

Nov. 1981

NAPALM in the MORNING

A terrible rumbling and shaking, as if the bowels of the Earth were being torn asunder.....a vast moaning, as of an elder god shuddering up from the deeps beneath the sea....and a suddenly terrified (ha!) fandom relaxes once again as it realises that it's only the procrastinator awakening after all -- the procrastinator being in this case Joseph Nicholas (at his usual address of Room 9, 94 St George's Square, Pimlico, London SW1Y 3QY, United Kingdom) and the cause of his awakening being Napalm In The Morning 3, promised for just before Christmas but delayed until now for reasons too tedious to detail here; suffice it to say that I just couldn't make up my mind what to write about. (Such are the problems posed by an overactive imagination, ho ho....at least, I would have an overactive imagination if it hadn't been deadened by all those bloody awful Piers Anthony novels.) The title might look a bit wrinkled, but if so it's because the electrostencil was salvaged from last issue. Cheapness rules OK, which should keep Leaderene Maggie happy, eh wot?

THE END OF THE DREAM

It's a commonplace, at least as far as I'm aware, that the SF fans of the fifties were turned on to the literature by a boyhood interest in astronomy, and no wonder: the gut-wrenching, inarticulable pre-pubescent excitement you feel at the realisation that the lights in the sky are stars like the sun, and that they just might have families of planets around them which might just possibly harbour intelligent life is a speculation powerful enough to stimulate almost everyone's imagination. And after you've thought about it (albeit not very logically or coherently), the obvious next step is to read about it -- first all the basic astronomy texts you can pry out of your local library and then, once you've exhausted their potential, the fiction itself....

Well, it might have been true for the fans of the fifties, but not for the fans of the sixties. A different stimulus for a different age, the stimulus being in their case something about which the fans of the fifties could only dream: the actual bloody conquest of space itself, with sanitised and unemotional US Air Force types being lofted off the pads at Cape Canaveral to spend three or six or ten days in orbit before splashing down in the Pacific to a hero's welcome, every last little bit of it beamed straight into the comfort of our suburban living rooms via the suddenly all-pervasive power of TV, the media communications marvel that, so Marshall McLuhan said, would turn the

world into one global village; just one small part of a gaudy, incredible, well-nigh implausible drama that included the assassination of President Kennedy, the grinding futility of the Vietnam War, Rachel Carson's publicising of the unforeseen deadly side-effects of common pesticides, The Beatles, the invention of the Pill, mini-skirts, Penzias's and Wilson's discovery of the black-body radiation left over from the Big Bang, Timothy Leary's preaching of the gospel of LSD, the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, and Alvin Toffler's coining of the term "future shock" to describe the increasing social disorientation caused by the accelerating pace of technologically-induced change that was sweeping the world.

The sixties were exciting times to be alive, all right, with everyone living only for the moment because we never knew what was going to happen next (but nevertheless kept hoping that the utopian tomorrow of which we sometimes dreamed was really only just around the corner); and all who lived through them, or part of them, whether as participants or spectators or johnny-come-latelies, have been in some way influenced by them. Like it or not, we carry forward in our hearts some trace of nostalgic warmth for that glorious, heady time which we know intellectually can never be reinvoled but which emotionally we hope can be.

Particularly SF fans.

If we accept the proposition that the fans of the sixties (or, to cast the net wider, those who began reading SF in the sixties) were turned on to SF by the myriad of space shots taking place all around them, watching all "that crazy Buck Rogers" stuff coming true before their very eyes and the public at large eating a few pieces of humble pie because of it, then it should come as no surprise to learn that a sizeable proportion of the SF "community" -- writers and editors as well as fans -- has in recent years been declaring its enthusiastic support for what's left of the space programme, proselytising its wonders and benefits at every conceivable opportunity: they grew up on it, believing passionately in its worth and future potential, and don't want to see it die because they will thus be robbed both of that part of their pasts which made them what they are today and of the motivation which fuels what they hope to be.

But dying it is, and nothing that anyone does now will ever be enough to resurrect it because its peak -- the Apollo 11 Moon landing -- came and went over a decade ago, and every mission since has been but another step on its slow downward journey into ultimate dissipation. The dwindling programme of unmanned scientific missions that we have now are but its last gasp, the tail-end of a "once-proud endeavour" which, for all its patriotic and visionary hype, was in fact a rather squalid (if massively expensive) Cold War propaganda stunt. The object of "landing a man upon the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth" was not to pave the road to the stars but to impress the rest of world with American technological knowhow; an arrogant and chauvinistic desire to demonstrate that anything the Russians could do they could do better. In which respect they of course succeeded, but only in the short term; the irony is that by their overkill approach, going for The Big One the first time out, they have allowed the Russians to pull ahead again precisely by virtue of the latter's concentration on the basics they decided to pass up: the establishment of manned orbital stations supplied by shuttle flights from Earth.

Yes but, you say, the Americans have now developed their own Shuttle and will be doing the same in the next few years, won't they?

But will they? The Shuttle is both way overbudget and way behind schedule -- not surprisingly, given the American penchant for awarding contracts to firms which produce the most optimistic tenders at the most optimistic prices -- and has in fact been the very item of hardware which has so hamstrung the US space programme, a bottomless pit into which NASA has been pouring the majority of the increasingly scarce funds which could perhaps have been devoted to other, more diverse projects. (So much of a sinkhole has it been and so much of

NASA's time has it occupied, in fact, that for the first time in the history of unmanned scientific missions there are no concrete preparations for the funding and developing of those which, out of the many feasibility studies that have been conducted, could be launched in the latter half of this decade -- nothing on line at all. As New Scientist pointed out in the editorial of its 20 November 1980 issue, "...the space science community is living on borrowed time, the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration has produced no follow-up ventures (to Voyagers 1 and 2).... We are, therefore, witnessing the death throes of space science as the life ebbs out of the US's space programme. Indeed, it is just possible that the American government will take the patient's life-support system away before brain-death is confirmed. There is a threat that funds for the ground station for Voyager, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory's mission control, may be cut off before the probe reaches Uranus. There is, therefore, the faint but real possibility that NASA will have two space probes in working order, sweeping past the two as yet unvisited gas giants with no decent facilities running back home to collect the data.... Jupiter and Saturn orbiters, probes into the atmospheres of the gas giants, and more Mars landers will remain the stuff of science fiction for a generation or more. You have seen the scientific exploration of the Solar System; remember it well to tell your children, for they'll see nothing like it." Moreover, there is no guarantee at all that the (hopefully) successful first flight of the Shuttle will coerce the US Congress into voting NASA the funds to establish a manned space station, and I find the attitude of those who assume that it will -- and, further, that it will rekindle wider public interest in spaceflight per se -- woefully deficient in logic.

Indeed, in terms of their ability for logical and analytical thought, these "space propagandists" are very often their own worst enemies. Particularly irrational in this regard are such SF writers and editors as James Baen, Ben Bova, Jerry Pournelle, Stanley Schmidt and G. Harry Stine, who in their pronouncements are constantly pointing to the fact that most of the technology required to build their cherished L-5 colonies and orbital solar power satellites and like that exists today, and thus betray a naivete which would be laughable if it weren't true and is all the more astonishing because it is -- what in Heaven's name leads them to assume that just because something can be done, it sooner or later will be? As a demonstration of their awareness of the political, social and economic factors that would have a bearing upon the situation, this line of thought is ignorant in the extreme; an act of faith that would embarrass even a ten year old.

Faith, it seems to me, is more or less what primarily motivates these people. Desperate not to see the cold reality to which they're dedicated revert to the SF dream it originally was, their arguments in its favour have abandoned logic, rationality and common sense for passion, special pleading and something closely akin to evangelical fervour -- a species of visionary preaching not made any more palatable by its blank refusal to acknowledge its own gaping flaws. The most commonly-used analogy, for instance, is that of the child and the cradle, with the child in question being the human race and the cradle the planet Earth (and the apron strings, of course, the gravity that keeps humanity tied to it, although no one has yet dreamed up a role for the mild green Fairy Liquid soapsuds), which has to be abandoned for a space environment in order that the said human race can achieve a greater and more fully rounded spiritual, emotional and intellectual maturity. As an analogy, this is, at least superficially, eminently plausible -- but when looked at in depth it collapses into a heap of ramshackle non-sequiturs. Why should a move out into space force this sort of maturity upon us, and how would it do so anyway? In short, where is the proof?

The obvious and automatic answer is that there isn't any (because, of course, faith isn't susceptible to such anyway), and nor can there ever be until after the move has been made (in which case it will take several generations for the proof to make itself apparent, if it ever does, which seems a rather vague method of experimentation). Pressed to justify -- even within their own terms of reference -- such claims, however, the pro-space enthusiasts sidestep the

issue, falling back on statements to the effect that we should colonise space because only by such action will national rivalries and international tension be swept away forever and the long-term survival of our species be thus assured....which simply raises yet more questions of the "where is the proof?" variety, and thus advances the argument not one whit. (The analogy most often employed to back up such statements concerns the inadvisability of putting all your eggs in one basket, but since we've all been occupying the same basket for the past four million years now this seems a remarkably inapt analogy -- never mind the fact that a space environment is inimically hostile anyway, and hence a considerably more fragile basket.) But then believers (of whatever stripe) always were immune to the processes of logic and rational argument -- the prime example of the breed probably being the UFOlogists, who always want their detractors to disprove their claims rather than submit to the standard scientific methodology of having to prove them for themselves -- and the sad fact is that without such dispassionate scrutiny the pro-space crowd don't stand a snowball's chance in hell of getting the funding they want. Financial backers want concrete, realisable results, not vague pie-in-the-sky promises.

Which is precisely why private enterprise is unlikely to step in where governments are currently fearing to tread. And then, too, the sheer cost of the ventures will ensure that private enterprise doesn't take the enthusiasts up on their offers -- the big multinational corporation with the sort of money the enthusiasts want became big multinational corporations by paying careful attention to their accountants, after all, and any accountant asked to hand over the two or three hundred billion dollars required to build a solar power satellite or a mass-driver on the Moon or an orbital factory or whatever and then wait some twenty or thirty years for the first dividend on his investment (assuming that there will actually be such dividends, which can never be guaranteed anyway) would probably faint dead away from the shock of laughing so hard. Only governments can budget for that sort of expenditure on that sort of timescale, because they're doing it for the national good and not for a profit -- and for all that a mass-driver on the Moon or the wholesale mining of the asteroids could result in a profit for all concerned, these same "concerned" will still have to wait a long time for it to materialise. In short, the real financial risks so far outweigh the potential financial gains that the funding will never be forthcoming.

But still the pro-space babble goes on, growing steadily shriller and more vociferous despite (or, more likely, because of) continual cutbacks in the real world of space funding, and proving ever more embarrassing. (I recently read a letter by Roy Tackett in Ed Connor's Moebius Trip 28 which contained the following wild declamation: "Either we grasp the stars or sink back into the darkness; which shall it be?" Are there really no other alternatives?) And not just on logical grounds, either, because throughout it there runs a streak of political conservatism so reactionary in tone that it properly belongs more to the nineteenth century than the twentieth: the dead hand of imperialist colonialism.

Such a jargon-phrase (as approved by Tass and Izvestia -- but for a real laff Radio Tirana is orders of magnitude better) has probably made you all sit up and pay attention at last, eh? I use it, however, not in any doctrinaire ideological sense but in its dictionary sense of a culturally superior force subjugating and incorporating into its infrastructure a culturally inferior one -- precisely the attitude, in fact, that has characterised the vast majority of the "space-going" SF written since Doc Smith invented the inertialess drive and sent his cardboard cutout heroes off to beat the shit out of those smelly old aliens who were denying man the fulfillment of his manifest destiny by their cluttering up of a galaxy that was rightfully his, and which was never more nakedly apparent than in the Astounding of John W. Campbell, a knee-jerk xenophobe through and through. It was in the supposed "Golden Age" of the forties, remember, that he and his writers gradually built up what was then regarded as the "~~consensus~~" view of man's future: that we would develop spaceflight, colonise the solar system, establish dominion over the nearer stars, spread throughout the galaxy, raise up an empire of awesome

power and might, collapse into barbarism, but eventually struggle back up to spend the long golden afternoon of our species basking in the peace and contentment of our hard-won maturity -- an appealing vision, not least because it has heavily influenced the outlook of subsequent generations of American SF writers (which still doesn't justify its labelling as "modern SF", because the period in which it came to prominence lies some thirty to forty years in the past) and also because it cleaved reasonably true to the rationale of SF as a literature which demonstrated the triumph of man over his environment through his use of technology. (Although this is a specifically American rationale; British SF, which didn't really gain its independence until the sixties, has a much more technophobic and pessimistic outlook, contending that man's mastery of his environment via his technological supremacy may not always be for the best, and thus cleaving truer to the Promethean motif of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, from which the literature really stems in the first place (on which basis one could conceivably build a tongue-in-cheek case for the "superiority" of British SF over its American counterpart!) -- not to mention the Promethean nature of modern science itself.)

Developments in SF since this consensus view was first raised up (the "evolutionary" influence of Horace Gold with Galaxy and of Boucher and McComas with F & SF -- although, looked at in retrospect, Galaxy would appear to represent not so much an evolutionary step as an aberration, preaching an attitude of excessive and rather anti-scientific gloom directly counter to Campbell's prognosis of SF as a literature that represented the social enlightenment that science would bring about -- and the later "revolutionary" impact of Ellison and Moorcock -- the former wishing mainly to do down the tabus and restrictions that were hamstringing the genre's potential and the latter wishing to break down the generic walls altogether -- which allowed for the promulgation of different points of view and thus widened the universe of discourse) have somewhat muted its influence and reduced its prominence, but it's still around, codified now into the specific future histories of Poul Anderson and Larry Niven, which -- like the consensus view itself -- take their cue from what might be termed "the challenge of the frontier": the idea that a man is somehow not a man unless he's working out at the limits of his endurance, taming the rugged wilderness and introducing into it the benefits of civilization. It goes without saying that this is a particularly American obsession, stemming directly from their own history -- and in this context it's obvious that the pro-space enthusiasts' talk of space as "the final frontier" is merely an extension of this historical drive into a new environment: with nowhere left at home to conquer and colonise, what more "natural" than to look for somewhere new?

Such is what fuels most of the current propaganda -- particularly that issued by the L-5 Society, which objected to the UN Moon Treaty on the grounds that it would interfere with America's "right to pioneer space"....dear God in Heaven, what incredible (and incredibly arrogantly assumed) "right" is this? -- and it can hardly be coincidence that the SF editors and writers who push it most are those who spent their youth reading (not at the time it was published, but later, when it had acquired so-called "classic" status) the SF of Astounding's "Golden Age", absorbing the "wisdom" of the consensus view and watching its early stages transmuted into reality via the medium of their TV screens. It is, therefore, not just the "old SF dream" of spaceflight that they wish to make real but the consensus view itself -- imperialist colonialism rampant for ever and ever amen.

(Repellent though this is, however, I'm not particularly surprised by it, in the main because the level of political and economic thought displayed by most of the major SF writers of this century has always been rather backward. Admittedly, I'm not great shakes at modern political philosophy, but one needs no schooling in such to spot the absurdity of the overtly feudal premises on which so many interstellar empires have been based -- and given the vast distances involved, any sort of hegemony or association seems vanishingly unlikely anyway.)

The pro-space enthusiasts usually manage to confuse or obscure this issue with talk of the new "freedoms" they'll find out on their new frontier, in particular the freedom to construct newer and more experimental forms of social organisation and thus redirect their lives towards more "meaningful" and more "fulfilling" goals. I'll grant that, removed from the political, economic and social constraints which govern life here on Earth, the space colonists may well find themselves with the ability to do just that, but this whole line of argument strikes me as nothing more than a tired reworking of the outdated hippie dream (macrobiotic rice, Zen consciousness and all, and not helped by the space artists' tendency to depict the inside of every L-5 colony as a glorifiedly idyllic San Francisco suburb), spiced up with a bit of post-Schumacher communalism to make it look more intellectually defensible. But defensible it is not, for in this respect it is but wish-fulfillment escapism; a technologically more sophisticated version of the brain-drugged thrill-a-minute stuff you can find between the covers of thud-and-blunder spy melodramas, Harold Robbins sexcess epics and similar bestsellerish drivel, but nevertheless indicative of a wish not to confront and solve the enormous problems that now face us but to run away from them altogether. To put it as bluntly and as unambiguously as possible: they don't give a shit about anyone but themselves, and all their talk of solving the world's troubles via the construction of a dozen L-5 colonies or whatever is merely a cover for their cynically self-centred wish to close themselves up in the womb-like safety of their giant toothpaste tubes in the sky while the rest of the world goes to hell in a handbasket.

A pretty sweeping condemnation, I'll admit, but I have a problem in that, despite the (or so I trust) logic and rationality of the foregoing, I'd really like to believe in it all myself. For all my belief in SF as a symbolic literature with a mythopoeic function, I still respond in some unquantifiable, almost mystic way to the old (American) SF dream of spaceflight -- a dream which arises from the treatment of SF as a somehow realistic medium with a societally awakening function: a perception completely alien to my current, more adult and more thoughtful views but to which I nevertheless continue to emotionally respond because it's the perception on which I grew up. I believed in the Apollo Moon missions because at the time they seemed to be leading somewhere and in my naive adolescent way I just knew that we'd have a settlement on the Moon by the end of the century and all would be roses for ever after. But the euphoric sense of achievement that told us "Next stop -- Mars!" when our eyes misted over at the pulse-fluttering words "Houston, this is Tranquillity Base. The Eagle has landed" was clearly misplaced; certainly, there can be few among us who didn't feel some indefinable but overwhelming sense of loss when Apollo 17 splashed down in the Pacific and effectively called finis to the great adventure. Because an adventure it was, a madcap one-off scheme with no future; the Space Age is over, for now and for ever, in the same way that the Western world's long-standing techno-cultural supremacy is now stumbling towards its end. The sixties, stripped of their nostalgic glow, emerge as but our frantic, last-minute scrambling to find some way out of our dilemma, and to no effect; like all civilisations, ours is now passing to make way for another, and no one can say that, in our five hundred year domination of the planet, we haven't had a good run for our money.

Born with the Renaissance, died with the Arab oil embargo which followed the Yom Kippur War in 1973....it seems more fitting, a more realistic response to the world, that we learn to live and cope with this than to deaden our reason with hopeless dreams of an era that recent history has ensured can never be.

"I didn't respond to the first issue of Napalm In The Morning because I hadn't seen Apocalypse Now. I've put off responding to the second issue because I haven't seen Kramer Vs. Kramer. Perhaps in the third issue you'll discuss another movie I haven't seen." -- quote from a letter from Gary Deindorfer, an extract from which appears in the letter column:

Just had to prove you wrong there, Gary....

THE DELTA AT SUNSET

Fewer letters than last time, which might or might not prove something and probably something that we already know anyway -- such as the fact that Christmas and its attendant hoo-ha induces vast apathy and intellectual blight. Still, the response this time is rather more varied, although Graham Ashley had a few words to say about that:

"The first Napalm certainly seems to have engendered a fair amount of interesting comment about both the film Apocalypse Now and the actuality of the Vietnam War, and to this end I find your off-hand comment that you received too many loes about your fanzine's subject-matter somewhat derogatory. Most of your letter writers, especially the Americans, held very strong and valid views, and stated them well; most fan writers would be most happy with such a response to their work.

"Perhaps your area of complaint lies in the fact that all but one of these letters were in a similar vein (the exception, from Chris Priest, I found merely mundane). Your DHSS piece might change all that. It was certainly quite interesting in itself, but unfortunately it doesn't really kindle any response in me."

And to prove it he then went on to write about something else entirely (which surfaces later). But in fact Apocalypse Now and the Vietnam War weren't my subject-matter at all, they were just the pegs on which the main topic was hung -- a topic to which only Chris addressed himself. Not, I suppose, that it really matters much, because I was grateful to receive any letters at all. As to whether I was offhandedly derogatory in my response to them is a moot point; certainly I wasn't doing it consciously, and if anyone did feel offended by what I said then....well, Gary Deindorfer gives me some support in his letter, which we'll get to in due course; in the meantime, here's a brief helicopter story from Tony Berry (you didn't think I'd want to lose touch with my roots now, did you?):

Tony Berry
567 Holyhead Road
Coventry
West Midlands
CV5 8HW

"I must say that I've gone off choppers a little since I went on holiday to Scandinavia while you lot were enjoying Seacoh 79. No sooner had the return ferry left Gothenburg than the imbecile captain ran the fucking thing aground and we all had to be airlifted off by the Swedish Navy and Coastguard. Have you ever tried standing for five minutes under a twin-engined helicopter hovering 15 feet above your head, waiting for some guy (probably called Olaf Svenson or something equally Nordic) to shove a harness over your head and winch you up? I reckon I was 3 inches shorter afterwards.

"But it's the only way to fly, boss."

*****Well (coff, shuffle, mumble), you'll doubtless collapse with amazement when I tell you this, but I've never actually flown in a helicopter at all. Marvellous confession to make, eh? One day I will, though. Just you wait....and once I have, my fascination with them will likely disappear entirely, to be replaced by something more....er -- healthy?

Rosemary Pardoe
11B Cote Lea Square
Southgate
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 2SA

"So Avedon Carol thinks there are few pretty men in fandom, does she? Reminds me of Ethel Lindsay's comment, a couple of years ago, that Gerry Webb was the only good-looking man in British fandom (a lady of strange tastes is Ethel). Avedon may be right about American fandom -- thinking back over the couple of holidays I've spent meeting American fans I can only remember two or three whom I fancied. British fandom, on the other hand, seems to be a veritable haven of pretty men, the percentage being a great deal higher than in, say, a representative sample of "the man in the street".

"At which point I think I'd better stop before I'm tempted to write out a list of "Fans I Have Fancied"!"

*****Damn! And just as it was getting interesting, too! Rosemary also remarked that if she had a job like mine she'd "very quickly make up (her) mind that the world was entirely populated by oretins"; at the moment she remains undecided. More on my job later; here's Marc Ortlieb with something else:

Marc Ortlieb
70 Hamblynn Road
Elizabeth Downs
S.A. 5113
Australia

"I must strongly second your dedication ((of Napalm 2)). Sandy Denny was one of my favourite female vocalists, and I was lucky enough to see her once with Fairport Convention. Half-pissed, she could outsing most others; the version of "Tam Lin" was magic. There was talk of a memorial album featuring some unreleased material, but I've heard nothing more about since and I guess, what with Lennon's death, most of the memorial albums will be of him. Still, I have four of Sandy's solo albums: North Star Grassman And The Ravens, Like An Old-Fashioned Waltz, Sandy and Rendezvous; do you know of any others? (Local fan Paul Stokes has a live recording on a German pressing, but I don't know anything more about it other than that the material seems largely similar to that on The Bunch album and that he gloats every time he mentions it.)

"Mumble. Can't think of anything to say about the lettercol, since most of it refers to a film I consciously avoided. I dislike war movies in general, though I have a private preference for those that don't show any blood. I don't want to know about Vietnam, having avoided a fully paid tour of the place by the skin of my student deferment and the election of Gough Whitlam. But I don't mind reading about war; indeed, I found Joe Haldeman's War Year absolutely fascinating, but I tend to get sucked into movies. I'm probably the only SF fan in Adelaide who didn't see Alien -- why go to see a movie when you know you're going to spend most of it cowering under the seat? I must be the last of the squeamish fans."

*****That last sentence was in fact taken from another, previous letter of Marc's, about something else entirely (I don't half overuse that phrase), but it seemed to fit...the only other Sandy Denny albums of which I'm aware are Fotheringay, recorded by her short-lived post-Fairport group of the same name, and Sandy Denny, her very first album, recorded back in 1966 or thereabouts and re-released about a year after her death. It may have been a substitute for the proposed memorial album; but if so, it's now disappeared again, as has Fotheringay...Marc went on to say that, as far as GUKF was concerned, I have "a slight advantage over Malcolm Edwards because the name Malcolm has unpleasant connotations for most fans, who are good rightecus Labour voters", which sounds reassuring -- although as I write the voting deadline is just under a fortnight away, and keeping me awake at nights(!). (Don't forget to vote, y'all!) Here's a little more about Australian politics:

Richard Thulder
Yance Agricultural
Research Centre
Yanco...
N.S.W. 2703
Australia

"It was obviously valuable for your American correspondents to point out the difference in the way the Vietnam War was perceived in that country, where the possibility of involvement by either yourself or a member of your family was very real, in contradistinction to the situation in your own country, where the whole protest movement would have been somewhat of an academic exercise. In Australia we had an intermediate situation. Proportionately speaking, fewer of our countrymen were involved in the war, so that for many the protest movement, characterised mainly by the misnamed Moratoria, was an equally intellectual exercise. I was not involved personally in the protest movement. Firstly, I was somewhat fatalistic about the prospect of being called up. Secondly, my main concern at the time was getting through the early years of my university education. Thirdly, I was convinced that the protests were, if anything, counterproductive, in that they would have alienated the bulk of the voting public. To this day I remain convinced of the last point: the reason for the conservative government's fall in 1972 was not the result of the protest movement but its tactical error in giving the vote to the 18-year-olds, who were in the front of the firing line for the national service ballot (the nation we were serving being the USA). The rest is history."

Gary Deindorfer
447 Bellevue Ave 9-B
Trenton
NJ 08618
USA

"You're right in your reply to Joyce Scribner -- she was closer to Vietnam than you, but that doesn't make her view any more "correct" than yours. Nor any less "correct", either. But then I've never had any direct experience of war: I've never been in any branch of the armed forces and

have seen it only at secondhand, in movies, books, magazines newspapers and on television. I was anti-Vietnam, but only in a desultory way; I went to some of the anti-war marches and all that sort of thing as much because my friends were doing so as otherwise.

"It's only years after Vietnam that certain things about this country have come clear to me. I'll give you an example: there have been some made-for-TV movies on the tube in the last few years which have presented American soldiers in a favourable light, as good old Amurrican boys doing their part overseas -- nothing that questions the morality, or lack of it, of the war, nothing about the Vietnamese themselves, nothing about the havoc Our Boys sometimes caused to the lives of the people they stumbled upon. Worse; there was even a very shortlived attempt at a sitcom about Vietnam that oozed onto the tube for a few weeks. I didn't watch it, and wouldn't have, but I got the impression that it showed a bunch of regular American guys and gals doing their thing on a newspaper for American servicemen, and all the "cute" adventures they had.

"Pukeworthy. It just shows how the mass media in this country of mine have a genius for justifying anything after the fact. If, after World War II, West Germany had had the same, it would have run shows about the Nazi concentration camps, letting on what good clean fun they were and how the nice German boys were just doing their jobs and following orders.

"It was interesting, though, to see how the US mass media manipulated the Iran hostage thing. From the start they played it up as something to get patriotic about, something to be ready to march off to war over. It seemed so ridiculous, to try and bring back that jingoistic flag-waving shit; eventually the banality of it all really got to me and I began making fun of the whole mess to friends and such. Right wing nonsense.

"Now that Raygun's become President, it will be an amusing thing to see how his Far Right fans start to be disappointed in him as (I predict) he moves to more middle-of-the-road positions -- just as Carter turned out to be more conservative than his liberal backers thought he would be, so I think Raygun will turn out more moderate than his conservative backers think he will be. I don't like the bastard myself. I can't help wondering how long it will be before the Trilateral Commission tries to get rid of him and install their hired flunky, George Bush, in his place. Bush, ex-CIA head. Then we'll have the ex-head of the most powerful spy agency in the world as US President, which sounds to me like a scenario for a takeover of this country by a spy agency/military dictatorship.

"But probably not; the US will just keep muddling along in all its sloppy mass media-dominated laziness."

*****Once upon a time, back in its early days, it seemed as though television might have the power to remake the world; that, through its potential for instant mass communication, it would draw everyone together into one all-embracing community, sharing the same values, the same beliefs, the same high standard of living -- Marshall McLuhan's "global village", in fact, and although many of his ideas have now been discredited it's interesting to note how some of his ideas about TV were born out by a recent study which showed that the black civil rights movement in America in the sixties was given its initial impetus not by political idealism but by TV commercials which, demonstrating the material joys of white life, prompted the blacks to wonder why they couldn't have some of the same goods too. But the initial impact of television has long since worn off and now, instead of being used as a means to change the world, it's used as a means of preserving the status quo, trivialising or sanitising out of existence any threat to the established order. The worst offenders in this regard are the news bulletins; next time you watch one, look carefully at their structure, at the way they present their information, at how each item of major importance is sandwiched between two of monumental banality, thereby reducing its impact, at the dapper, chirpy newsreaders with their bright expressions and their sprayed-on smiles, telling you that everything's fine, there's nothing to worry about, mummy is looking after you. And not only TV news bulletins, either; in an article in The Guardian about a month ago, Peter Watkins (director of The War Game) pointed to the safe, undisturbing way in which Leaderene Maggie's decision to buy the Trident missile was presented by the newspapers, given a mere half-column along-

side "bigger" stories about strikes at British Leyland and jewel robberies in Hatton Garden, all topped by a picture of the smiling Queen Mother celebrating her eightieth birthday, the whole designed to present the decision as just a normal part of ordinary everyday life and nothing to worry about at all. And then look at us, drugged into placidly accepting it all without even noticing it....as Jimmy Robertson remarked in conversation with me at Novacon 10, if you don't stand up against this sort of thing you're effectively contributing to it, and I can't agree more.

Amazingly coincidentally (although no one will believe me, but I had final-drafted "The End Of The Dream" before his letter arrived), Gary quoted part of a radio interview with John Lennon in which Lennon made specific reference to the macho war mentality of movies like Star Trek and the imperialist colonial attitudes they displayed --and while it may not be a particularly original remark it will, coming from him, carry more weight than a literary critic could give it. Jim Meadows III also mentioned Star Trek, but more favourably, pointing out that those who dumped most vociferously upon it usually ignored entirely that even bigger turkey, The Black Hole; but since I don't particularly want to talk about movies at the moment, I'm going to change the subject yet again. Here's the earlier-mentioned "something else entirely" from Graham Ashley:

Graham Ashley
86 St James Road
Mitcham
Surrey
CR4 2DB

"I'm actually writing this at the Forth Bridges Lodge Hotel in Scotland, which lies on the southern bank of the River Forth, framed by the road bridge to the west and the railway bridge to the east. The view from my bedroom window in the morning is quite literally spectacular. Now, in the darkness, only the road bridge is visible, lit up

by its navigation lights and the movement of the car headlights coming over the gentle curve of its suspended superstructure. Quite idyllic, you might think, and I suppose you're right, but what bothers me is why so many people should choose this particular bridge to commit suicide from. Even supposedly responsible people: recently a police sergeant returning home pulled his car up on the bridge, got out and jumped.

"Obviously height is a factor; the Golden Gate bridge springs immediately to mind, but having been up there I think there's more to it than just physics.

"A colleague who I'm working with in Scotland and myself had already crossed the bridge early one morning, just as the heavy commuter traffic was beginning to make it vibrate with its weight, when it struck me that one would need to be really desperate to jump from it. The height above the water is immense, and in my eyes the suicide should receive a medal just for his courage in attempting the feat.

"Several days later, however, I crossed the bridge again, but this time at eight o'clock at night, thinking that the long walk (it takes at least thirty minutes to cross the bridge in its entirety) would be a good exercise after a very heavy evening meal. I was surprised to find that in the dark the bridge becomes a totally different world, a microcosm where the pedestrian is very much alone despite the continuous stream of motor traffic passing (let's face it, only a loony would be out on a bloody cold and windy bridge in the pitch dark!). At the bridge's central, and highest, point I couldn't even see the water below since it was hidden by the darkness. It was then I decided that jumping from it wouldn't be that difficult if one was really desperate; at that time of night you could take as long as you liked and not a soul would disturb you (the cars don't really intrude at all). The darkness provides a high degree of anonymity for this grossly personal act and, of course, you leave behind you one of the largest gravestones in existence.

"Pretty neat, eh? Actually, I would probably lack the necessary courage to jump from the darkened bridge even if I was that desperate; I can't put my head over a full washbasin without feeling slightly sick inside. I much prefer the method used by the old lady who committed suicide whilst I was there: she simply waded into the river and disappeared.

"God, all this is depressing. How about making the next issue of Napalm an all-suicide issue?"

*****Sorry to disappoint you, but...well, actually, one of the subjects I promised myself that I'd eventually write about when I started Napalm was

this house, the people who live in it, and the goings-on in St George's Square generally; but instead I wrote it all up as "The Perils Of Pinlico" for Marc Ortlieb's Q36E to publicise my GUFF candidacy, including mention of the suicide attempt that took place a few doors down in November 1980: a girl standing out on a narrow third floor window ledge, stark naked on a freezing night, threatening to jump, who was eventually talked back inside by the police and the fire brigade. Unlike a suicide on the Forth Road Bridge, however, she had an audience, doubtless attracted as much by the glimpses of nipple and pubic hair thus afforded as by the possibility of her death.

Still, your letter will doubtless provoke as much comment as Harry Warner's in the previous issue; mere days after it had been distributed, I began overhearing conversations in which people discussed with amazement his revelations of the "faking" of American Civil War photographs -- but without remembering where they'd read it! (Squeezed out of my own fanzine by the letter-writers, yet!) And, apropos your remarks about my DHSS piece in the extract that led off the letter column, I thought I wasn't going to get any response to the main subject at all....which, as it turned out, was completely inaccurate:

Terry Jeeves
230 Bannardale Road
Sheffield
S11 9FE

"Enjoyed your memoirs of the interviews, especially of the woman who came (un)dressed to kill. In your shoes, I'd have led her on just as far as I dare legally go before turning her down. Eric Bentcliffe and I played a similar game in the red light district in Belgium way back in 1957 (we were on our way to the London Worldcon, believe it or not) and we had an evening entertainment of wandering past the houses of the madams. They would sit half-dressed in their windows, exhibiting their wares; we would wander past, slow down and look furtively this way and that. Immediately, the ladies of the night would begin to display even more of their wares in the attempt to inveigle us into their mansions. As they flagged, we would draw out our wallets and apparently count up how much cash we had. Eventually, the women caught on, and we would move along to the next vantage point to repeat the business. It made quite an entertaining way of passing the post-dinner half hour."

*****Well, maybe it wasn't about my work, but it was at least inspired by it -- as was the following:

Walter Williams
807 13th SW
Albuquerque
NM 87102
USA

"It so happens that in one of my former incarnations I earned my beans and tortillas as a court reporter/transcriptionist. Most of the cases I had to describe had to do with a disease called Black Lung.

"This is an affliction of coal miners and other people who work in coal fields and coal cellars. It usually takes 20-30 years to make itself apparent, and then manifests itself in various unpleasant ways, usually in reduced breathing capacity, coughing, deterioration of the lung tissue, and in weakness that can result in other diseases which would normally be only a nuisance becoming deadly; a cold can turn into pneumonia very easily, and the reduction in breathing capacity frequently leads to strains on the heart. A lot of Black Lung sufferers end up dying of heart attacks.

"Mine workers who can prove they have Black Lung are qualified under US law for disability benefits, but they have to meet fairly strict requirements. Most of the hearings I was required to transcribe involved mine workers, or coal workers, trying to get their benefits; most of them, approximately two thirds, didn't have Black Lung and were trying to cheer the government out of the money. Sometimes it was quite obvious; sometimes they even said it out loud in front of the judge.

"The fact that there were so many fraudulent claims made the government attorneys very aggressive in dealing with all the cases; they'd badger witnesses and try to prove that the miners weren't miners at all, or suffered lung problems because they were smokers, or had worked as acetylene welders, or with asbestos insulation, or had worked not in mine but with the transport of coal -- people who transported coal "were not covered by the meaning of the act" -- or had worked in other kinds of mining that might have caused impairment. The government attorneys were assisted in their efforts by the fact that a lot of

these people were fairly elderly and had worked in "outlaw" or "renegade" mines during the 1920s and 30s -- that is, mines which either didn't belong to the union, or didn't pay Social Security tax, or both. There was, therefore, no record anywhere of these guys having ever worked in the mines; instead they had to rely on affidavits from their co-workers, and it's difficult to find co-workers you haven't seen for sixty years.

"Some were also seasonal employees, working only in the winter when the demand for coal was high and doing other jobs in the summer. The law specifies "full time" workers, and though these guys were probably working 16 hours per day in the winter, and only a few hours if at all in the summer, which probably averages out to full time over the long haul, the government attorneys were rarely prepared to concede the point.

"Plus, a good many had had welding jobs, or worked with asbestos during the war, or smoked three packs of cigarettes a day for the last fifty years, and while the tests the government demanded gave fairly conclusive evidence of lung impairment they gave no clue as to its cause. I never heard a verdict, because the verdicts in these hearings were always given after the typed transcript was turned into the judge, so I have no idea how strict or lenient the judges were when interpreting the Act -- and I've always wondered.

"Perhaps the most pathetic cases were the widows, whose husbands had died of Black Lung and were trying to collect the benefits themselves. Usually the death certificate read, simply, heart attack. Very few of the widows could afford to transport a doctor from Roswell or wherever to Albuquerque for the hearing, so the doctor could explain he didn't give an autopsy and just wrote out the most likely cause with no idea whether the heart attack was caused by complications or not. I never knew how those turned out, either, but they were pretty gruesome hearings. Still, it wasn't within professional ethics to transcribe things like "Reporter weeps in sympathy"; our main job was to make the judge look good, like adding a bit where he forgot to formally accept the evidence or whatever, and correcting his grammar; everyone else got transcribed verbatim. It was the judge's job, after all, to pick the court reporters from the competitions."

*****Why it is that, whenever a government's lawmakers institute a benefit for something or other, its bureaucracy then seems to take it upon itself to obstruct the payment of those benefits? The UK's most disgraceful recent example of this concerns the decision by a group of senior civil servants to withhold back-payments of service pension to ex-officers who'd fought in the war, and to sidetrack all enquiries by said ex-officers about same. Their punishment, when they were found out, was a mild rebuke by the Ombudsman.... Never mind the current campaign to stamp out fraud and abuse by claimants of social security benefits, which will probably end up costing more than the benefits themselves and might actually be justifiable if the government were to devote an equal amount of time to telling people in need about the benefits they can claim. Our priorities have been skewed somewhere in the recesses of the system, that's for sure.

Jim Meadows III
P.O. Box 1227
Pekin
IL 61554
USA

"I found your account of life in the Legal Aid section fascinating. And bitter. I can see you now, sitting behind your tattered metal desk, one of many in the office, wearing your jeans, long hair and smarmy smile, listening to whining applicants telling you lies about their finances. You make it sound awful, even worse than my job."

"You do seem to have something in common with Jeff Suter, though, in that you both manage to find the worst to say about a situation. Your worst and his worst come from different ends of the table, but you're both pretty negative. One never sees pieces on subjects like these that look for the sunny sides. I'm trying to imagine a witty, insightful fanzine article on the lighter moments at Legal Aid, the interesting characters, the inner strengths you discover in your co-workers and the applicants, the satisfaction and challenge you find in your work and your hopes of expanding your abilities on the job....

"Nope. Can't do it. Might as well stay Kafkaesque."

*****But bureaucracy is a Kafkaesque nightmare anyway....isn't it? At least, that's what David Redd would appear to suggest:

David Redd
 "Kensington"
 9 Queensway
 Haverfordwest
 Dyfed

"The description of your work gives me goosepimples, especially the last paragraph on page 3 about the "verification of every item of income and expenditure". This to me sounds like a trial run for the police state, the ones who can afford the best accountants being best off under the present system, and even if as many people "try it on"

I still don't like it. Five interviews per officer per week? You mean one day's salary for you plus government overheads....well, that's about £50 out of my taxes for checking each case. If the system is awkward to administer, can't it be changed? Not only awkward to administer, but a real strain for the people involved, you say towards the end. Isn't there a better way, or is this inevitable in a free society?

"I hope somebody with more time than I really lets rip into the implications of what you're doing....although I have to remind myself that almost everywhere else in the world (including parts of the UK) things are much worse."

Greg Hills
 P.O. Bx 11205
 Wellington
 New Zealand

"I was fascinated by your spiel about your job and the people you have to be nice to in it. It gives me an insight into and explanation of why you let yourself go in fandom. At present ((his contract has expired since he wrote)) I'm employed by the NZ Post Office in a position

which entails a lot of public contact via phone. Apart from the fact that I also have to contend with people who speak inaudibly, or with incredibly thick accents, or who feel that they have to hold the phone with their fingers over the mouthpiece, it's quite surprising how close the resemblances are.

"It also confirms my personal philosophy of TANJ ("There Ain't No Justice"), because the nice subscribers, those whom I would really like to help, get screwed by the system while the idiots with pull get uptight, go to Higher Authority, and get service before the rest. There really must exist a place, somewhere, where the quiet, polite, patient customers get preference over the noisy, antagonistic ones. Some people prefer the latter customers, and truly the human race wouldn't be where it is today with the argumentative, egocentric person; but the quieter ones make better neighbours."

Chris Morgan
 39 Hollybrow
 Selly Oak
 Birmingham
 B29 4LX

"I had, on occasion, wondered exactly what it was that you occupied your time with in between fannish activities. An interesting job, you make it sound, despite the thick volumes of rules and codes. Why is it that everyone else's job seems so much more fascinating than the one I had at British Leyland until a few years ago? Of course, the answer

includes the "grass is greener" syndrome, but I can see a couple of other reasons, one being that I wasn't dealing with a never-ending stream of members of the public but with pieces of paper. And while I will admit to preferring pieces of paper to the public at large, one's reminiscences of the former are likely to be somewhat less fascinating than of the latter. But that isn't a particularly good reason; I did get to meet a variety of people through my job, and some of them were peculiar characters about whom much could be written. No, the major reason why your job sounds so much more interesting than mine ever did is the same reason why I never wrote about it, and also the reason why I've never put out a personalzine like Napalm; it's that I'm not prepared to bear my soul in public. It's not that I can't write about my hopes and fears, triumphs and failings, but that I'm not prepared to do so for more than one person at a time. Even when producing something as mundane as the BSFG Newsletter I cannot avoid being consciously conscious of my audience. I daresay that quite a lot of me -- my attitudes and prejudices -- goes into some of my book reviews, yet somehow that doesn't seem quite so revealing, partly because I'm dealing with nice, safe things (pieces of paper again) and partly because I believe that almost nobody bothers to read fanzine book reviews anyway."

****For both our sakes, you'd better hope that your last remark isn't so, otherwise we'll soon find ourselves out of a job (never mind all those free review copies!). In actual fact, though, I didn't think that I'd been that revealing about myself -- at least, not in the version that finally saw print; the earlier drafts were so clogged with soul-baring angst that they would have made a Californian group therapy session look positively re-

strained -- but in his letter John Fairey chided me, quite accurately, for my excess of whining, pointing that the frustrations I experienced were by no means unique to it. I'd quote a bit of it, and bits from other letters, but I'm running out of room; this will cost me a fortune in postage as it is (but then what fanzine doesn't these days?), so this will have to be the last:

Steven Green "Funny you should mention the legal and loophole over
11 Fox Green Crescent libel and slander; it's one of the sides of British
Acocks Green "justice" that I find most contemptible, a prime example
Birmingham of cheque book expediency -- if you can't afford to win,
B27 7SD then you won't. The situation is particularly worrying
 for journalists; most of us bend, if not break, the rules
every day or our lives, and even if the newspaper concerned decides to back you
up in the courts you can still be sued as an individual -- as you probably know,
even the simple act of passing copy over to the sub counts as publication, as
does his handing it on to the editor, and so on. So much for the rights of the
individual...."

"Well, Gary Mattingly was depressingly right about the Raygun victory; it was an uphill battle persuading myself to get out of bed the morning after the election. I mean, if you're going to get blasted to atoms by a geriatric McCarthy clone, you might as well stay horizontal and comfortable. I've been trying to come up with Raygun jokes ever since, but I have a sneaking suspicion that the biggest joke of all just took up residence in Pennsylvania Avenue...."

"Still, if Ronnie has his way, a lot more people will be able to experience the numbing totality of war, maybe even ride a few helicopters -- for the first few days, at least...."

And thus, by dint of clever editing, we wind up (almost) back where we started... well, actually, I don't think it is all that clever; I'm less happy with the structure of this letter column than I was with the previous one, but then that's my problem. In the meantime, here's the WAHFs: Arnold Akien, Harry Andruschak, Michael Ashley, Bill Carlin, Avedon Carol, John Fairey, Rune Forsgren, William Goodall, Roelof Goudrijsen, Dave Haden, Julian Headlong, Ken Mann ("Enjoyed the rictures"), Mickey Poland (who sent a newspaper clipping to the effect that the world's first helicopter was built in Scotland in 1905, "but it was 1924 before anyone worked out a way of making the machines fly forward"), Rochelle Reynolds and Alan Dorey, whose letter will be held over until Napalm 4 (due in time for Easter) because it will mesh nicely with the proposed subject-matter of same. Also in that issue: letters from you lot, more banal commentary about the state of the world, and something that might once have resembled a joke. The biggest joke of the moment (page Steven Green) is second-guessing the Hugo nominees; I've a depressing suspicion that the only two novels worth the award, Michael Bishop's Transfigurations and Greg Benford's Timescape, will be ignored in favour of a slate consisting of such rubbish as The Magic Labyrinth, The Number Of The Beast, and Ringworld Engineers, plus the slightly more acceptable Lord Valentine's Castle and The Snow Queen. I think I know who the winner will be, too, but I'm holding that prediction back until next time....don't want to stick my neck out too far, eh wot?

This was Napalm In The Morning 3
from Joseph Nicholas, Room 9,
94 St George's Square,
Pimlico, London SW1Y 3QY,
United Kingdom