

CLOUD CHAMBER 37

A stopgap effort from Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU, UK. Dated around 1 October 1987.

Remember Conspiracy '87? It took me several cough-ridden weeks to recover: I finally consulted the doctor and was told that my unfortunate bronchi had picked up a dose of some convention-borne bacillus, possibly scientology. A quick course of antibiotics has now left the offending tubes (if you'll pardon the expression...) clear. Meanwhile, without having done much remunerative work since the Worldcon, I've been revising my "serious SF" and fanfannish speeches for publication (in *Xyster* and *Pulp* respectively), drafting an article for Chris Evans (of which more below), lovingly revising a blistering letter to the Managing Director of Metropole Hotels (again, more below), and thinking about the future of *Anisble*.

Anisble 51? I'd like to issue this, with many "snapshot" convention reports from many viewpoints: perhaps only a few hundred words each, describing some high or low point, or any suitably bizarre incident. If you are reading this and were there, the subtle meaning is that I'd be interested in a bit from you. The deadline is, as ever, Real Soon Now.

Some of you have intelligently rushed in reports without being prompted. Thanks.

The Metropole Hotel: No one who was at Conspiracy can have failed to notice the disastrous hostility of what was euphemistically called "upper management" and in fact consisted solely of the General Manager, the Mr Fred Hutchings who by Monday night was famous in story and song. (The rest of the staff tried to be nice, difficult when enforcing such daft policies as that resident concubines couldn't charge snacks or drinks to their rooms even when said room bills had been guaranteed with charge or credit cards. By thus banning editors' friendly habit of buying huge rounds on their expense accounts, this cost the hotel some thousands of pounds...)

Usually one expects time and staff turnover to bring a better regime, but the appalling twerp Hutchings seems determined to make the Metropole unusable for the foreseeable future. Although he's entrenched in the system (as former owner, and now a shareholder with a buy-back option), it seems worth complaining: to Mr M.K.Bolland, Managing Director, Metropole Hotels, PO Box 335, National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, B40 1PT, telex 336129. Copy complaints to Katie Hoare, 45 Tilehurst Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 7TT—she's compiling a dossier at the request of Brighton authorities who are scared stiff by the thought of future business being driven away. I had a nice letter of apology from the aforementioned Mr Bolland, promising that the issues would be "discussed" with the loathsome Hutchings. Don't hold your breath.

One point of complaint was too hot for inclusion in official Worldcon committee protests (and I couldn't go into it since for me it was just hearsay): the fact that Hutchings was pissed out of his skull while giving some of his more controversial performances. Eye-witness Bernie Peek has happily risen to the occasion and sent in a letter about the elderly drunk in a suit who harassed him for no apparent reason, and was later identified to him as a General Manager, ho ho. Cool, impartial Katie Hoare was heard to remark, "Bernie is a real star."

L.Ron Hubbard: I needn't describe the depressingly high level of Hubbard promotion at Conspiracy. It must have preyed on me more than I'd supposed (the "official Hugo photo call" ruse was the last straw, luring the winners into a Hubbard/New Era party which several would have preferred to avoid): there was an unfortunate scene at Monday's SPWA binge, which generated many conflicting accounts. The actuality went something like this:

LANGFORD (very tired and emotional, and hearing someone drone on about L.Ron Hubbard's Writers of the Future for the millionth time): Oh, fuck L.Ron Hubbard!

FRED HARRIS (famous Author Services Inc publicist of L.Ron Hubbard, rushing suddenly forward): YOU'RE ALL WASHED UP, LANGFORD! YOU'LL NEVER WORK IN THIS FIELD AGAIN! (Hurls dregs of drink at swaying blasphemer.)

LANGFORD: (Hurls contents of full glass at Harris.)
After which, I fear, it all passes into alcoholic oblivion. I was horrified by the notion that, even in a spirit of irony, I could have kissed Fred Harris on the cheek as reported.... The tale duly grew in the telling, acquiring details which even my own dim recollection can tell are wrong. Charles Platt has published a somewhat slanted account in his *WOM*: this scribbles a specific grudge to me (saying that I felt my two fan Hugos had

been "contaminated" by Algis Budrys's commercial for Hubbard projects at the start of the ceremony—come off it, Charles!), omits the fact that the hurling of drinks was initiated by Fred Harris, and adds insult to injury by stating that I missed... do I really have to call in eye-witnesses who afterwards tried to persuade FH to remove his soggy jacket and calm down?

Actually I'm not proud of this incident, and attempts to clarify it begin (in view of later fanfannish reactions) to look like personal trumpet-blowing. Oh, it was sort of nice to be applauded as a "hero" by embarrassing numbers of both fans and professionals... but such jollity tends to obscure the issue of whether the Hubbard crew's "take-over" of the Conspiracy image is supportable, and whether it should have been allowed to go half as far as it did. (The committee did at least resist the merry idea of a special additional pre-convention mailing to all members, to be paid for by New Era Publications of course, urging everyone to vote a Hugo to Hubbard's *Black Genesis*.)

Chris Evans, initially billed as on the strength of L.Ron Hubbard's Writers of the Future, is much more of a hero than I: he soberly decided that this was a bad thing and, although he could certainly have used their money, refused to take it. (I hear Lisa Tuttle made a similar decision.) Chris plans a fanzine exploring the general disquiet... tentatively titled *Conspiracy Theories*. Contributors are said to include Malcolm Edwards, Chris Priest, myself and the Mexican committee (who, for reasons connected with Budrys's tactless Hubbard flag-waving before the Hugos, are withdrawing the invitation for him to be their Guest of Honour). All enquiries to Flat 2, 191 Anerley Road, Peuge, London, SE20 8EL.

Peter Nicholls writes: "Your amnesia re Fred Harris is deeply disappointing to everyone. Had he threatened to put a rattlesnake in your letter box? Did you insult the ghost of Elron? We need to know these things in order to fill the pages of Chris Evans' notorious anti-scientology fanzine, in which I tell all about the enormous personal bribes paid to the entire Committee, and how Steve Jones managed to be press officer to New Era and Conspiracy '87 at the same time. Half the above was a joke."

In fact, "anti-scientology" is very definitely not Chris's theme. The Scientology angle may be a bit of a red herring, although Hubbard's name is so inextricably connected with it, and the tabloids so implacably convinced that the cult is "sick" and "evil", that even if one preserves an open mind about Scientology it can still appear unwise for SF fandom to be seen publicly embracing Hubbard. I find myself more annoyed by the incessant hype for the terrible, mediocre products of Hubbard's science-fictional senility. Fred Harris's outfit can buy slots on best-seller lists (it's easy, you just invest ludicrously uncommercial sums in publicity: vanity publishing writ large); it can buy saturation advertising at conventions; it can't buy our respect.

As for "Writers of the Future," so nobly devoted to encouraging new authors... h'mm. This will doubtless be considered at length in the Evans fanzine. Anyone who's frowned at tobacco-sponsored sporting events, or who cares to imagine an SF contest funded by the present government of South Africa (substitute bugaboo of your choice here), may think the ploy fairly transparent.

Literary Bit: At the con I chatted with Ross Pavlac, who was combining his Worldcon visit with a "pilgrimage" to the haunts and graves of Tolkien, C.S.Lewis, Charles Williams, G.K.Chesterton and others. He was frighteningly erudite about original manuscripts now preserved in vast US collections, etc....

I've never really felt the lure of literary relics and pilgrimages, because in a sense it's irrelevant when creators die. Open a book of Chesterton's and there he is in the mind's eye, still beaming and scribbling furiously between swigs of red wine in some Fleet Street pub. So I found myself fatally tempted to pull RF's leg: "Lewis is buried under his favourite seat in the public bar of the Eagle & Child in Oxford, you know. There's a plaque on the floor if you look under the bench."

There was a distinct pause before Ross said very seriously, "No, in fact he isn't buried there...."

Hoare Horror: It is 1 a.m. Martin Hoare is watching a video, the Ride of the Valkyries playing at full blast. The music climaxes in a terrific crash and a heavy shower of bricks through the windows. Shards of glass slash the curtains, though happily not Martin, to ribbons.... It turns out that six police cars have just chased a suspected stolen vehicle through the Hoares' garden wall. This car then catches fire. (No fatalities, remarkably.)

"It was great," Mr Hoare later told *Anisble*: "I got my picture on the front page of the local paper!"

An Unwanted Postscript After snipping and trimming the text overleaf so that it fitted neatly on to one photo-reduced side (as guaranteed, once upon a time at least, to annoy GREG PICKERSGILL), I naturally had it all disrupted by an earth-shaking (though only to me) letter from JOHN BROSINAN: "It was I who picked up the pieces of the glass that you threw at Mr Harris but which hit the table I was standing behind...." Yes, it would seem that my unreliable memory was quick to censor the more embarrassing sequel to the events related overleaf: they are more or less correct as far as they go, but are apparently followed by an annoyed Langford muttering to himself, by the hurling of a glass, and by profuse Langfordian apologies to Fred Harris and all those present, couched in such terms as "I'm really terribly sorry that I missed." Oh dear. This also makes good old Charles Platt's report less inaccurate though more incomplete than I thought. I dare say he'll forgive me. This correspondence is now closed. :: MIKE GLYER has already published preliminary post-Worldcon reactions in *File 770: 69*; I was glad to see that he restrained himself from any sour grapes at not winning the fanzine Hugo, and merely allowed himself the graceful and dignified comment, "Ansible became the first newszine ever to publish only three issues in the year for which it won the Hugo." His difficulty in telling Anne Page from Katie Hoare is not my problem... :: TERRIBLE BOOKS were distantly alluded to in *Ansible 50*, a truncated-to-fit line which quite failed to convey that I've been preparing another bloody list of spare review copies etc., available to anyone at all for a stamped addressed envelope. :: CHRIS PRIEST reports a little nervously that *The Last Deadloss Visions* is continuing to grow as correspondence and Ellisonian reactions (second- and third-hand) roll in; can it be true that the great Harlan rang Lisa Tuttle in the small hours to harangue her for an hour because she had failed to prevent CP from doing this terrible thing? :: ANDY PORTER's violent campaigning for the 1990 Holland bid, written from the disinterested standpoint of an impartial newszine editor, has subsequently led to a raised eyebrow or two when it was revealed that he presumably knew all along he'd be fan Guest of Honour if Holland--as it did--won... :: RSVP is the baffling magical rune I've recently been putting on *Ansible* mailing labels to signal the New Informality of the mighty distribution system. Responses have been a bit mixed. Dennis Virzi acutely said, "What does RSVP mean?" while Hilary Robinson's letter went, in its entirety, "It says on my *Ansible* label--RSVP. Is this all right?" Foot. And James Steel nibbled knowingly at the bait by deducing this to be a plea for interesting response stuff to fill up *Ansible*, but then scorned the hook by ending his letter there, the rat. :: I THOUGHT M. JOHN HARRISON WAS MIKE MOORCOCK'S BUDDY? "...a greener but more attractive approach than, say, the old Moorcockian one, in which reality is seen somehow not just as a cultural but a social contract, negotiated on a day-to-day basis by a group of good friends sitting round a train they have just burned." (MJH reviewing Theroux's *O-zone* in *Foundation 40*.) I also thought Mike Moorcock was M. John Harrison's buddy... "a tendency to repeat himself... Harrison does have a tendency to repeat the effects of authors he greatly admires... his admiration for his own writing tends to produce a sense of *deja vu* which is perhaps not always intentional and moreover tends to emphasize the streak of misanthropism which runs through a great deal of this kind of fiction." (MM on MJH in *Wizardry & Wild Romance*.)

status... yes

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