Organised by the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

# TATION Fifteen

P.R.2.



1<sup>ST</sup>- 3<sup>RD</sup> November 1985 De Vere Hotel Coventry

GUESTS of HONOUR:

Dave Langford James White



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#### ARTWORK CREDITS:-

- 3 John Dell.
- 6 Cathryn Easthope.

This progress report was written, except where otherwise stated and put together by Eunice Pearson. Without the help from this dammed awful typewriter which will only work while Phill blows it with a hairdrier. Who said chairmen aren't useful for something?

July 1985.

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#### REMEMBER THE OLD DAYS ?

Were you at ALL fourteen Novacons as an attending member? If so, Stan Eling would like to hear from you. He is making up a list of those he believes have attended all Novacons. If you think your name should be included on this list write to him without delay at:124 GALTON ROAD,

SMETHWICK,

WARLEY,

WEST MIDLANDS, B67 5JS.

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### **BOOKINGS**

The hotel booking forms are included in this PR. Please read it very carefully before you fill it in as any mistakes will cause your booking to be delayed. Rooms will be allocated on a first-come-first-served basis. If you would like to share a twin room with someone and do not have a partner in mind, the hotel will arrange it. But neither they nor the committee can accept responsability for who you get.

Room rates are: £15 per person in a twin or double room

£20 per person in a single room.

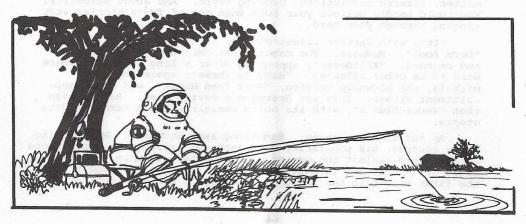
There are: 19 double rooms

20 single rooms 157 twin rooms

9 family rooms (two twin rooms sharing a bathroom).

Sorry to be so terse, but it really is very easy to make a mistake. Not a year has gone by without someone forgetting to book far enough ahead and then still expecting to get a room in the main hotel. There will, of course, be an overflow hotel, and some rooms may be available in the De Vere if there are any cancelations -- but don't count on that.

Just a PS for the real ale fans -- Wem ale will be available.



## STURGEON: Mercury Plus X

Sturgeon? The name was magnetic. There it was, perpetually cropping up attached to the stories I most admired. Sturgeon: quite an ordinary Anglo-American word among exotics like A.E. van Vogt, Isaac Asimov, Heinlein, Simak and Kuttner. Yet -- spikey, finny, odd. And it was not his original name. Theodore Hamilton Surgeon was born Edward Hamilton Waldo. To the usual boring, undeserving parents. That was on Statten Island, the year the first World War ended.

So there were two of him, as there are of many a good writer. A bright side, a dark side -- much like our old SF image of Mercury, remember, so much more interesting than banal reality. He had a mericurial temperament.

The bright side was the side everyone loved. There was some—thing so damned nice, charming, open, empathic, and elusive about Ted that women flocked to him. Men too. Maybe he was the mercy of his own fey sexuality. If so, he was quizzical about it, as about everything. One of his more cutesy titles put it admirably: "If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let Your Sister Marry One?" Not if it was Sturgeon, said a too-witty friend.

He played his guitar. He sang. He shone. He spoke of his philosophy of love.

Ted honestly brought people happiness. If he was funny, it was a genuine humour which sprang from seeing the world aslant. A true SF talent. Everyone recognised his strange quality -- 'faunlike', some nut dubbed it; faunlike he certainly looked. Inexplicable really.

Unsympathetic stepfather, unsatisfactory adolscence. Funny jobs , and "Ether Breather" out in Astounding in 1939. So to an even funnier job, science fiction writer. It's flirting with disaster.

I could not believe those early stories: curious subject matter, bizarre resolutions, glowing style. And about sexuality. You could hardly believe your luck when one of Ted's stories went singing through your head.

"It", with Cartier illustrations, in Unknown. Terrifying.
"Derm Fool". Madness. The magnificent "Microcosmic God", read
and re-read. "Killdozer", appearing after a long silence. There
were to be other silences. "Baby Is Three": again the utter
miracle, the blown-up version, "More Than Human", was no disapp-ointment either. This was Sturgeon's caviar dish. Better even
than "Venus Plus X", with its outre sexuality in an hermaphrodite
utopia.

As for those silences. Something sank Sturgeon. His amazing early success, his popularity with fans and stardom at conventions — they told against the writer. Success is a vampire. In the midst of life we are in definite trouble. They say Sturgeon was the first writer in the field ever to sign a six-book contract. A

six-book contract was a rare mark of distinction, like being crucified. A mark of extinction. Ted was no Stakhanovite and the deal did for him; he was reduced to writing a novelisation of a schlok TV series, "Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea", to fulfill his norms.

At one time he was reduced further to writing TV pilot scripts for Hollywood. He lived in motels or trailers, between marriges, between lives. Those who read "The Dreaming Jewels" or "Venus Plus X" or the story collections forget that writing is secretly a heavy load, an endless battle against the disappointments which come from within as well as without — and reputation a heavier load. Ted was fighting his way back to the light when night came on.

About Ted's dark side.

Well, he wrote that memorable novel, "Some Of Your Blood", about this crazy psychotic who goes for drinking mentrual discharge. Actually it does not taste as bad as Ted made out. That was his bid to escape the inescapable adulation.

One small human thing he did. He and I, with James Gunn, were conducting the writer's workshop at the Conference of the Fantastic at Boca Raton, Florida. This was perhaps three years ago.

Our would-be writers circulated their effusions round the table for everyone's comment. One would-be was a plump, pallid, unhappy lady. Her story was a fantasy about a gay who tried three times to commit suicide, only to be blocked each time by a green monster from Hell who wanted him to keep on suffering. Sounds promising, but the treatment was hopeless.

Dumb comments round the table. I grew impatient with their unreality. When the story reached me, I asked the lady right out, "Have you ever tried to commit suicide?"

Unexpected response. She stared at me in shock. Then she burst into a hailstorm of tears, collapsing on the table...."Three times," she cried. Everyone looking fit to faint.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," I said, "I've tried it too."
"So have I", said Sturgeon calmly.

He needn't have come in like that. He just did it bravely, unostentatiously, to support me, to support her, to support everyone. And I would guess there was a lot of misery and disappointment in Ted's life, for all the affection he generated. Yet he remained kind, loving, giving. (The lady is improving by the way. We're still in touch. That's another story.)

If that does not strike you as a positive story, I'm sorry. I'm not knocking suicide either. Everyone should try it at least once.

Ted was a real guy, not an idol, an effigy, as some try to paint him. He was brilliant, so he suffered. I know beyond doubt that he would be pleased to see me set down some of the bad times he had. He was not one to edit things out. Otherwise he would have been a less powerful writer.

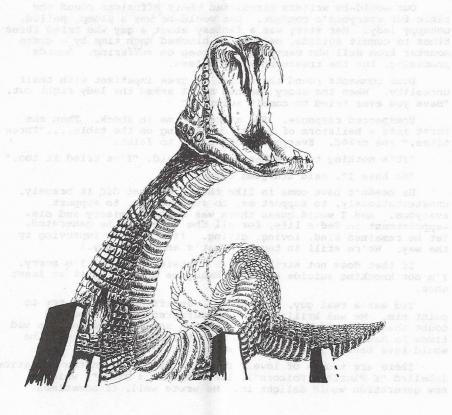
There are troves of lovely Sturgeon tales (as in the collation labelled "E Pluribus Unicorn"), like "Bianca's Hands", which a new generation would delight in. He wrote well, if sometimes

over-lushly. In many ways Ted was the direct opposite of the big technophile names of his generation, Doc Smith, Poul Anderson, Robert Heinlein, et al. His gaze was more closely fixed on people. For that we honoured him, and still honour him. Good for him that he never ended up in that prick's junkyard where they pay you a million dollars advance for some crud that no same man wants to read.

Ted died early in may in Oregon, of pneumonia and other complications. Now he consorts with Sophocles, Dick, and the author of the Karma Sutra. He had returned from a holiday in Hawaii, taken in the hopes he might recover his health there. That holiday, incidentally, was paid for by another SF writer — one who often gets publicity for the wrong things. Thank God, there are still some good guys left. We are also duly grateful for the one just departed.

Participated at Moon Retor, Plotted | This was particle times years

-- Brian Aldiss.
Written in haste on
a train bound for
Paddington. By
demand. No charge.





(Copied from the film catalogues. I didn't make up a word myself, honest.)

AIRPLANE II, THE SEQUEL

(84 minutes, directed by Jen Finkleman)

"The first lunar shuttle is prepared for take-off. Aboard is Ted Striker, on the run from the mental institution to which he was consigned when he threatened to disclose faults in the shuttle construction. Elaine Dickinson is the shuttle Computor Officer. Among the passengers are a bomb-toting husband, a carnel priest and an all-American family and their dog. Clarence Over is the Chief Pilot. The shuttle, once airborne, goes off course and heads directly for the sun. Pandemonium breaks loose aboard and Elaine again convinces Ted that he is their only hope for a safe lunar landing. Back at Mission Control Steve McCroskey plans to help Ted avoid disaster..."

#### TOPPER AL SUMSAPORO VEHICLEM SAI VENERALLE SASSA ISCIANO FREE SON OF

(80 minutes, directed by Norman Z. McLeod)

"The famous Hal Roach comedy which launched the Topper series. When his two young friends are killed, they reappear to Topper and set to work to make him rebel against the routine of his life. The anarchic ghosts, derived from the writings of Thorne Smith, are among the funniest creations ever transformed to the screen."

#### ATTACK OF THE 50-FOOT WOMAN

(65 minutes, directed by Nathan Herz) and we bedoom to be be the best of the b

"One of the great legends of sf cinema, this magnificent melodrama is almost as compelling as its title. Rich but neglected wife is visited by an extraterrestrial giant on a hunt for diamonds and she's infected with fast growth."

#### HEAVY METAL 18000 , SVOL AL DELL'ESTATE TOUR OF FOOR AL AND MONTHS

(90 minutes, directed by Gerald Potterton)

"Heavy Metal combines film, music and art into a unique entertainment experience. It takes its audience into a universe of magic, passionate fantasies, awesome, good and terrifying evil....into worlds that have the logic of a dream -- and a nightmere."

#### DR. G AND THE BIKINI MACHINE

(90 minutes, directed by Norman Taurog)

"Dr. Goldfoot has a fiendishly ingenious plan. By ensnaring a dozen of the world's wealthiest men in traps baited with beautiful, lifelike robots, he manufactures in his scientific laboratory, he can aquire a vast fortune from ransom demands. An accident-prone Secret Intelligence Command agent, unwittingly stumbles across Dr. G's hideout and falls in love with one of the beautiful robots resulting in chaos and hilarity."

SILKWOOD

(131 minutes, directed by Mike Nichols)

"Karen Silkwood died under mysterious circumstances on november 13th, 1974. As an employee of the Kerr McGee nuclear facility in Cimarron, Oklahoma, she had to endure the humiliating and painful cleansing procedure required after being contaminated. Becoming active in the union, Karen was urged to obtain evidence that safety regulations were being recklessly ignored and incurred the distrust of both management and her fellow workers, who feared their jobs were threatened. When she became contaminated for a second and then a third time, Karen, alarmed for her safety agreed to produce the evidence she had obtained. The next evening she left a union meeting in her car to meet a reporter from the New York Times...."

THE RIGHT STUFF

(192 minutes, directed by Philip Kaufman)

"This film follows the development of the American space programme, from the first supersonic flight by a plane in 1947, to the last orbital space flight of the Mercury programme in 1963. When Russia launched the first successful space rocket in 1957, the decision to put a man into space became a political one. The seven pilots selected to be astronauts soon formed a tightly-knit group, often in conflict with the rocket scientists. Their wives, too, had to endure constant exposure to the news media. These ordinary men and women were destined to capture the imagination of the world...."

#### BLADERUNNER

(116 minutes, directed by Ridley Scott)

"Early in the 21st Century four non-human Nexus 6 replicants have killed the crew of a space shuttle and returned to Earth to pass as humans. Blade runner Rick Deckard, with the ability to detect non-humans, is sent to find and eliminate them. From the moment that he meets the beautiful replicant, Rachael, with whom he is soon to find himself falling in love, Deckard is involved in a desperate pursuit of his quarry through the teeming city. As the reason for the replicant's action becomes apparent, Deckard faces a terrifying confrontation with their leader..."

SPLASH

(110 minutes, directed by Ron Howard)

"Allen Baur is saved from drowing off Cape Cod by a beautiful mermaid. He sees her briefly as he regains conciousness but she disappears into the sea. The mermaid, whose tail transforms into legs on land, comes ashore in New York to find Allen. She calls herself Madison, after the first street sign she sees, and learns human speech from TV commercials. Allen is captivated, even by the way she eats lobster — shell and all. The lover's bliss is about to by shattered however. A pompous scientist, who first spotted Madison at Cape Cod, is intent on revealing her true form to the world..."

(From the catalogues of Harris Films.)

### FOOD'n'DRINKS

I know that many of you will want to eat out of the hotel on at least one occasion, and perhaps go on a pub-crawl as well, so here's a short guide to the local oases. Not all of them of course, but it should help.

#### FOOD

Mr. Big -- Fairfax St. next to hotel. Burgers. Also two more in Trinity St.

Fishy Moores -- Fairfax St. nearly next to hotel. Mostly (surprise) fish. Restaurant and take-away.

Swiss Alps -- Hales St. English.

Dun Huang -- Hales St. Chinese. Quite new -- looks good.

Koh-i-Noor -- Corporation St. Indian.

The Parson's Nose -- Bishop St. Fish and chips and Donner Kebab takeaway. Very popular after throwing out time. Watch for drunks.

Tandoori Restaurant and takeaway -- Bishop St.

Stage Bite -- Corporation St. above Belgrade Theatre. Italian and English. Good and very popular. Fast service.

Ostlers -- Spon St. Egon Ronay recommended. Excellent food and value. Crockpots a speciality. Hugely popular.

Herbs -- Lower Holyhead Rd. Vegetarian. For those of you who won't eat the higher life forms.

Kentucky Fried Chicken -- Burges. Guess what?!

Rajah -- Burges. Indian. The property data to the soy is seen to the

Etnas -- Hertford St. Italian restaurant and takeaway. Cheap

Pizzaland --Hertford St. Well, there had to be one somewhere.

Nellos -- Market Way, Shelton square (far end by the Arcade).

Italian again.

Benedicts Bistro -- Hay Ln. (Up past the Cathedral by the law coursts). English, European, Mexican (Hombre?).

Pagoda -- Mercia House, precinct. Chinese.

For those of you willing to go further afield:

Mario's -- Radford Rd. Italian.

Quo Vadis -- Barkers Butts Ln. (continuation of Coundon Rd.)
Egon Ronay reccommended. Italian. Excellent, but
not so cheap.

Simla -- Station Square. Indian.

You should find something in this lot!

#### DRINK

- Smithfield -- Hales St. Big old pub spoiled by modernisation. Real ale bar in rear.
- Tally Ho -- Corporation St. Another big old pub even more spoiled by modernisation; lots of flashing lights and noise.
- Rising Sun -- Spon St. Same story as above I'm afraid, though not quite so bad. Some real ale.
- Old Windmill -- Spon St. This is the one people. One of the oldest pubs in Coventry, and possibly the best. Recently done out, but properly. Hand-pulled Stag, Maans, Wilsons. Superb. As you go in the door there is a little cubby-hole on the right with a copper-covered hatchway. This used to be the bar, all of 18 inches long. Don't miss the brew-house at the rear.
- Golden Cross -- Bayley Ln. By Benidict's Bistro.
- Dog and Trumpet -- Hertford St. (under ABC cinema). Different because it's underground, it's more of a club than a pub, open till the early hours at a modest price after normal closing time. Real ales. Live music.
- Coventry Cross -- Burges. Real ale. Nondescript place in the middle of a row of shops -- if you're not careful you'll miss it.
- Bug and Black Bat -- Shelton Square (opposite Nellos). Best-named pub in town. Modern, trendy place, all mirrors and spot-lights. They won't let scruffs in, which rules out most of Fandom.
- Rainbow -- Allesley village. Other side of town. I put this in 'cos it's my local. This and all the buildings in the old part of the village are listed so they can't spoil them. Nice cosy place, hand-pulled Courage Directors and Best Bitter. No, you can't crash at my place!

For those of you with more money who want to stay out later:

Park Lane Night Club -- Lower Precinct, far end. Also a Casino on the premises.

Reflections Nightclub -- Burges.

Most of the boozers above serve bar snacks or full meals. Plenty more to sample -- for some of them full riot gear is advisable. Have fun.

## Vin¢ Remembers

"What was it like being a fan during the war?" asks Eunice, innocently.

"Well, there was the time when a bullet struck the folded ASTOUNDING in my pocket and saved my life," sez I, "and when I parachuted into France I was lucky enough to come across this villager with a complete set of pre-war AMAZINGs and was able to keep occupied in his cellar whilst the Nazis searched overhead..."

I began reading s-f magazines in '36. I was a reader of 'Wellsian scientific romances' long before that, but hadn't come across an s-f 'zine until, one day, I was looking through a pile on a newsagent's counter in search of FLYING ACES, a flying mag that ran fantastic stories -- you know, a future war between America and Japan, that sort of thing. In this pile was a large size AMAZING STORIES, already three years old. I bought it, knew I'd found what I'd been looking for all my fourteen-year-old life, and immediately started searching for more.

In those days there were magazines and there were hard-cover books. The Lane brothers had started publishing Penguins the year before, but there were virtually no pocket books as such. But the magazines! In those far-off, virtually unimaginable times, Britain was exporting cars and other goodies to the States. As we didn't want much from them, the returning ships were loaded with cheap ballast to keep them from being top-heavy. Amongst that ballast was magazines which had either been returned from the newstands, or were 'remainders'. They came over here and were sold at waste-paper prices, and British business enterprise being what it was — then — market place stalls and even some shops existed for the sole purpose of purveying these 'zines to the public, usually at three old pennies each; they were three times as expensive as newspapers but only half the price of Penguins.

There were scores of pulp magazines, but only three s-f -- ASTOUNDING, AMAZING and WONDER. In spite of the numbers arriving, there were very few old magazines around, even then. Who'd want to keep these definitely lower-class productions with those horrible covers? I collected a few and I suffered as the reader's letters columns in all three magazines pleaded for the reprints of late '20's/early '30's 'classics' by E.E. Smith, Garrett Serviss, A. Merritt, John Campbell etc., golden oldies which seemed forever beyond recall. In mid-'37 TALES OF WONDER edited by Walter Gillings started over here; in early '38 a second issue appeared and I wrote, not having much idea of what I was asking for but pleading for reprints. I also, fatefully, sent in a subscription for Gillings' SCIENTIFICTION, a printed fanzine.

SCIENTIFICTION promptly folded, but in its columns was an advert for 'Science Fiction Service' of Liverpool. I sent for their catalogue, and in <u>its</u> columns was a mention of 'fanzines'. I shuddered at the catalogue — who could afford to pay four shill-ings and more for 1929 AMAZING STORIES? — but sent for the fanzines.

When they arrived I was surprised, intrigued and disappointed. No interviews with authors or news in the manner of SCIENTIFICTION. Instead, some mention of s-f, especially book reviews, but mostly it seemed to be ex-University types discussing philosophical subjects, some 'in' jokes shared by the twenty or so people who seemed to constitute 'fandom' and meetings at various houses far away, all set down in duplicated 'zines.

I was a loner and felt ill-educated. I contributed some book reviews, had some correspondence with Mike Rosenblum -- who was subsequently the main-stay of British fandom during the war -- but tho' I kept getting 'zines for a year or so, felt myself to be a bystander.

All this time the international situation had been getting worse, and eventually war was declared. I felt apathetic; I'd read book after book on future wars, seen the film THINGS TO COME, and believed that this was the end. The Germans would bomb us, probably with poison gas, and that would be it. By this time I was working twelve-hour shifts at a munitions factory, my mother was gravely ill, and bombs were falling. In the circumstances s-f and fandom seemed irrelevant. I bought the -- much reduced in size -- ASTOUNDING and its companion UNKNOWN, the British Reprint Editions or BRES, but let my connections with fandom go.

Eventually I was 'called up' -- to the RAF -- but I'm sorry; no thrills or romantic encounters or anything. Just an ordinary boring war, as suffered by thousands of others. About the only interesting thing that happened s-f wise was seeing an ASTONISHING STORIES in the back of a parked car in a street in Reykjavik, Iceland. I bought BREs and scouted around for books during leaves, but hundreds of thousands of books and magazines went for pulping and they were rare.

Eventually we dropped the A-bombs on Japan. They came as a surprise, but to a fan a comprehensible surprise — and a relief. All through the war, you didn't know whether you were going to be sent somewhere to be killed in the following few days. To have that omnipresent shadow lifted was like having a cancerous growth excised. You, at least, were going to <a href="Live">Live</a>. All you had to worry about was the thousand—and—one small responsibilities of everyday life.....

In '47 I was 'demobbed'; during demobilisation leave I spent weeks cycling around what was left of London, looking for s-f. About that time, I found myself in Foyles, in Charing Cross Road. In those days, Foyles boasted that they had the biggest secondhabd book department in the world. I had a mental list of authors to look for -- Wells, Stapledon, Fowler Wright, James Branch Cabell. Russell, etc. I'd exhausted the list and was standing in an aisle wondering where else in Charing Cross Road to search, when I heard a voice behind me saying "You look for Wells and Stapledon; Eric'll look for Cabell, I'll look for Fowler Wright...." I turned around, walked up to the small group and said "Excuse me, I've looked for all those. Are you science-fiction fans?" They were; their names I recognised from the old fanzines I still had at home. They told me about the regular weekly meetings at the 'White Horse' in London. That was it. I wrote an account of the first post-war Con in '48 when all of fifty one fans turned up....and kept on fanzine writing for the next twelve years.

((And he still hasn't stopped!))

## AST 2FOW

This years artshow venue will be held in the 1000 sq.ft. Pine room on the 3rd floor of the De Vere Hotel. The pine room is by far the most relaxing room in the Hotel and is ideal for the artshow. The artwork stands will be the same as the ones used last year and at Yorcon 3.

However there is one thing we can not provide, that is artwork. Should you wish to display artwork could you please fill in the amount of display space required on the hotel booking form and return it to 86 Berwood Farm Road, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham. Alternatively if you have any special requirements please contact Carol Pearson at the address on the back cover.

#### PROGRAMME.

This year we are aiming for a more fuller programme than ever befo before, starting at 12 o'clock on the Friday and running through until late Sunday night/Monday morning. We are planning to have few if any breaks in that time. There will be two actual programmes which we hope will compliment each other, more infomation in detail will be in the next Progress Report.

However what we can tell you at the moment is that there will be THREE parties over the weekend and though I know I was only making a joke last year this year we are planning to have

a Saturday Night CABARET.

Though it may be All Saint's Day on Friady the 1st, we will be organising a HALLOWEEN PARTY. We do hope that you will ent into the, ahem, spirit of the occasion with costumes, maskes etc. Please bring your own ghouls.

If any group or convention would like to use the fan room, either for a party or a part of the fan programme, please could you contact Eunice Pearson as soon as possible. Address is on the

back cover.

Sorry that we can not reveal more infomation about the programme but as you can well imagine the process of getting speakers along and confirming them is a very long a difficult task and we wouldn't want to mislead you. Suffice to say that we will be having one or two or even three unusal guests.

#### BOOK ROOM.

The book rooms will be located on the 3rd floor in suits 3 and 4, which isn't as bad as it sounds since the rooms are next door to each other and are very large. The tables are £10 each and could you order and pay in advance using the hotel booking form provided. We can not accept anyone who turns up on the day asking for tables.

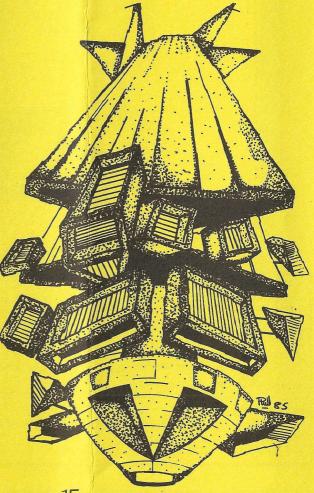
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53	Margaret Austin	109	Richard Brandshaft
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149	Lee Montgomerie	
150	Doreen Rogers	
151	Mike Gray	
152	Matthew Irving	
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155	Debby Moir Tim Bellerby	1
156	Frank Carver	
157	Dave Cowie	
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172	Tip Burale	

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