

From BORN IN THE UK #9 (June 1991) for the eleventh mailing of  
APA OF THE DAMNED. c Rob Hansen 1991.

The best-known fanzine I've published in my time in fandom to date was EPSILON, which saw eighteen issues between 1976 and 1985 (my favourite decade in the history of fandom), and which may well be reborn one day if the time feels right. I used to draft all the pieces for EPSILON in longhand first, crossing out and amending as necessary, before pounding them into wax stencils by means of my trusty Brother manual typewriter (one of my first purchases after leaving school, back when I had ambitions to be a Big Name Skiffy Writer). However, being as untidy and disorganised as I am some pieces inevitably got lost before they could be committed to stencil and, eventually, forgotten. A couple of pages that were written early in 1985 and obviously intended for EPSILON #18 recently came to light so I thought I'd present them here for your amusement, a previously unpublished blast from the past that I had to call:

EPSILON #17.5

NEW YEAR'S EVE is usually the last occasion on which you're sure of a good time until Easter comes around and, as last time, I spent it up in Newcastle at a party thrown by Kev & Sue Williams. Last time I was the tall, dark stranger thrust unceremoniously out into the cruel northern night, but this time they found someone taller, darker, and even stranger in the person of BSFA supremo Alan Dorey. Resplendent in a Ronald Reagan mask and brightly-patterned African shirt, Dorey burst through the front door at the stroke of midnight and announced:

"A Happy New Year, my fellow Americans, and let's bomb the shit out of those Commie bastards!!"

Clearly, this was a man who had had nowhere near enough to drink. A quick call to the Langford party down in Reading confirmed that we were having a better time than they were, to everyone's smug relief, and then it was time to get down to some serious drinking.

Did you know that Kev Williams is one of the highest-paid people in British fandom? Not a lot of people know that. What they also don't know is that his position high in the European hierarchy of Proctor and Gamble takes him across to their head office in Cincinnati at least once a year, and that his most recent trip had occurred only a couple of weeks previously.

"Cincinnati is a strange place", he told me, "pretty boring and full of people who drive cars with bumper stickers that read 'GOD, GUNS, & GUTS MADE AMERICA GREAT - LET'S KEEP IT THAT WAY!' Y'know, the sort of person we'd call a neo-fascist loony over here. I've thought of trying to get in touch with the local fandom on occasion, but I didn't think there were any interesting fans in Cincinnati"

"There aren't." I assured him. ((This was the time of the TAFF Wars.))

There then followed a contest between two teams, called respectively 'the Nerds' and 'the Boring Old Farts'. I was once again on the latter, and since we'd beaten the Nerds so decisively last year quizmaster Kev Williams weighted things heavily in their favour this time. We still won, of course, but it took a little longer. Biggest surprise of the night - for me anyway - was getting a call from Avedon from New York. She was at a New Year's party as well, but it was still 1984 over there. I was talking to someone still in last year, I realised with a thrill of scientific sensawonder!

"So what's 1985 like?", asked Avedon.

"It's been pretty good so far", I told her, "but I don't expect that to last at all."

DUNE Speaking of Avedon, EPSILON received a letter from Ms Carol a short while back telling of how she and Ted White were invited to the US premiere of the new multi-million dollar space epic DUNE, and got to hobnob with the stars and film-makers afterwards. Here's what she had to say:

"Great camera work. Great sets. Great cast. But the director is no storyteller and didn't have enough faith in his actors to let them carry off their roles. He also didn't have enough faith in his material - he omitted a lot of things from the book that would have livened up the movie and kept wider audience interest, and he put stuff in that really shouldn't have been there and made me want to throw up. He never emphasised the ecological aspects and he pretty much omitted the parallels between the Fremens and the Israelis. And there's a fucking [rainstorm] at the end of the movie, for no reason. Characters seemed to appear on the scene for no reason without any background, other characters appeared to exist for no reason. There are some incredibly stupid expository bits - like pictures of the planets (Dune, the Duke's homeworld, and the Baron's homeworld) sitting on the screen while a voiceover tells you what the politics are and how the Duke is being sent to this other planet and so on - along with a lot of expository sand. Instead of calling the melange "the geriatric spice" they have invented the idea that the guild-pilots/navigators use it to "fold space" to take them where they want to go. This completely eliminates the surprise in the discovery later that the guild needs the spice to be able to see where they are going, which discovery is quite important in the book because it leads Paul Maud Dib to understand the politics around the damn spice. Instead of giving you one use of it early and then surprising you with the prescient properties later, they start with this bit about folding space and never really work out the relationship between Paul's prescience and the spice. And it's all very weird and vague like that. There's also nothing about how once people acclimatise to the spice, they can never return to Caladan, and there's none of the politics involving Beast Rabban and Faiyd Rautha - which would have been OK, but the characters were portrayed anyway, and they seemed to be nothing but guys cluttering up the sets (Rautha is played by Sting, who prances around looking like meat). A real waste of talent.

But hell, the food was terrific - Universal spent \$48,000 on Peking Duck

and cheese and shrimp and sushi and god knows what else - I couldn't even get to it all - and Ted looked interesting in a tux. [I] looked adorable in mine, too, but probably would have looked even better had I not just climbed out of a sickbed for the first time in a week."

By a strange coincidence my own viewing of the movie was also a freebie, a ticket to a special preview showing of DUNE courtesy of Malcolm Edwards, SF editor at the publishing house holding UK hardback rights to Herbert's original novel. Edwards had clearly had a fair number of these tickets to dispose of since others in the preview audience included Rob Holdstock, Chris Evans, Brian Aldiss, Lisa Tuttle, John Brosnan, Gamma, and other such lowlifes. This being Britain there were no meetings with the cast afterwards and most certainly no \$48,000 smoked salmon buffets, so instead we retired to a local hostelry and the insipid delights of cheap curry. No-one seemed too terribly impressed by the film.

"What a load of nonsense!" announced Chris Priest.

"A two-hour long trailer", said Malcolm, "and with that big a budget how come they couldn't afford any lighting men?"

"Gonna help sales of the book, though", I said, tucking-in to a sausage hot-pot, "because people will have to buy the book to figure out what the hell was going on."

"Yeah", said Chris Evans, " they failed by trying to be [too] faithful to the book, surely the first time that's happened with an SF film. There's no way they could have succeeded in squeezing a 500-page novel into a two-hour film without making a lot more cuts in it than they did."

So, the thumbs-down from a random sampling of the local SF community. Later, I was telling Brosnan about how neat it was to have attended my first ever free preview showing of a film, whereupon he offered me some tickets to another preview the next weekend.

"It's a film about this robot assassin from the future that disembowels muggers in modern day Los Angeles", he explained.

I decided to give it a miss. There are some films you don't need to see even if [they] pay [you]!

.....1985.

Your snotty attitudes toward things can later come back to haunt you. That film I was so dismissive of was THE TERMINATOR, one of the best SF films of the 1980s, and how I now wish I'd seen it first on the big screen rather than on video!

.....1991.