

NAPALM in the MORNING

Napalm In The Morning 1, a personalzine from Joseph Nicholas, Room 9, 94 St George's Square, Pimlico, London SW1Y 3QY, United Kingdom -- at least, that's where the stencils were typed, although the duplication was done by Dave Langford at his fortress of fanac and James Branch Cabell first editions in Reading, with me hovering at his shoulder. That's to say: the duplication will be done in Reading by Dave Langford with me etc. etc., but never mind. It's available for all the usual reasons and probably a few unusual ones as well, but exactly what they might be I'll leave you to discover for yourselves.

OUT OF THE RISING SUN

Well (modest coff at my own cleverness), there are no prizes for guessing from where I lifted the title Napalm In The Morning -- and, equally, no prizes for guessing which of the many genuinely stunning sequences from Francis Ford Coppola's magnificent Apocalypse Now made the greatest impression on me. Watching its opening moments from the front rows of the cinema, with Kilgore's gunships apparently flying straight at you, is almost to feel that you're the one about to get zapped. Never mind the thrill of primitive excitement it sends through you; it's just like a cavalry charge from an old John Wayne western, heroic boys in blue galloping in to rescue the stout-hearted settlers from the pesky redskins -- which is of course exactly what Coppola wanted since, having made you feel that "thrill of primitive excitement" and put you firmly on Kilgore's side, he then forces you to compromise your position by his graphic demonstration of the panic, destruction, blood and senseless death that follows. And eventually repudiate altogether when the appalled realisation finally dawns on you that all the earlier talk of surfing wasn't a joke, but the sole reason for attacking the village in the first place.

My main problem with this sequence, however, is my lingering fascination with helicopters.

I don't pretend to know the exact reasons for this fascination and, this far removed from the adolescence in which it held sway, I'm not so sure that I care any more. The important thing to remember, as far as the rest

of this bit is concerned, is that I used to daydream about flying helicopter gunships way down yonder in Vietnam....

My father has been involved with aircraft for all his adult life -- and for most of his pre-adult life as well -- and so it was perhaps inevitable that I, as a mere lad, should have developed some interest in the subject; an interest that manifested itself as the collecting and building of commercially available plastic kits: the sort you can find in hobby shops and toy departments up and down the country. For a long time, this mania -- and it was a mania; it absorbed all my pocket money for years on end, with books being dinly categorised as something obtainable from public libraries -- confined itself to the building of pre-1945 propeller-driven aircraft, and in the process filled my shelves with literally hundreds of biplanes and fighters and bombers and transports and such. All good clean -- but the sort of fun that virtually divorced me from my peers, robbed me of meaningful social contact, and led me to retreat into all manner of womb-like fantasies of death-or-glory aerial combat.

God only knows what I might have become if this obsession had continued unchecked; but, as I've written elsewhere (a maudlin and self-indulgent loc in Stop Breaking Down 2, for those of you with long memories and big fanzine collections), in 1967 I was awoken from my five-year-stupor by the near simultaneous discovery of rock music and science fiction (or, rather, partially awoken from it; SF is, after all, supposed to hold great appeal for lonely, alienated kids, but is so minority an interest that it probably can't do anything to help them over that block) and in consequence the mania began to relinquish its grip upon me, slowly and imperceptibly reverting to the status of the hobby it had for a short time possessed at the very beginning of its life. But not before I'd abandoned daydreams of World War Two for daydreams of Vietnam....

The vietnam War will probably go down in history as the first armed conflict you could watch from the comfort and safety of your own living room. Every night at nine o'clock: air strikes, casualty counts, jungle patrols, naval blockades, the works; front-line TV reportage on a scale and with an impact never before known. (In point of fact, certain Pentagon strategists attribute America's "losing" of the war to its TV coverage, reasoning that this provided the American public -- the vast majority of whom had of course been completely unmoved by previous student protests -- with altogether too clear a picture of the abject failure of their military machine to conquer a supposedly ill-organised rabble of supposedly ill-equipped peasants, eventually generating amongst that public a mounting groundswell of silent protest which did more than anything else to force the US government to the negotiating table. Whether or not there's any truth to this supposition is a moot point; but at least one of the strategists in question is reputed to have said that the next time they got America involved in a war they wouldn't tell the media about it.) And I, of course, lapped it all up -- not to the extent of understanding what it was all about (if I had, my parents would probably have swayed me into actually bloody supporting it), but at least as far as acquiring (surpr̄ise!) plastic kits of the aircraft involved.or, rather, some of the aircraft involved. By that time I'd built a model of virtually every pre-1945 propeller-driven aircraft I could get my hands on and was casting around for suitable post-1945 subjects. The problem was that the majority of such aircraft were jets, a type for which I had no liking -- too streamlined, not enough knobbly bits -- and my choice of subjects was therefore very limited. Particularly in respect of Vietnam: apart from the lumbering old Douglas Skyraider (one of which actually managed to shoot down three MIGs by the simple expedient of being slower than they, thus causing them to overshoot and fly straight into his cannon-fire every time they made their passes), there were only the twin turboprop Bronco ground-attack plane, the pusher/puller twin-boom Cessna Skymaster

(one of which makes a brief appearance in Apocalypse Now), the Douglas C47 (which, when carrying a mungun in its doorway, was nicknamed "Puff The Magic Dragon", and anyone unfortunate enough to have stumbled across the appalling The Green Berets may remember seeing it in action), and the high-wing de Havilland Beaver observation plane. But there were all those helicopters....

As I mentioned earlier, I've really no idea why helicopters should so appeal to me. They're ugly, ungainly, unaerodynamic and look more like pregnant insects than efficient flying machines (although this could of course be the secret of their appeal: in defiance of all rational expectations, they fly); but I started building models of them, and not just of the types that served in Vietnam. If a kit existed, I bought it; British, French, German, Russian, American -- all were grist to the mill of my adolescent fancies. My favourites, however -- the centrepieces of the collection -- were the types that served in Vietnam, the most widely used of which was the Bell UH-1 Huey, a light general purpose machine that performed in roles even its designers had never considered. I built a model of each: the cargo transport (one door-gunner with a belt-fed 16mm machine-gun and lots of takeoff loading), the dustoff (unarmed medevac, so nicknamed because of the quantity of dust thrown up by its low-and-slow touchdown and takeoff), the slick (troop carrier, sometimes with a door-gunner and sometimes not), the loach (from LOH, light observation helicopter), and the one that always struck me as the king of the bunch, the cobra (gunship). (The latter two functions had been partially usurped by more specialised machines -- the Hughes Cayuse (of which Kilgore's unit has far too damn many, military advisers to the movie or not) and the Bell AH-1 Hueycobra, respectively -- by the time I began to take an interest in them all, but I didn't care; I built models of them as well.) As though to emphasise the esteem in which I held the latter, I built the 1/32nd scale kit manufactured by the American firm Revell, a fifteen-inch long wonder of a hundred-odd parts, spending weeks (yes, I do mean weeks) on its painting and assembling, on the addition of minor details that the exigencies of commercial mass-production methods had required be omitted, in checking that my choice of ordnance (4 16mm machine-guns, 2 7.62mm miniguns, 2 2.75cm anti-personnel rocket pods) really existed, and in tracking down authentic markings to replace the fictitious codes provided on the transfer sheet. Which is just about where we came in, because, by what was either astonishing prescience or astonishing coincidence, I ended up with a gunship that flew with the 1st of the 9th Air Cav -- Kilgore's unit in Apocalypse Now.

This doesn't mean that when I was ensconced in my cinema seat watching him strafe the shit out of the Charlie village at the mouth of the Nung I was looking for "my" helicopter -- but I was reliving that years-old daydream and, perhaps surprisingly, feeling not in the least embarrassed by it. Not, mind you, that it still haunts me now; the only daydreams of flying in which I indulge these days are strictly practical ones, like hang-gliding (which appeals to me for a variety of reasons: on the purely mercenary level because it's a bloody sight cheaper than conventional gliding, but also on a more aesthetic level because it gets you closer to the elements; it is, literally, the next best thing to being a bird), which, despite lurid and sensationalist news reports ("Hang-Glider Stubs Toe On Landing" is the approximate intellectual level of most of them), is actually pretty safe. And certainly safer than flying helicopter gunships in Vietnam; in eight years of fighting, the Americans lost just over three thousand helicopters of all types, most of them to enemy small-arms fire. (Thus the basic paradox of helicopter warfare: although admirably suited to low-level daylight assaults, they are actually at their most vulnerable when performing in this role. Put a half-dozen or so rifle rounds into the rotor gear train and all you'll be left with is a pile of scrap and a very dead crew. In reality, Kilgore would have lost far more of his ships than the three he did.)

As you might expect, I no longer build model aircraft -- but then neither did I get rid of all the ones I built back in my childhood-cum-adolescence; they repose in a large cardboard box in my parents' house in Lyme Regis, Dorset, packed carefully one atop the other in layer upon layer of foam chips. When I was down there recently I took the opportunity to sort down through the box in search of the Huey gunship to which I earlier referred, and found it in a somewhat sorry state of repair: one of the main rotor blades snapped off at the root, the skid assembly and one ordnance pack pack hanging loose, other breakages too minor to mention. (Come to that, most of the other models seemed in a less-than-brilliant condition, the rigours of moving house having caused a certain amount of damage; most notably to the propeller blades and undercarriages, the two most vulnerable areas of any plastic model.) Yet strangely -- or perhaps not so strangely -- I felt no great desire to abandon everything and rush to the repair of my once-beloved creation; all I could do was sit there looking at it and remembering the past: a past which, as L. P. Hartley once so succinctly put it, "is a foreign country and, besides, they do things differently there".

(As a coda to all the above: although, as you've probably gathered, I'm over the moon about Apocalypse Now, I will admit that it's not perfect. The ending, for example, when Willard finally encounters Kurtz, is a little too drawn-out -- and I'm told that the 35mm version of the movie, currently on general release in what is euphemistically known as "the provinces", makes it even more drawn-out by the reshooting in its entirety of the helicopter strike on Kurtz's temple with extracts from which the film began (a version, incidentally, which I'll probably never see....unless and until it turns up on TV in a few years' time, although I wouldn't be at all surprised if the useless sods chose to show only a cut-down print of the 70mm version now ending its run in London) -- and is badly marred anyway by Brando's total failure to act. On a first viewing, this last is compensated for by the tremendous impact of Chef's decapitation and the ritual slaughter of the bullock, but on second and subsequent viewings this impact (which of course derived from their being completely unexpected) is lost and Brando's aforementioned "failure" becomes in consequence starkly apparent. Despite which I still think it's an absolutely fucking brilliant movie (the standard of the photography alone puts thousands of others to utter shame) -- as, indeed, do many other fans: Chris Priest, Alan Dorey, Andrew Stephenson, Janice Maule, John Collick, Dave Cockfield, Paul Kincaid....in point of fact, I was discussing it with the latter two at a recent party and, while we all had different views about exactly what made it great, we were all agreed on one thing: that it was, as far as we knew, the first movie ever to capture the overall insanity, the totality, of war, as opposed to concentrating solely on a demonstration of its effects upon the individual.

(So why, then, didn't it get the Oscar as Best Film of the Year? One obvious answer is that, probably because it took so long to reach completion, it's effectively the fifth film about Vietnam to have surfaced in the past couple of years (the others being, in order of their release, The Boys In Company C, Coming Home, Dog Soldiers -- aka Who'll Stop The Rain -- and The Deer Hunter), and thus ruled itself out of consideration by virtue of its "unoriginal" subject-matter. A less obvious answer concerns the Oscars themselves which, like all other awards, are notoriously prone to influence by current fads and fashions. Vonda McIntyre's Dreamsnake collared the Hugo for Best Novel at Season 79 not, I submit, because it was really the best novel of the year but because of its trendy pro-feminist line; and, similarly, Kramer Vs. Kramer won the Oscar for Best Film because of its pandering to a current American obsession, to wit: the question of child custody after divorce. And who, in a few years' time, is likely to give a shit about that? Apocalypse Now, on the other hand, for all that it's set in the Vietnam of 1969 (spot the blindingly obvious clue), is an essentially timeless movie, with a message that, trite and overworked though it may be,

is nevertheless still valid: that war is not the glorious patriotic endeavour that megalomaniac authoritarians like Robert Heinlein and Jerry Pournelle would have us believe, but is instead a grinding, senseless, bloody, insane hell.

(In which respect the awarding of the Oscar to something as mawkish, as sentimental and as tediously wet as Kramer Vs. Kramer strikes me as an obscene and indefensible denial of reality. Can there possibly be anyone alive who does not immediately think "Vietnam" every time Jimmy Carter starts bleating about the Russian invasion of Afghanistan?)

Quote from Brian Smith: "Playing cards with Kev Smith is like The Poseidon Adventure -- all the action is on the bottom of the deck."

THE REASON WHY

It's often struck me that a large proportion of the articles which see print in many fanzines (especially American ones) don't really qualify as articles at all, having little in the way of a formal structure -- a beginning, a middle and an end -- and sometimes very little to actually say, relying more on a series of padded anecdotes vaguely related to some nebulous central theme than the theme itself. They don't so much propound and rationalise a particular argument as simply fill the page -- which is of course a pretty-sweeping generalisation, and one that probably won't hold up to a moment's serious examination, but....

Well, the "but" here is that the foregoing is the main reason for the publication of Napalm In The Morning in the first place. It (and an earlier draft of the piece you've -- hopefully -- just read) first saw the dark of a duplicator's drum as a one-shot apazine for FEAPA's Easter mailing, and would probably have been consigned to eternal oblivion had I not subsequently realised that it could serve as a handy vehicle for the discharge of various Great Thoughts which weren't substantial enough to be developed into full-fledged articles in their own right (at least, not in the terms outlined above -- spot the inconsistency in this issue) or which, if included in a loc, might have been deep-sixed by an overcautious editor.

This is, in other words, a self-justifying ego-trip, but since damn few (read: damn all) fanzines aren't that shouldn't upset you too much. Besides, there's always the trade angle -- I'm now receiving so many fanzines that, what with all my other commitments (ah, get out the violins and such), the possibility of my ever being able to write locs in response to them all is pretty bloody minimal. Each of the editors in question (you know who you are), and any other editor who deigns to send me something, will probably get a letter sooner or later, but in the meantime you'll just have to make do with this. (Which, I suppose I'd better point out, is not specifically an Apocalypse Now fanzine -- God forbid that I should ever become another mindless cultist of the kind that have latched onto The Hitch-Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy -- and although letters on the subject are welcome, the next issue will contain Something Completely Different.)

Keeping abreast of my fanac aside, however, there's another and, dare I say it, more altruistic reason for this: GUFF, the Get Up and over Fan Fund, originally intended as a one-off exercise to bring an Australian fan to the UK for the 1979 Worldcon but which it's now been decided to maintain as a regular annual exchange between Britain and Australia. Which is just as it should be, since there's no reason why British fandom's international fan fund contact should be restricted to America only, and certainly no reason why Australian fandom should be left out in the cold.

This is therefore GUFF's first year of "proper" operation, the object being to send a British fan to the June 1981 Melbourne convention -- and, as you have by now probably guessed, I'm standing for it. (Thus do I destroy my supposed altruism.)

But....so far I'm the only British fan to have expressed any interest in so standing, and unless somebody else steps forward we could well end up with the perfectly ludicrous situation of me running against myself and winning by default. Hell, it's not that I want to be beaten out and denied my just desserts (take that however you like) by some better-known or more popular British fan, but by God the voters -- and particularly the Australian voters, who have a much greater stake than we British in the eventual outcome of the race -- won't half feel cheated if they aren't faced with a little competition to pep up their interest.

What, in other words, is the matter with the rest of you that you don't fancy the prospect of a free trip to somewhere you're never likely to be capable of visiting any other way?

Perhaps it's just that GUFF itself is too new a fan fund to have generated anything like the long-standing interest and support that TAFF enjoys -- which is of course all the more reason for pushing it as much as we can. Perhaps it's our incorrect and unjustified impression of Australian fandom (and Aussies generally) as a collection of boring lager-drinkers with nothing to offer but what we already get here. Well, Chris Priest laid that one very neatly to rest in his article in Dave Langford's Northern Saffblower 5 (attached to the first issue of his Ansible), and I have a letter from him on the same subject from which I'd quote if I had the room (and his permission). And, Christ, everyone who met John Foyster at Seacon, or has read his Chunder!, knows that it isn't like that at all.

So come on, dumbos! Get up off your asses and start shaking some action!

WHAT I'D LIKE TO WIN THE HUGOS....

Novel: On Wings Of Song, Thomas M. Disch; Novella: No Award; Novelette: "Palely Loitering", Chris Priest; Short Story: No Award; Non-Fiction: Encyclopedia Of SF, ed. Peter Nicholls; Dramatic Presentation: Alien; Professional Artist: No Award; Professional Editor: Edward Ferman; Fanzine: No Award; Fanwriter: Dave Langford; Fanartist: Stu Shiffman; John W. Campbell Award: No Award; Gandalf Grandmaster: No Award.

....AND WHAT I HAVE A HORRIBLE SUSPICION WILL WIN THE DAMN THINGS ANYWAY

Least Worst Novel: The Fountains Of Paradise, Arthur C. Klutz; Least Readable Novella: "Enemy Mine", Barry B. Bongyear; Most Mawkish Novelette: "Options", John Varley; Worst Short Story: "Unaccompanied Sonata", Orson Scott Fart; Most Undemanding Non-Fiction: In Memory Yet Green, Isaac Astral; Prettiest Dramatic Presentation: Star Drek -- The Motionless Picture; Most Competent Provoker Of Adolescent Masturbation Fantasies: Boris Vallejo; Most Popular Editor: Ben Bova; Most Widely-Read Imitation Fanzine: SFR; Most Boring Fanwriter: Richard E. Geis; Worst Scribbler: Bill Rotlser; John W. Campbell Award: Somtow Sucharitkul (because he's a "hard working" SFWA official, and is unscrupulously self-promoting enough to have persuaded the members to vote him the trophy by way of thanks); Gandalf Grandmoron: Marion Dimmer Bradley.

Anyone care to place any sidebets on this collection of hacks and cretins?

Dear People:

Re Dave Hulan's comments about the sender of that £5 note on the TOC of FLAP 4 - it's mine. Really and truly. Cross my heart, and all that. I just forgot to put a note in with my contribution - mainly because I only remembered that my dues were due when on my way to the post office.

Best,

Joseph

Why is there writing on this mailing wrapper, you are asking yourselves? (Note subtle Kev Smith-like phraseology.) Well, basically, boss (shuffle shuffle), bad planning left me no room at the bottom of the back page to put in my address and your address and like that. Particularly that -- after all, this is supposed to be a Surrey Limpwrist fanzine, so I had to have somewhere to put the statutory Ian Williams joke.

Except that I can't think of one. Poot.

On the other hand....well, there's this unsolicited loc from Dave Langford:

"I do think you have not been fair to the Hugos. They are really triflic awards, even if they are a bit pitted and ugly and made of base metal and tend to get voted to the wrong people etc. I mean, On Wings Of Song is all about art and metaphysics and such and obviously cannot stand even the merest comparison with truly great works of Sci Fi like Artur C Cleark's magnificent bok about really great huge enormous lift shafts spanning the stars, or whatevre it is abot. And you halve to admit that as fanzines goe, meen; ng profitmaking faneeznes with a cir; culation of 3000000+ off which the editor lives and subsists and moves & has hig bean, SFR is on the whole by and large taking all things into consideration really more or less not all that bad. I mean, your just a Brittish fan and this Proves it. Only Amerikan fen can truly demmer-craitically vote on the hgous. Because there are more of them. yrs in christ, d drofgnal!

Yes.

This is not my address; it's a COA from Terry Hughes:
6205 Wilson Blvd (Apt 102)
Falls Church
Virginia 22044
USA

But I bet the useless post awful people return all the undelivered copies to him anyway.



JACKIE CAUSGROVE & DAVE LOCKE
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This was Napalm In The Morning 1,
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AIR MAIL
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