

# NAPALM in the MORNING

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Here it is at last -- the genuine fourth issue of this triffically triffic fanzine by familiar BSFA hate-figure and all-round logorrhea-merchant Joseph Nicholas from his usual abode of Room 9, 94 St George's Square, Pimlico, London SW1Y 3QY, United Kingdom, and on a brand new typewriter to boot. Well, it was about time....

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## TOO MUCH OF NOTHING

Those of you who've been with me since the first issue (about a year ago now....my God, does that make this one the annish? Gosh, wow, sense of let down) and can actually remember back that far (although I can't imagine why you'd want to) will recall that I therein voiced various pious reproofs about the standards of article-writing as practiced in most fanzines: that they had little in the way of any formal structure and were more often a series of padded anecdotes vaguely related to some nebulous central concept rather than coherent, rationalised arguments either for or against something. And, having propounded such a sweepingly generalised condemnation, I then went on to condemn myself as well by announcing that this fanzine had been conceived for the express purpose of allowing me to retail similar material myself, and never mind all that tediously conventional stuff about having a beginning, a middle and an end. Nobody actually protested at this but then there was probably no need for them to do so, since each of the first three issues had a main central article, and Napalm's avowed "philosophy" hence fell into abeyance. Until now.

I tried (honest) to write a main central article for this issue, as promised in the concluding paragraphs of the previous one, but....well, the material wouldn't gel, the opposing viewpoints couldn't be reconciled, and I eventually lost interest in the redrafting that would have been necessary to make it worth publishing. If inspiration strikes, it may put in an appearance at some suitable future date, but for now you'll have to put up with this idiosyncratic collection of rambles and bits (more resembling an apazine than anything else, and hence guaranteed to annoy D. West), flung together at the last minute because it's time I produced another issue and because I need something to take to Australia with me on my GUFF trip (the commencement of which is, as I write, a mere four days away; and with that looming large in my mind -- come to that, it's been more or less uppermost in my thoughts since I heard that I'd won -- it's obviously a bit difficult for me to concentrate my full attention on anything else, at least for any extended period of time).

And I will write a trip report. I promise. On my grand-aunt's grave, if you like, since she's just died of a stroke.

THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER

Before anything else happens, however, let's run a late letter on Napalm 2 (if only to separate it from her comments on Napalm 3, otherwise it might seem as though she's taken over or something):

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"I admit I did wonder what you do for a living. So it's the DHSS -- known down our way, for reasons that escape me, as Do Have Some Sense. Lord, what memories that does bring back.... I did two years in the Valuation office down here in Bournemouth (and a couple of years in the Department of the Environment, a long time ago, but that's another story), it being another department

that's civil service by default, since they couldn't think of anything else to do with it. As with yours, the job -- at the level I practiced it -- involves a great deal of contact with the public: going out and measuring buildings, noting amenities, etc., for the purpose of putting a rateable value on them. We went out to new buildings, council houses, shops, and (since someone had the bright idea that our records needed updating) every domestic property in Poole and Bournemouth.... Oh God, the memory is with me yet. But it was interesting, for all its faults, for gaining me legal access to all kinds of homes and businesses and for getting me into conversation with weird people. There was the house with 45 tanks of tropical fish....a green sub-aqueous light pervaded the place, and the air-pumps sounded constant as heartbeats; that was eerie. The lesbian couple, the lady from California, the (I think) commune....people are strange and, as you say, none to fond of government officials. Though I have to say that most were amiable, inviting me in for cups of tea and coffee (the first requirement for the job being a large bladder capacity, as there are no public toilets in Bournemouth). The whiners, the threateners, the evaders: they were there. Only once did I have a dog set on me. It declined to bite. Although I was once bitten by -- ah, you won't believe it, but it's true -- a cross-eyed Siamese cat....

"The main trouble with the job being, of course, not the three days spent doing field-work -- wading through a flooded building site in the teeth of an easterly gale, or wandering the country lanes (no bus service) in the ice and snow -- but the two days back in the office. It's true you develop a strange attitude to survive. Rules and codes and precedents are inflexible, and the rating system has been bugged about with so much since its inception that it's unworkable. People, especially those who question the system -- are regarded as extraneous intrusions. I remember pensioners who quite genuinely needed rebates, and who had to play a round-the-houses game with the Valuation Office and the Town Hall to get them. If they found they weren't up to it, too bad....

"I had many reasons for leaving, attitudes both in the office and out of it. Time-serving executives who spent their days creeping up the higher rank's arse, the prospect of being promoted off field-work into an office, a small difference of opinion over a strike, most of all the realisation that the oily ingratiating manner they teach you was becoming a permanent feature of my character. Not to mention the restrictions on dress, which could lead me on to the prevalence of male chauvinism, but I'll spare you. More than this, however, was the prospect of spending my life in the Civil Service -- but there's you facing a 3 year sentence in the DHSS and the prospect of more of the same with equanimity; not only does my heart bleed, but my head spins.

"Not that you'll ever reform the system: the familiar arguments about income, the discontent among the lower ranks who do the work but don't make the policy -- we used to call ourselves mushrooms, because we were kept in the dark and fed bullshit. I suppose I can't condemn it just because I can't stand it, but I do think there's something rotten at the heart of it. The same system does for DHSS benefits, and it always seems that the evaders make it while the deserving cases slip through the loopholes. The walking wounded -- single parents, alcoholics, schizophrenics, etc. -- don't fare

too well under a Tory regime, it seems.

"But I must say that you sprang out of a dark corner and surprised a prejudice I didn't know I had when you said that half your applicants are for divorce cases. Shock-horror-outrage! They got into it, and now they want legal aid from our taxes to get out of it? But, thinking it over, it's not a fair reaction. Marriage is still the Done Thing in this society, and people get into it with no idea of what's involved; and having seen some people trapped inside the hell that a failed relationship is, they need all the help they can get."

Hang on a minute -- those last remarks of yours are perilously akin to the sort of glutinous soul-baring stuff that surfaces in American fanzines, in which everyone wallows in a slough of emotional turmoil, obsessed with the invented problems of self-confrontation and self-realisation: "California crap", as I now customarily shorthand it, since it seems to be derived less from any genuine attempt at psychological insight into the self than from the loony post-counter-cultural fringe rubbish of EST, primal scream therapy, group encounter sessions, and the like. (To read Tom Wolfe's "The Me Decade And The Third Great Awakening" in his Mauve Gloves And Madmen, Clutter And Vine is to almost kill yourself laughing; who can ever forget his word-picture of the girl lying spread-eagled on the floor trying to will her hemorrhoids away?) And I'm damned if I'll have that bloody nonsense imported into this fanzine -- particularly not now that Steven Green has referred to my letter-columns as being "so full of inward revelation" that they read like "dilute group therapy". (I winced a lot at that one, I can tell you.) Now that I've mentioned him, though, here's a relevant-seeming chunk of his letter:

Steven Green "In my job -- hack on a local newspaper -- you come  
11 Fox Green Crescent across some real low-lifes. A couple of weeks back,  
Acocks Green an illiterate Irishman (no racial slur intended)  
Birmingham B27 7SD stumbled into our foyer muttering "I call um duh SS,  
I call um duh SS". Turns out he was referring to  
our local office of the DHSS, who -- he claimed -- had screwed him out of a  
month's benefits. A man of few words (and most of those thinly-disguised  
grunts), he thrust a scribbled note at me, explaining that he intended to go  
on hunger strike unless the manager of the DHSS branch in Solihull -- "not  
some girl sent to get rid of me" -- wrote and personally apologised for the  
error. "I've seen my priest, and I've made my peace with God", he told me  
before stumbling out again. The story has an unhappy ending -- the jerk got  
his apology."

Which reminds me, apropos nothing at all, of the Raygun jokes that Harry Andruschak sent me in response to your "plea" for same in your letter in the previous issue; there are a couple of duds, but the other two seem marvelously nasty, viz: "Remember how the bible claimed it was a miracle when an ass spoke?" and "We all sprang from monkeys, but Raygun didn't spring far enough". More are solicited.

Harry was one of the only two US fans to have responded to the previous issue, perhaps because I sent the trans-Atlantic copies by surface mail and they haven't reached everyone yet. For a time, however, I thought that my ruminations in "The End Of The Dream" had mortally offended them; and they'd decided to cut me off without a word. On the other hand....well, here's what Brian Earl Brown thought of it:

"I must confess that I haven't the foggiest idea of what you were trying to say in "The End Of The Dream" since you had a different subject in every paragraph. You really do need to learn to stick to your subject and not meander at large through your essays."

Well, I'll admit that I could have done without the parenthetical quote from New Scientist and condensed the long aside about the relationship between SF fans and the pro-space enthusiasts down into a more manageable form, but "a different subject every paragraph"? Come now, it's called "developing your

argument", a process of reasoning in which each step in the chain of logic is first stated, then provided with its own supportive rationalisation, then tested for its fit against the preceding steps, then -- dear God in Heaven, Brian, surely you're not serious? Because if your reaction is in any way typical, then the differences between British and American fanwriting arise from more than just differences in our respective approaches and underlying moods; and we could have, in effect, a complete -- and perhaps completely unbridgeable -- communications gap. (In passing, I'd query whether the confused and/or hysterical American reaction to "Run For The Shadows" in Nabu 10 was a consequence of the complexity of the argument I was propounding -- an argument that I made deliberately complex in order (albeit with massively loaded dice) to provide "evidence" for the follow-up article, "Standing In The Shadows", and whose opening pages were designed to distort your reading of it anyway by their inclusion of several heavy charges guaranteed to get you all frothing at the mouth. (But then it wasn't only the Americans who were confused by it; reviewing Nabu 10 for the BSFA's clubzine Matrix, Rob Jackson demonstrated a surprising inability to distinguish between the examples used to support one particular step of the argument with the subject of the argument itself. But then that wasn't the first time he'd perpetrated such a misrepresentation -- an Arnold Akien article in Chris Hughes's Rule 42 (now retitled Fantasmagoria) on the need for a more impartial criticism of SF was described as being devoted to a defence of Heinlein's critics, so this might not mean anything very much....except that Jackson doesn't pay altogether too much attention to what he's reading.) I'd say more, but I'd prefer to save it all for the follow-up article, where it can be presented as a coherent whole and (hopefully) have a greater impact.)

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GOD EMPEROR OF DUNE And if you think the title is bad, then you ought to try reading the book.... But thanks to the diligence of Phil Palmer, I've unearthed from my fanzine collection the following fascinating quote. Who said it, and when?

"One-time author Arthur C. Clarke is president of the BSFA. Does he actually do anything? How many of the council have met him? Corresponded with him? When was the last time he came over to attend an AGM? All this nonsense about the old school tie and being one of the boys has got to stop. Clarke has done his bit for the BSFA in the past, but his name should only be linked by way of Honorary President or some other such inconsequential post."

The only clue I'll give you is the obvious one: that BSFA members (particularly -- all right then, this is another clue -- those who attended this year's AGM at Yoncon 2) are more likely to get it than anyone else.

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#### LIVING IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

Back in Napalm 2, you'll recall, I devoted quite a bit of space to the joys and tediums of my job in legal aid interviewing, and remarked towards the end that after a three-year stint there I'd be up for transfer to somewhere else, probably Supplementary Benefit interviewing. Well, now it looks as though I could be transferred earlier than that, because we recently had the staff inspectors in....

In theory, staff inspection is a very laudable idea, involving a team of officers touring around the offices in a particular branch or division to discover the exact nature and extent of the work involved, talking to everyone involved and building up from their notes a picture of how it's handled, the object of the exercise being to produce a detailed organisational scheme of how it may be better handled and of the staff required to do so. It's an efficiency exercise, in other words, designed as much to improve control, standardise procedures, maximise job satisfaction and enhance management-staff relations as to cut costs and eliminate outmoded practices; but in the

present economic climate, and particularly under this government -- constantly extolling the virtues of the entrepreneurial middle classes and being more concerned to resurrect the laissez-faire capitalist mentality of the nineteenth century than to "move Britain forward" -- the emphasis is very much on cutting costs, by any means available. Simply put, Thatcher hates bureaucracy, and indeed came to power on a platform that promised to "roll back the frontiers of government intervention" -- all these tedious regulations and such being of course what was really preventing British industry from again becoming strong and vital and taking over the world, and never mind any more relevant considerations like the energy/resources crisis and the general post-1973 decline of the West and other global problems from which she'd like to pretend Britain is immune -- and within days of coming to power had announced a sweeping onslaught on the civil service to be headed by one Sir Derek Rayner, head of the highly successful retail chain Marks & Spencer, his brief being to find ways of cutting its numbers down to "more reasonable levels".

Nobody can deny that, in certain respects at least, the civil service is overmanned, and that certain of its practices are wasteful of time and energy -- in DHSS benefits, for example, there used to be a prohibition that no girocheque (for payment to a member of the public) could ever be greater than £30: a ruling laid down after the war, when £30 was A Very Great Deal Of Money Indeed, and whose maintenance now was clearly meaningless because it meant that you had to write two cheques, one for £30 and one for the balance. Thus the terror of the rules....and nobody was sorry to see that sort of nonsense get thrown out of the window. But this was merely the tip of the iceberg; Rayner was out to massacre whole departments, either by doing away with them altogether -- Prices & Consumer Protection was disbanded in its entirety -- or by selling bits of them off to private industry -- like the Building Research Establishment, for instance, and the Hydraulic Research Station and the National Maritime Institute, the theory behind this being that private industry is better equipped to perform this sort of research better than the government (which conveniently ignores the fact that these laboratories were established in the first place because private industry simply didn't carry out such research....and indeed hasn't shown the slightest interest whatsoever in buying them, which must be a bit embarrassing for the Leaderene, what?). Chop, hack, butcher, is the Rayner way, cheered on by the Tory press (the Telegraph, the Express and the Mail) who, like he, are mistaking the short term gain -- a reduction in the number of civil servants -- for the long term strategy -- an improvement in bureaucratic efficiency. Never mind the fact that in the long term some of these cuts will result in greater rather than less expenditure....particularly in legal aid.

There's never been a staff inspection for legal aid; like Topsy, it just grew, and as a result it has no central policy, no overall set of procedures, no recognised system for staff complementing. That it needs such goes without saying, but these boys clearly couldn't have cared less about it; all their pious protestations about coming to us with an open mind, and being prepared to listen to what we told them, were a complete sham. We were the last office on their list, after all, and in such circumstances even a moron would have had difficulty denying that by the time they got to us their minds had already been made up by what they'd seen elsewhere. And what they had seen elsewhere was not good; they had, quite deliberately (or so it seemed) started with the worst, most lax, most inefficient offices in other parts of the country and worked their way gradually up the scale towards us, the prime concentration of and most experienced interviewers and assessors of the self-employed. So they should have been impressed with our zeal, our dedication, our quest for the "truth", right? Not a bit of it, for these other offices were bad only in our terms, accepting without question whatever the applicants chose to tell them and being concerned only to turn out an assessment that would give them free legal aid regardless of what money they might have available to contribute towards their costs, making the complex process

over which we slaved and sweated look as easy and as straightforward as anything you care to name. And if it was that easy, then why did it have to be done by people of our grade? Why couldn't it be done by the next grade down? And from the news that had filtered through to us before the staff inspection team's arrival, it was clear that this was just what they would be proposing -- we were doomed, and we knew it, and all we could do was fight a desperate rearguard action to show these minions of the imperialist Thatcherite tyranny what we really thought of them.

The team consisted of four people; their technique was for each one of them to sit with one of us for a day, watching us at work and asking us questions about it as they saw fit....and I got the clown. Either he was genuinely thick, which was unlikely, or he was just acting thick in order to lead me on, to trap me into making all sorts of self-compromising statements that would undermine our claim that only people of our grade could do the job, which was much more likely. And I nearly feel for it once or twice, too.... but his questions were so blatant, so damn loaded, that it was fairly easy to spot what was coming and turn him aside from the path that would have led to the answer he wanted, and his frustration at not getting those answers was clearly evident on his face. (He was body-languaging so much, in fact, that there were times when I felt almost like a character in a Dune novel, reading him like a Bene Gesserit Reverend Mother or a Fremen Naib; but I managed to prevent myself from making any cryptic pseudo-philosophical utterances or thinking in italics.) Despite which the morning passed off well enough: he asked me all sorts of boring questions about the organisation of the work, watched me write a rude letter to an applicant pointing out that if he claimed to be earning only £100 a week he damn well should know where all these huge credits of £1000 shown in his bank statements came from, and sat in on a not particularly difficult interview (the applicant had no formal accounts, but he did have a record book....not that I necessarily believed the figures shown therein, but it gave me a base from which to work). The afternoon, however, was showdown time, when he began asking me how I was going to do my assessment, what was the significance of the information I'd gathered, why I needed it in the first place, and -- the clincher -- why I didn't just accept what the applicant told me.

Rather than give him an answer, I gave him a demonstration, pulling out the file of someone I'd interviewed the week before and asking him if it was likely that a self-employed carpenter and joiner could support himself and his family on a gross of a mere £50 per week. Seems reasonable to me, he said, After all, there's a recession in the building industry right now.... With an evil laugh, I pulled out the Department of Employment's 1980 earnings survey and pointed to the fact that an employed carpenter and joiner made an average net of at least twice that much. Er, he said; and then, recovering, asked me nastily why I didn't do an assessment based on the applicant's statement just to see what the answer might be. I chuckled inwardly at that: experience told me what sort of disposable income figure I'd get without having to do a draft assessment, but to prove it I did it anyway, ending up with a negative because his expenses were about three times his income.

At least he had the grace to blush. Slightly.

Scenting victory, I pulled out another file, this one concerned with a woman who'd claimed to be receiving, in addition to some earnings from her work as a model and maintenance from her separated husband, various interest-free loans from friends and relatives. (Lots of our applicants claim to be supporting themselves in such a fashion, which raises many hearty laughs from I and my colleagues. The standard trick is to hand them a sheet of paper and a pen and invite them to write down the names of the people involved. They usually change their minds.) I'd already done some work on this one, and so knew what I was going to find, but for his benefit I did it all over again, going steadily through the bank statements and adding up the credit entries

to find that they totalled to a sum vastly higher than that she'd told me at the interview. So what? he said, If they're loans you can't bring them to account as income. Indeed not, I said, but which are the loans and which the income? Um, he said, abashed, you'll have to write and ask her, I suppose... Right, riposted I, enjoying every moment of it, it's as well that I didn't just accept what she told me, isn't it? Otherwise we'd have antirely the wrong picture of her income, wouldn't we?

He didn't answer. He went to get a cup of tea, and failed to return.

Subsequent consultation with my colleagues revealed that we'd all been subjected to exactly the same inquisition, with exactly the same question at its core: why don't we just accept what the applicant tells us? Because the applicants are bloody liars, that's why, and each of us had to fend off the inspectors with similar demonstrations of their guile and duplicity. Which will of course ultimately make no difference at all: if the other offices don't bother with the sort of exhaustive enquiries we make then we're clearly in the wrong, and never mind the fact that in not asking such questions those offices could be costing the legal aid fund a bloody fortune in uncollected (because the applicants' means are never properly assessed) contributions. Cutting costs in the civil service is all, and if it can't be done by disbanding departments or selling bits of them off to private industry then it can be done by taking the work down a grade or two and thus saving on staff salaries. A short term gain indeed....

The inspectors' preliminary report is due to be presented in mid-June, and we are all well aware of the recommendation it will make. I'll be in Australia at the time and so, as the obvious joke has it, may not have a job to return to....which isn't true, of course: they can't fire me and they can't demote me, but they can push me sideways into something else -- probably, because of my experience interviewing members of the public, into Supplementary Benefit, God help me. It will probably take a year or so to work itself out, but in the meantime I intend to fight like crazy to get myself a nice desk-bound job in a policy section (not that I'll succeed; they're plum jobs, hard to come by even at the best of times). I won't be thinking of leaving the civil service (in the present employment situation? come off it), but I'll certainly be dreading the next few years.

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CONFESSIONS OF A CRAP ARTIST Here's another fascinating quote, again unearthed by Phil Palmer, although this one is less likely to embarrass its perpetrator than the previous example. The punctuation is as per the original; who wrote it, and how old was he at the time?

"Pistols clattered on rock and then Ryath opened out his hand and walked towards the aliens, he then hit himself on the chest with the flat of his hand and said his name. Surprisingly the aliens ignored him but instead one of them walked up to Mike. Mike hesitated as the alien knelt down and placed the side of his outstretched hand just below Mike's knee. The alien then turned to the other aliens and spoke to them in a rather excited voice, 'Ette chilium alia Wombles.'

"At the last word Mike's eyes went wide, as he and Ryath watched five of the aliens stood forward and watched what was evidently their commander. The commander looked at Ryath and Mike and then at his crew. He paused, raised his hands and then let them drop quickly, instantly the five aliens started to hum and then sang,

"'Underground, overground wombling free, the wombles of Wimbledon Common are we, makinf you used to the things that we find, things that the everyday folks leave behind.'

"Mike nearly collapsed while Ryath could hardly stop himself from laughing the aliens carried on as the captain turned towards Mike and Ryath, 'Here is the home of the Wombles, and there is Great Uncle Bulgaria.'"

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST

At last the letters, although I can't make my usual introductory remarks about them here because I've already run those back on page 3. Poot. Straight on in, then, with:

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"Strange -- the first time you produce a Napalm which actually has something to do with the business of SF, i.e., space exploration, I find the whole thing rather dull and tedious. I can no longer find within myself the enthusiasm for space nor, for that matter, the more mundane world of NASA and its lack of finance. Yet I agree with much of what you said, even if you did ramble and drag in your usual pet hates (such as Jerry Pournelle and E. E. 'Doc' Smith).

"I think the problem with these advocates of space exploration is the fact that their literature is so shallow in the first place. For most writers the story is the means of expression and stands as an artifact in itself, but Pournelle et al produce hollow stories constructed of sheer doctrine with no characters at the heart to give them life. The only way their dreams, and ~~thus~~ their literary ambition, can be fulfilled is for their ideas to be made real.

"Is it any wonder, then, that their deeply held passion for spaceflight lacks both logic and reason in argument, for its climax can only mean a vindication of all they have been preaching and finally bring some deeper meaning to their work. Unfortunately, a cause founded upon little rationality has little in its favour when viewed through clear eyes and, as you point out, one can certainly pick holes in most of the pro-space arguments. For instance, their proponents say that space exploration will lead to greater intellectual and spiritual maturity, yet I was always under the impression that all but one of the Apollo astronauts later developed rather than discarded spiritual and mental problems; in a similar vein, they claim that the colonisation of space will unite nations, yet Dave Langford demonstrates in his War In 2080 that exactly the opposite could occur, with nations becoming obsessed with the strategic nature of colony worlds and orbiting vessels. And was it not the I-5 Society which objected to the UN Moon Treaty on the grounds that it would prohibit America's 'right to pioneer space'? Exactly how do they intend to unite nations if America is doing all the pioneering?

"Of course, the arguments all collapse to reveal one simple fact: that all these people really care about is themselves, and they always have cared only for themselves; any idea of 'universality' is just a sham. E. E. 'Doc' Smith's hackwork was founded upon xenophobia, and even the Apollo Moon landing was motivated by this same fear, the only difference being that the little green aliens of Smith's novels were replaced by men and women wearing Russian uniforms. It's plain that America's plans for the conquest of space have always been military in nature, and indeed those SF writers who actively support future space exploration are usually fascistly motivated in their work. It will be interesting to see how these writers will now reconcile themselves to the new Reagan administration. Certainly, his right-wing political aspirations would appear to be identical, but I can't see Congress reacting favourably to NASA's plea for cash in the current climate. If Reagan is going to fight wars in order to unite nations, then he's going to do so down here on Earth. Pournelle and friends may find a dichotomy in their lives."

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"I have to admit that 'The End Of The Dream' rather bored me -- not the fault of your writing, I hasten to add, despite extravagantly long sentences and an overabundance of parentheses; it's just that the subject-matter bores me. Once, a long time ago, when I was very much younger, I rushed downstairs at an ungodly hour of the morning to watch the pictures coming in from Apollo 11, but since then only the Boy's Own adventure story of Apollo 13 has done anything to arouse my interest. When I was in Washington last year, I visited the Air and Space Museum in the Smithsonian, and there were all these mind-bogglingly BIG rockets and the



equally mind-bogglingly small capsules. I got exactly the same feeling from them that I get in any other museum, when I see a Greek statue or a piece of Saxon armour or somesuch: it was intellectually fascinating but very little else. These things don't really belong in the here and now."

Very possibly -- in his letter, for instance, David Redd remarked that he saw "the American Moon landings as having been ahead of their proper time, rather like the Viking voyages to America 500 years before Columbus", but added that "some people will always be searching for new frontiers and new resources to exploit, and as long as humanity's current period of high technological ability continues entrepreneurs and others will aim towards space. The present decade might not be the right time for pushing out into space, considering the world's problems, but this might be the only chance we'll get", which doesn't strike me as a terribly good reason for conquering space, smacking far too much of a "just because it's there" attitude, and one unlikely to be shared by the majority of humanity.

Jimmy Robertson "Space exploration or socialism or whatever will only have  
64 Hamilton Road any meaning when most of genuinely feel that it should  
Bellshill happen. It has to become relevant to our intellectual or  
Lanarkshire emotional evolution. Vague attempts at communal living,  
ML4 1LG whether it be in a squat or a country or a space colony,  
cannot be successful or permanent without a commitment on  
a scale not yet seen. Probes to the Moon, Mars and the rest of the solar  
system, because they are the wish of the few, for whatever motives, cannot  
expect to sustain any longevity and must suffer the same fate. When things  
are done for ulterior motives, it eventuall filters through to the mass con-  
sciousness and leaves a bad taste."

By which means one could perhaps argue the military-funded exploration of space would meet with objections from the people at large and eventually have to be cancelled....but no: that's far too idealistic an assumption, and no argument based on it would hold water for a moment. Besides, haven't we all been conditioned from birth to believe in the "rightness" of particular causes, whether they be war-oriented or not? So you can bet that if the American people are told that their administration is sending men into space solely to forestall the Russians, they won't raise a murmur of protest.... Apart from which, this business of being conditioned to believe in the "rightness" of something can also be directed against my anti-space argument; the pro-space enthusiasts have convinced themselves that they're in the right and will close their minds against anyone who tries to tell them they're not. Meaning, essentially, that mass irrationality rules okay -- speaking of which:

D. West "Well, the lead bit was all good solid stuff like what  
48 Norman Street makes the members of the Leeds group nod their heads pro-  
Bingley foundly and observe that it makes you think, doesn't it?  
West Yorkshire "Right. Except that in your remarks on the end of  
BD16 4JT the space race etc. you observe that nobody is now going  
to put any more money into the business because it's so  
obviously crazy -- yet, as you've just pointed out, the start of the whole  
thing was based on various delusions of grandeur. Rationality never did have  
much to do with it, so why expect any future decisions to be made on the basis  
of cold logic and accountancy? The space lobby may well be composed of de-  
ranged unreconstructed fifties Astounding readers, but that's not to say that  
they won't carry their case. After all, Hitler didn't have what you might  
call a sensible programme, but that didn't stop him -- in fact, the irration-  
ality of it was a good part of the attraction. People, and governments,  
don't necessarily do what's best for them. Half their motives are based on  
myths, dreams, fantasies and visions.

"(Like American foreign policy, for instance. What was the whole Viet-  
nam business but a sick child's modern-technology game of cowboys and in-  
dians? Now they're proposing a slightly more modest version of the same  
thing in El Salvador. The whole thing would be a little less offensive to  
reason, decency, etc. if they weren't so fucking incompetent -- but unlike  
other people they can't even pick out fantasies where they have a chance of

winning. They just lurch from one shameful disaster to the next, without even the excuse of idealism -- unless you can so classify a phobic reaction to anything faintly opposed to redblooded capitalism."

Bearing the foregoing non-parenthetical cavil in mind, then, let's hear what the pro-space enthusiasts have to say:

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"I'm saddened to see the space programme fading away; there's something about space exploration that excites my imagination. It's unfortunate that Congress has no imagination to excite, and hence have consistently trimmed NASA's budget in a false-hearted effort to balance the national budget; now,

with Reagan here, it's lucky to be still alive. But we may still end up with a manned space station because some military genius wants to have a base in low orbit (although it's a sad fact that the military can have documented cases of billions of dollars of waste and still have Congress vote them more money). That's why I don't object to the L-5 people: they may have a bit of vacuum between their ears, but they're the only civilian space lobby we've got. Now, far be it for me to defend the likes of Jerry Pournelle, but I suspect that what he and his cohorts mean when they say the technology to build these cities in space already exists is that they're not talking pie-in-the-sky stuff dependent on some completely unlikely development, but that if people would invest -- right now -- then construction could begin -- right now. But I'm not holding my breath; it will happen when it happens and not when the L-5 Society forces it, but anyone pushing space as a "good idea" will help to keep the space programme around. And I rather suspect that it has done a lot to make people aware of the smallness and interconnectedness of the world, thereby making people more sensitive to questions of pollution, resources, war, etc.."

I can't agree with your last remark at all -- the current batch of brainwiped geriatrics passing themselves off as the leaders of the Western world don't strike me as remotely sensitive and aware of anything but their own limited quasi-territorial ambitions, and the same applies to the people who elected them (presumably because these politicians tapped into the collective psyche of the electorate, articulating for them various wish-fulfillment power-fantasies that they would otherwise never have been able to realise). How else to explain the resurrection of the paranoid Cold War mentality of the fifties? It's an attitude that predates the space programme by several years, and more or less conclusively demonstrates that the said Grand Adventure has had no effect whatever on the vast majority of the world's population. As Mary Gentle put it in another part of her letter: "No one born before, say, 1945 has a proper understanding of nuclear war; they didn't live with that potential for destruction in their formative years. What they've had experience of is conventional war, which can be won (or at least survived). That date holds true for the space programme as well, since they were brought up in the days when it was a laughable impossibility, and maybe they're only too willing to be convinced that it is still just that." In other words: only people like you and I are aware of such things, and no matter how much we may try to influence the policies of our leaders our views will always be dismissed as the product of idealism and inexperience. Which shouldn't stop us trying, but....

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"Surely no one with even half a brain could disagree with your criticism of NASA's man-on-the-Moon programme. The construction of an orbiting space station, serviced by reusable Earth-to-orbit vehicles, was obviously the most efficient thing to do. But, however much Proxmire and his ilk may decry such a move, this is what we'll now get, simply because the Russians have established

such a system and are running it on a regular basis. As with Sputnik et seq, it will be a historical imperative which forces America back into space.

"Whether the human race will undergo some process of maturation as it

leaves the orb that bore it is another matter entirely. Sure it's an act of faith -- but then it's just as much an act of faith to say that we can only mature if we stay on Earth, and is certainly not backed by history. It's easy to ask 'where is the proof', but in this debate neither side can produce irrefutable proof. The pro-spacers, being essentially idealistic, do tend to stammer and stutter when asked this question, but could always turn the tables on the anti-spacers by asking them the same question. It's not scientific, asking the opposition to prove their case rather than proving your own, but what's sauce for the goose, etc.....

"Actually, given the general tenor of your remarks, I'm rather amused by your own 'act of faith' in the inevitable end of Western civilisation. For a society which has lasted at least two thousand years, it's shown remarkable durability, and the Western mode of thought, with its roots stretching back to the logicians and theorists of ancient Greece, has come to be the accepted one. Truly different modes of thought, such as those found in Hinduism and other Eastern thought-systems, have either been westernised or swamped by the Western thought-system. I'm prepared to believe that the present domination by the countries of the North Atlantic may end, but their successors will share this Western mode of thought, with its reverence for self and thirst for discovery."

Will they? Why should they?

Mary Gentle "I can't look at spaceflight as coldly and as rationally as you'd have me do, I suppose because it began in the mid-sixties, that indian summer of a decade, and for me is always mixed up with the time when it was all going to change, the world would be put right, and you'd only have to prove a thing was morally wrong for people and governments to stop doing it. But having grown older, and at the end of the apathetic seventies, and the beginning of the authoritarian eighties -- I'm still pro-space. For two reasons: one philosophical, and one practical.

"Given the choice between the long slide into disintegration and the rise of whatever non-Western (possibly anti-technology and pro-religious) society will follow, and the chance of humanity diverging into as many different societies as there are off-Earth colonies....what sane society would choose disintegration? If we spread into space, with colonies that aren't dependent on Earth for survival, the more types of civilisation will become viable. And the more experiments there are going, the more chance of coming up with something workable. Suppose it does involve colonialism, communism, fascism, the total fuck-ups associated with the progress of humanity? What the hell, suppose it does. It's a western idea -- this being a civilisation that's either advancing or going downhill, and can't have the stasis that Eastern cultures have had in the past -- but I'd rather go to hell in a handcart than stay here and quietly fall apart.

"But what about the practicalities? Well, it does seem that to spend money on a space programme is to waste it, because there are so many better uses for it. But does that money go to help the sick, the old, those in need of housing, education, help? Does it hell -- it seems that when a government doesn't spend money on space, it spends it on missiles, defence installations and nuclear submarines....though I may have that the wrong way round; it may be that if you're funding a Moonshot you have to ease off on the purchase of arms because there's only a limited supply of money. Either way, the space programme is the better alternative.

"I find myself arguing that the benefits of spaceflight are non-proven, and that the only reason to continue with the programme is that it's better for governments to pour resources into that than into escalation towards nuclear war. A strange argument, but when the advantages and disadvantages are all problematical, doesn't it make sense to take the route that leads to the widest number of choices?

"But I don't think we will. I think the recession is part of a long downhill slide, and that -- failing something outrageous like a working FTL drive or a matter transmitter -- we've down all the space-travelling we're going to. Lack of will, lack of resources....and I think it's a damn shame, a lost chance, and a dangerous turn of events, because there are no similar

limits on the proliferation of those nuclear weapons with which I admit I may be obsessed. Meanwhile, most people go about their business serenely unconcerned about either alternative, and maybe -- since there's damn all we can do about it -- that's the only sane way to live."

I reject that totally, since such behaviour is akin to that of the proverbial ostrich, and reprehensible in that noninvolvement in something can easily be construed as passive acquiescence in its application. You have to get out there and fight for what you believe -- as long as it's a rational belief, that is.....

The end, or almost; I had some more letters that I wanted to print, but I've run out of stencils and have room now only for the WAHFs: Arnold Akien ("The most remarkable thing to emerge from the space race wasn't the American space programme but NASA, a civilian agency -- which is now being forced back into the womb from which it sprang"....you'd get yourself quoted more often, Arnold, if you didn't write such bloody enormous letters!), George Bondar ("In your discussion of spaceflight I noticed occasional use of the word 'maturity' -- doesn't this simply equate with accepting compromise, copping-out, giving up, selling out, accepting second best, striving only for the easily attainable?"), William Goodall (twice -- having written one loc, he then forgot about it and wrote another), Phil Greenaway (a suicide story which, to please Graham Ashley, may appear next time), David Haden, Phil James (a postcard from the shuttle launch at Cape Canaveral, no less), Terry Jeeves, Naveed Khan, Eric Lindsay ("All enthusiasms are irrational, including an enthusiasm for life itself."), Pete Lyon ("Don't be too hard on the conquest of space; you evince all the bitterness of unrequited love or the sourness of a divorcee. Just because its proponents get their politics and scenarios wrong is no reason to dismiss it -- to disinter that hoary old metaphor of the conquest of the New World, would you have strutted, snorting snuff, powdered and periwigged, sophisticatedly sneering at the colonists' puritan idealism?"....well, it's an appealing image....), Stephen Mackey (who thought that Napalm 3 didn't deserve to be called a fanzine because it had no mention of SF; wrong both specifically and generally, I'm afraid), Ken Mann (twice, but the second letter was responding to Vector 101 and should have been sent to Kev Smith; in it, he says various rude things about Chris Priest, which reminds me to tell you that The Affirmation is the best novel published this year, and you should all rush out and buy it immediately), Tim Marion, Marc Ortlieb, Cyril Simsa, Jon Wallace (who seemed to think I'd written Kev Smith's review of Ringworld Engineers in Vector 99), and Glen Warminger. Speaking of Ringworld Engineers reminds me of all the other crap that's been nominated for this year's Hugos (mercifully excluding Heinlein's The Number Of The Beast, easily one of the worst SF "novels" the world's ever known) and that it's time I stuck my neck out and said who'll win....well, actually, The Snow Queen (and I thought it would get the Nebula as well because of Dell's hyping of it through the SFWA; hurrah for Timescape, which also won this year's BSFA Award) but I'll take side-bets on Wizard because it's the lowest common denominator of them all. The real winner should be No Award....the only two bits of short fiction worthy of the prize are Tom Disch's "The Brave Little Toaster" and Keith Roberts's "The Lordly Ones" (if the latter's on the ballot; I've missed the April Locus and so can't remember for sure). That's it until next time -- whenever that is; in view of my persistent lateness, I've given up making promises. The duplication was by courtesy of Dave Langford, two days before my departure for The Other Side Of The World. If you feel like writing, please don't do so until I get back, on 19 June; I don't want the mail piling up too high in my absence. Or else I'll set the Air Cav on you, I will....

This was Napalm In The Morning 4  
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