

# Cloud Chamber

## 44

A tiny morsel from Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU. August 1993.

Time presses—I'll just catch up on mailing 7 and add the false *Cactus Times* which for many of you will 'complete' the Mexican set. Pat Cadigan kept demanding to be libelled more in *CT*, and a small consortium of Abigail Frost and Modesty Forbids devised this flyer for a post-Mexican 'Meet Pat' gathering in London. It wasn't distributed owing to the organizing efficiency which kept the meeting's date and place a deadly secret from Mexican and the *CT* people.... (Pat later wrote to me: 'I was sitting muttering drunkenly into the foam on my Guinness, "That dog Langford, where is he?"' I don't believe a word of it.)

● **Kev and Maureen** reviewed awful books, respectively Warwick Collins's *Computer One* and David Pike's *Sentinel of the Row*. I found Kev's piece uncomfortable reading, mainly in its first half, because.... ● It begins by emphasizing how angry Kev is. Chris Priest once defined the excessive intrusion of the reviewer's own foibles as 'the itchy-bum school of reviewing' (I'll confess I've done this myself, usually for humorous effect). Better, surely, to present the case in a way that merely *implies* an anger which is communicated to the reader. ● The whole first paragraph continues to amplify the point that Kev is very, very angry. This is prolix. ● In accordance with Muphry's Law (see *Cloud Chamber 40*), the third sentence offers a hostage to fortune by incorrect use of 'It's'—fatal when you're about to play the 'more literate than thou' cards which follow. ● It reeks of 20/20 hindsight: Kev has finished the book, loathes it, and now proceeds to put the boot into five opening lines as though they alone condemned the entire novel. In isolation, they're no more than irritatingly precious. (Exercise for the student: write Kev's assessment of the opening sentence fragment of *Finnegans Wake*.) ● The author tries, not very eptly, to indicate that the shadows' colour is between blue and green. I doubt that this was worth pouncing on, and I dislike the metaphorical knuckle dug into my ribs as Kev immediately glosses it with 'the reader is feeling confused, and insulted by this gibberish'. He is telling me so forcefully what I should be thinking that, yes, I even begin to feel a sneaking sympathy for Warwick Collins. ● Nit-picking intensifies with 'it is not the earth which has become organized, but humans upon the earth'. Hell, can't the guy even attempt—even if not very skilfully—an ordinary

figure of speech such as using 'the earth' for 'the earth's people'? (Exercise for the student: turn to Fowler's *Modern English Usage* and look up metonymy and synecdoche.) ● The review perks up as the author is allowed to condemn himself in his own repetitive words about *Hymenoptera*, without any nudging from Kev—who thereafter contrives not to flog himself into angry histrionics, and grows increasingly persuasive. ● In reviews, understatement tends to be far more effective than shouting (or drooling) at the reader. End of pedantic diatribe. You may go now.

● By contrast, **Maureen's** calm review of the self-published Pike book provoked no irritation—just mild gloom at the prolonged spectacle of kicking a literary cripple. I would have been overwhelmingly inclined to dispose of this thing in one or two paragraphs (mercy killing?) rather than let it linger on for several hundred words. It's not as though Pike has a vast sf reputation needing measured reassessment, as when Heinlein and Asimov published their late bad books.

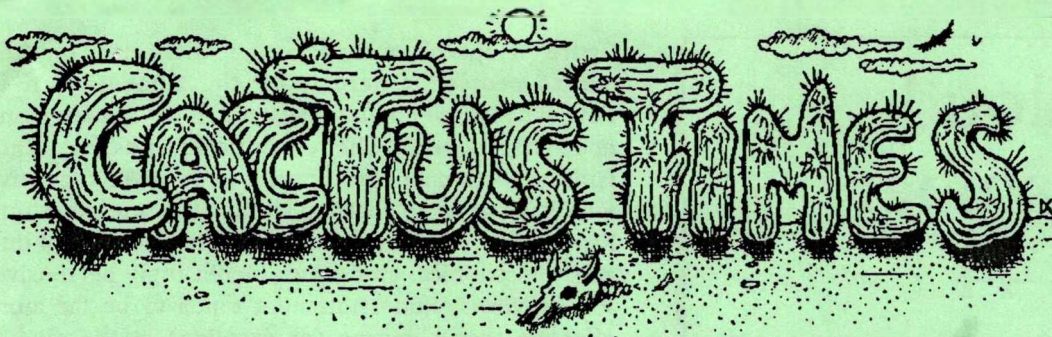
● **Sherry**. 'Mapplethorpe' is a fine coinage, tripping far better off the tongue than *FTT's* 'wobbly bits'.

● **Lynne**. A list of Approved Issues for *Acnestis* discussion sounds intimidating. But maybe (and maybe this is what you mean) we should try the format of the fanzine *Reading Matters*, grouping responses under *subject* (not contributor) heads. 'Postmodernism. Gosh, Paul is clever, and Dave Langford wholly misguided....'

● **Chesterton**. Thanks for all comments. I'm still very fond of GKC's writing despite lack of sympathy with his religion, and rather resent his 'hijacking' by the American Catholics who dominate the Chesterton Society and who seem to insist on rating his tiredest piece of apologetics far above the fiction, essays, lit-crit.... ● Of course many of the inconsistencies and telescoping of time in *The Man Who Was Thursday* (there's another I didn't mention, where the hero says 'remember how I did so-and-so yesterday?', and if you turn back he very patently did not) can be explained by the book's subtitle: *A Nightmare*. But the same kind of thing happens in his other novels, notably *Manalive*.

● **Rereadings**. Several things, including the uncut edition of Piers Anthony's *Macroscope* (oh dear, those huge wads of astrology and irrelevance ... I think I may prefer the brutally and unsympathetically edited UK/Sphere text to this flab), a wad of detection and chinoiserie by Ernest Bramah and Robert van Gulik, and *That Hideous Strength* by C.S. Lewis ... what a weird curate's egg this one is. The bit that most makes me gnaw the carpet is Lewis's extension of that old knock-down argument about abortion (where medical students make the hypothetical decision and are told, 'You have just murdered Beethoven, har har'). Good old prophetic Merlin pops up and immediately rounds on the heroine for conspiring with her husband to delay having children—because she has thus caused a champion of Good to *fail to be born*. Where is this weird reasoning supposed to lead? All women should begin a desperate round of successive pregnancies from the earliest possible age, just in case? ●





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Volume 4  
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Cactus  
Times—Not!

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## Twenty Things You Didn't Know About Pat Cadigan or: Now Will You Stop Moaning, Pat?

- 1 Pat Cadigan is also Mills & Boon's highest-selling hospital romance writer, under the name of Rosie M. Banks.
- 2 As the above implies, she is Iain M. Banks's identical twin sister.
- 3 Both Iain and she had plastic surgery to disguise this fact.
- 4 Iain wears a beard to conceal the characteristic operation scar, a greatly enlarged mouth. Pat shaves hers just to be perverse.
- 5 Pat has not touched alcoholic drink since the age of seven.
- 6 Pat was proud to vote for Richard Nixon as president in 1968.
- 7 She has voted for him again in every subsequent election (including that for County Sheriff).
- 8 Pat's SF novels are in fact written by the late Virginia Andrews.
- 9 The late Virginia Andrews is assisted in her efforts by child slave labour in a variety of fascist Third World countries.
- 10 The children are paid the local equivalent of 10p per day, and are tortured if they fail to meet the deadline. Strikers are shot.
- 11 Pat's hospital romances are written by a computer. All she does is boot up in the morning and take the MS out of the printer. That is, when she can't find anyone else to do it for her.
- 12 Pat didn't even write the hospital romance program herself. She blackmailed her twin Iain into writing it, by threatening to tell Barbara about their incestuous relationship.
- 13 Pat is John Jarrold's grandmother. His grandfather is the Lionel Hampton Big Band.
- 14 Pat's income last year from nurse novels she didn't even write is conservatively estimated at £400,000,000. She declared \$15,000 to the IRS, and applied for a \$10,000 grant from a foundation for the support of starving writers. When she got the grant, she spent the lot on Giorgio of Beverly Hills perfume. Which she mostly used to clean the lavatory.
- 15 Pat always uses a body double for the mini-skirts. At one stage during *Mexicon* the double (an underpaid editor of *Antiviv*) rebelled at getting only \$1.50 per hour plus bus fare, and understudy Charles Stross had to be called in. Luckily it was too dark in the disco for anyone to notice.
- 16 Wandering the cliffs of Scarborough after *Mexicon*, Pat found an interesting piece of driftwood labelled IMPORTANT HOTEL PROP—DO NOT REMOVE. She fancied a souvenir of her visit. The rest is history.
- 17 All Pat's famous '20-minute drunken tirades' are plagiarized from popular US sitcoms.
- 18 [The cowardly *Mexicon* committee won't let us print this one. *BASTARDS! SCUM! BASTARDS!*]
- 19 In her most famously influential SF rôle, Pat advised Robert A. Heinlein on the feminist position for '*The Number of the Beast*'. ('Much the same as the missionary position, Bob.')
- 20 It is no coincidence that Pat Cadigan shares initials with the well-known movement 'Political Correctness', which she founded as a breakaway group of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

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