it is in the general population, though I have no means of checking. I believe that Yngvi is a louse.

TIMPANOGAS 2 (Richard Mann) And hello to you an' all, mate. You sound a bit disheartened in your editorial spiel - now you're here though, you might as well stay around until you become a little less vague to us. (You never know - we might like you.) Your summer cabbage (a cross between a cottage and a cabin) makes me positively drool. I don't quite see what you mean about OMPA lacking mailing comments of an ephemeral nature. Can one be much more ephemeral than I'm being now? Your comments are pleasantly readable and by no means devoid of interest, anyway. I do so agree that Beryl is a fascinating personality...

NEXUS 4 (Pete Weston) This I found the biggest disappointment of the mailing. A nice thick issue with Fred-all in it (it turns out) except for artwork I've already seen and have anyway. The bits of original Weston-waffling (I don't care how your guinea-swine spells it - the word itself is with an "a") and the brief lettercol are of considerable interest nevertheless. For the record, I didn't after all duplicate this NEXUS.

THE SCARR 9 (George Charters) Maurice Walsh's "The Green Rushes" is of course the book from which an episode was adapted to

make the film "The Quiet Man". Although "adapted" is the key-word there, I found the film worth going to see repeatedly (largely, I admit, for the music) and it's very much in the Maurice Walsh spirit throughout with one annoying exception - it has no remotest sign of a Scotsman (or woman) among the characters.

PANTHEON 3 (Burkhard Blum) If PANTHEON has a niche for every god, I guess AMBLE has at least a corner of a niche for every pantheon. The main (no pun intended) trouble with this particular pantheon is that it is difficult to tell whether the words at any given moment are those of the columnist or of his pet editor - or possibly six other people simultaneously. Assuming that the Spanish-fried eggs are to go with French-fried potatoes, that leaves a bit of untranslated double-Dutch cheese hanging over one's head. Why have two rival mailing-comment columns, anyway? Or are you still trying to use up some multilingual titles somewhere and if so why? In fact, in any case, why? ≠ Burkhard, I haven't a clue as to the German laws concerning libel, obscenity, sedition and blasphemy but (a) I understand you too have such laws, and (b) they are not necessarily the same as, or even similar to, their equivalents over here. Therefore I'm afraid that your contribution to the argument concerning same isn't all that relevant. Because OMPA mailings are distributed from British soil, we can only go by what our local laws (whether we approve of them or not) appear to say. Nevertheless, I personally value the international character of OMPA very highly indeed - even if I don't always understand your obscurely plural self. (Distraught thought: does a German atheist have a "nicht" for every god?)

THE OFFICES OF "G.H. Associates" on the top floor of Jericho Buildings are, I suppose, impressive in a tawdry kind of way. The receptionist's a brassy blonde of thirty-or-upwards, and the remainder of the office staff seems to be composed equally of dedicated-looking middle-aged virgins and depressing-looking middle-aged men. Which of these - if any - may be the "associates" of the firm's title has never been vouchsafed me. The "G.H.", of course, is Mr. Gaudeamus Higginbottom.

I called in on him one afternoon as he was muttering obscure incantations - or possibly just expletives - over an opened ledger. He waved me to a seat. "I won't keep you a moment," he apologised. "I'm just scrutinising the petty cash. Take care of the pence, I always say..." And he continued muttering, while I reflected that to give him his due he took equal care of the pounds.

He looked up momentarily, and pressed a buzzer. "Would you ask Miss Hope to come in?" he asked the receptionist when she looked in. Miss Hope proved to be one of the dedicated-looking virgins.

"This item for postal surcharges," said Mr. Higginbottom accusingly. "It's getting out of hand again."

Miss Hope shrugged. "I've got the envelopes, if you want to see them," she answered with some acidity.

"Oh never mind." He handed her the ledger and dismissed her. "Isn't it a scandal though," he commented as the door closed. "The sender's either too mean or too idle to stamp the envelope properly, so the recipient has to pay not once but twice. It's not fair."

"You don't have to accept the mail though," I pointed out.

"I daren't refuse," said Mr. Higginbottom sadly. "You never know how much business you're turning away if you don't accept all your mail. They've got me in a cleft stick." He squared his shoulders a trifle. "And, in fact, it's high time I started looking for a way out." He pressed the buzzer again, and told the receptionist: "Ask Jolyon to come in for a minute, please."

Jolyon - I don't know if it's his given name or his surname or even both - proved to be one of the depressing-looking middle-aged men. He listened attentively to what Mr. Higginbottom had to say, agreed that something ought to be done, and went away to ponder the matter further. "Good man, that Jolyon," said Mr. Higginbottom after he'd gone. "There isn't much he doesn't know about the law. In fact, offhand I think the only thing he doesn't know how to do is how to get back his licence to practise. Still, his misfortune is G.H. Associates' gain. Isn't it just a perfect paradox though - solicitors aren't allowed to solicit."

I could have pointed out that a solicitor is a solicitor of (or possibly to) the High Court, and that his licence entitles him to solicit said High Court on behalf of his clients, not to solicit possible clients on behalf of himself. I didn't bother though - if Mr. Higginbottom didn't know that already, I had a feeling that it was the sort of thing he wouldn't want to know. He's that sort of a person. I forget just what I did say actually, but I never got a chance to finish whatever it was because Jolyon was back.

"It's a matter of simple equity, Mr. Higginbottom," he was explaining. "If a letter is delivered unstamped, or understamped, the recipient has to pay twice the deficiency. But what about mail that's been over-stamped?"

"What?"

"Stamped with more value than was strictly necessary," Jolyon explained patiently. "We must get our share of those too, if we'd only bother to check. Any we find, simple equity demands that the Post Office should pay us twice the value of the overpayment. That should balance out the problem nicely."

But Mr. Higginbottom had got hold of the germ of an idea. "Better than that!" he said excitedly. "We could send mail to ourselves! Stamp a letter for, say, one pound and fourpence instead of just fourpence, then claim two pounds off the postman! Jolyon, I think we're on to something. Would you send Miss Hope in, please?"

I had to go soon after that, but next time I called in I was all agog to hear how things had turned out. Mr. Higginbottom's shoulders immediately slumped when I mentioned it.

"Don't talk to me about that," he said, and kept right on talking to me about it nevertheless. "That's the trouble about having an unfrocked lawyer - he can't work except through intermediaries, and everybody else was reluctant to touch the matter. Anyway, the Post Office have lawyers of their own, and they managed to get the argument beautifully twisted. D'you know why we have to pay double on an unstamped letter?"

I wasn't sure.

"Once to make good the deficiency, and once as a sort of fee to the Post Office for the bother of stopping at the door to collect the money in the first place. Therefore, their lawyers said, even granting the justice of the claim that overpaid postage should be reimbursed, the Post Office should by analogy

still claim an equal fee for the bother of having to call to pay the difference - which leaves us exactly where we were to begin with. I tell you - when you're dealing with the Post Office, you just can't win."

That I knew already, of course.

OH DIDN'T HE RAMBLE - the column where anything can happen, but seldom if ever does...

SOMETIMES IT DOES THOUGH Recently things have been happening quite rapidly, too. There's the vexed question of my weight, for instance. In the previous issue I reported that from around 15 stone at the beginning of the year I was aiming at 12 stone by worldcon time. I made it, too - when an outside scale showed me as twelve stone dressed, I bought my own scale and checked my progress nightly. I got down to eleven stone two, naked, and hadn't finished yet. I was really carried away with enthusiasm. Visions of me at ten stone... nine stone... eight stone flitted enthrallingly across my mind.

Then at the Con, Beryl saw me stripped. (Like, she had to help me into my Knight of St. Fantasy uniform.) And she told me I'd gone too far. Bones were protruding where bones were not intended to protrude. And I had, I recalled, had a couple of dizzy spells recently. So I agreed to call off the downward trend and return as quickly as possible to twelve stone. That I have now done - slightly above in fact - and if I can stop eating again (I tell you, food is so habit-forming) I'm now aiming to stabilise myself at about 11½ stone. The trouble is that what I eat goes to my stomach rather than to fleshing out my bones. However, I'm still noticeably slimmer than I was.

Things have been happening to Bristol, as well as to me. Immediately after the Con, the Walshes moved to 61 Halsbury Road, Bristol 6. (Tony, Simone and baby Sarah.) On Saturday the 25th of September 1965 was held the inaugural meeting of the Bristol and District (BAD) SF group. Participants came from Bristol and Weston super Mare - a threatened invasion from Bath of monster fans failed somehow to materialise - and also Frank Herbert came from Frome. (The Eric Joneses from Cheltenham, the Keith Freeman from Reading, and Peter Mabey from London are not really local enough to count.) Oh yes - Beryl was there. Tony Walsh was elected Chairman or President or something, Tony Underwood of the R.A.F. Locking (WSM) Secretary, and myself Treasurer. At the third meeting I'll even be able to start collecting subs...

Then on Monday the Eleventh of October 1965 much to my surprise and gratification I passed my driving test on a car - at the second attempt. (I'd also had two attempts on my scooter, the second of which had been successful.) As a result I find that I'm qualified to drive anything on the roads with the following somewhat bizarre exceptions: a road roller, a tracked vehicle steered by its tracks, an invalid carriage, a trolley vehicle (ie, motivated from overhead wires), a public service vehicle in use thereas, and a vehicle exempted from duty under Section 6 (6) of the Vehicles (Excise) Act, 1962 - whatever that is. (Also, I should imagine, a hovercraft.)

My newly-found facility I was very soon able to put to a bit of practical use, because it was almost time for my (delayed) annual holiday. Returning to

 READ BETWEEN ANY GOOD LINES LATELY ?

Bristol on Guy Fawkes night, I almost immediately found myself caught up in a fantastic minicon which started the next day - Saturday the 6th. A total of 47 attendees has been counted - this includes five small children and one mundane next-door-neighbour of the Walshes', said Walshes providing the location for the event. Fans came from as far away as Salford and Wisbech, besides numerous places in between and London. The survivors - the vast majority - all bedded down more-or-less dressed on mattresses - contributed by the Walsh and Mercer households - with which a couple of the downstairs rooms had been carpeted for the occasion. A sizeable contingent was even left over to Chineat at mid-day on the Sunday. I don't know of anybody who didn't enjoy the event, anyway - except for another couple of mundanes that I'd temporarily forgotten about. Myself, I had (as the saying says) a ball.

The search for larger Mercer-accommodation proceeded apace, and on the 20th of November (still 1965, in case anybody came in a year late) the entire Mercatorial household was at long last removed from the Worrall Road address to the present one. Not before time, too - large though the room was, it was rapidly disappearing under the vast weight of books, records, fanzines and things that kept on happening. The new address, from which this issue is being perpetrated, is:

FIRST FLOOR FLAT, "ROSEHILL", 2 COTHAM PARK SOUTH, BRISTOL 6.

Instead of consisting of one large room, it consists of four of them - each of comparable size to the original one. Then there's a hall that's almost equally large, a bathroom/toilet, a kitchen, a potrzebie/glory-hole/cubby/oubliette, and an absolutely splendid air-lock just inside the front door. The premises comprise the entire first floor of a large and spaciouly-environed house, and are reached by an outside staircase. So now there's a room for fanzines, a room for fiction, a room for non-fiction and records, and a room to sleep in...

Winter seems to have come early this year. The wide open spaces are already proving somewhat enormous to heat - though by spring they should with any luck be just warm enough. Or before then, if I can afford to buy any coal... Still, the advantages of the place should be self-evident. And living in a barn is a new experience for one. (Or, come to that, for two.)

The bath is possibly the smallest full-size bath in captivity - though the room in which it is located is plenty big enough. The water is heated by a wonderful old explosive gas-geyser, the operation of which is at least equally as hazardous as car-driving. In most of the other rooms there's a choice of coal, gas or electricity to use for fuel - so the place has definite possibilities.

And so as the wind howls through the gaps in the shutters - well to be strictly truthful it doesn't howl so much as seep - and down the as-yet-unfired chimney - I draw the circle of portable stoves more closely around me, ^{and} AMBLE and its perpetrator each in its or his separate way prepares to go to bed. The future lies athwart the road - kick it out of the way, and let hibernation commence !

See you when I do, if not before.

AM

23 November 1965