

No-one could ever understand our bizarre relationship.../

THE SPUNG

EAST OXFORD
LOVE NEST -
NIGELINA

TALKS (OR SHOULD I
SAY GIBBERS INSANELY)
EXCLUSIVELY!
TO THE SPUNG!

- See page 9 -

THE SIZZLING SOMERWAY MID-MICHNEUMAS UPDATE ON S.F. IN OXFORD!!! • FORWARD WITH THE PENGUIN •

SPUNG EDITOR IN LITERARY SHOCKER QUIZ PROBE

Dark Feasts by Ramsey Campbell

After going to Necroninecon over Hallowe'en and hearing Ramsey Campbell reading from this collection of his best short stories, I decided it was something I strongly wanted to read in toto (the wonder-dog). Now having only got it three days ago, and having wasted a lot of time on Bored Of The Moon, I still haven't finished it... but here's a review of the first two-thirds.

The collection kicks off with the straight Lovecraft derivative The Room In The Castle. This really does come straight out of HPL in everything bar style—Campbell acknowledges him as a major influence and claims that he was a real master of the classic horror story structure. This is all very well, but that seam has been pretty well mined out by now, so it's just as well that the next story, Cold Print, sees Campbell moving away from Lovecraft into his own fears (though still, a little incongruously, retaining such conventions as the Celtic myths). This is a thoroughly competent story, and throughout it and the next three Campbell's writing skills develop until he is able to give us the first genuinely frightening story, a 6 page short-short called At The End Of A Summer's Day. "I'm happy to say that it remains an enigma to me," he says in his introduction, and I think it must be that enigma, the inexplicability of the thing, that makes it so effective. I wish I could describe it to you, but there isn't enough of it to be able to provide a taster.

Next comes The Whining, which I thought must be a parody of King's The Shining until I checked the dates on them (and now I'm just confused); and then another frightener, The Words That Count, in which a 23-year old girl, deeply religious and obsessed with sin and hell, writes in her diary about a strange, possibly evil pamphlet she received that morning. Although the girl's fear and guilt are well done, it's the final implication that seals it.

Next come a couple of iffy ones, then The Companion, which the increasingly incredible Stephen King described as "maybe the best horror tale to be written in English in the last thirty years". Didn't see it myself, but it ain't bad. Call First is a quickie which exists mainly for its punchline, though it does show that Campbell is becoming unable to help writing well, even when he's writing throwaways. In The Bag I didn't like, but it won the British Fantasy Award 1978; however, the same year the World Fantasy Award was won by the next story, The Chimney, which is infinitely more moving and effective, perhaps because it is partly autobiographical, perhaps because the child protagonist is easy to sympathise with.

None of the next five stories really stood out for me, though Mackintosh Willy won Campbell another World Fantasy Award. The only other stories I've read so far are Hearing Is Believing, which would have been pretty good even if it hadn't included a perfect demonstration of the slingshot effect; and Seeing The World and Apples which Campbell read at the convention, which are OK but nothing special.

But look, this man can write, he can create plausible and sympathetic characters, he understands structure and at his best he can give you a genuine chill (something I find even the glorious Clive Barker has trouble with)—what more could one ask for?

Strongly recommended.

Ivan Towlson

RETURN OF MACKEREL PERVERT (part 2) SHOCK!!!

Discussion Meetings

Every Wednesday at 8:15pm in Trinity xi.8 (courtesy Mark Davies). I'm still looking for someone to do the talk in 8th week, but here is what we have so far:

6th week: untitled on Alan Moore - Martin Pickles

7th week: Isaac Asimov - from Foundation to Fossilisation - Mo Holkar

This may not be the proper place to moan about the courtesies necessary to a worthwhile discussion meeting, such as respecting the speaking object and not constantly interrupting the poor soul who's trying to give the talk with boring trivia, but it's too late, I've done it now. Discussion meetings are interesting and often educational; chaotic shouting matches are just annoying. I'm sorry to be so pompous and self-righteous, but...
...oh, to hell with it. Next entry.

Library Meetings

Being unable at present to find a more suitable venue, library meetings continue to be held at St Anne's in 60 Woodstock Rd rm 2 (courtesy Paul Cray) on Sundays at 8:15pm. Afterwards we adjourn to St John's Prestwich Room for alcohol and argument; then back to the library for unspeakable, blasphemous instant coffee and the odd quiet biscuit (we never eat noisy biscuits, it's against all morality).

Video Meetings

Mondays of even weeks, in the Sir Christopher Cox room in New College. Yes, I know it's impossible to find--hopefully we can con someone into standing in the lodge and guiding the huddled masses to showings of:

6th week: Peggy Sue Got Married, plus (we hope) The Clangers and MaxTM on Wogan

8th week: er... not quite sure yet... depends what we can get

If anybody in the general area of New College (you know who you are--and so do I, he cackled) can offer coffee afterwards I'm sure we'd all be very grateful.

The Christmas Party

...is GO!!! See elsewhere for details.

Sfinx

...is GO!!! (when Tim gives us the masters) Don't hold your breath for the stupendous, staggering, surprising, somnolent, stupefying, stuck-at-the-pre-production-stage (etc) Best Of Sfinx--stopping a door near you soon! Details elsewhere. Meanwhile, why not buy copies of Sfinx 4 for all your friends? At only 70p a time, it's cheaper than a pint of cider and twice as nutritious (it says here), and what's more it's quite good.

The Newsletter

...is STOP!!! Unless, of course, you all send me lots of reviews, news, gossip, lies, slander, quotes, weirdness, dirty photos, other things you'd like to see in the newsletter (I'm not fussy... well, not very fussy. Remember, I have to answer for this stuff to our mighty senior member.) Are Neal and I the only people interested in SF around here? Currently seeking reviews of Fon and Consider Phlebas--and if anyone has read anything recently issued or reissued that they think is worth a mention, would they please mention it?

How do people feel about carrying (brief) author retrospectives in the newsletter? I'm about to mount a major assault on the Philip K Dick back catalogue, and I've had to rush around asking everybody which bits of it I ought to read in the limited time I have; it seems to me that the newsletter is the ideal place to put out "Five essential novels by..." lists which might, if nothing else, give the potentially interested somewhere to start on an author, and if we're really lucky kick some of the Dumarest-junkies' brains sufficiently into gear that they read some (gasp) decent sf...

Feedback and suggestions eagerly solicited. Send THE LOT to the editor, Ivan Towlson, at New College (or visit him at 84 Bullingdon Road, he gets awfully lonely... (sob)).

Gosh, that was even more cranky than usual... I must have got my soul back after all. Or maybe I'm just getting old. John Styles, where are you now that I need you? (help)

REPORTS OF MY DEATH HAVE BEEN GREATLY EXAGGERATED... BUT NOT THAT GREATLY.

Sincere and grovelling thanks are due to everyone who helped distribute the epic Freshers' batch of newsletters. This includes Jo, Kate, Chris, Mo, Dave, Paul M, and Neal, and probably a lot of others. Also to Tim for being asked to collate a few if he had time and doing a hundred and fifty without protest. I owe my sanity to you all (faint whimper).

Thanks also to the unsung heroes who helped (w/oll haven help!) distribute this 'un. (They enter stage left and take a bow. The editor falls flat on his back with exhaustion and is carried off stage right by the Mad Alchemist, who is plotting to rule the universe with an army of mutineer New College philosophers...)

BECCON ASTEROID QUIZ

SHOCK SURPRISE RESULTS!!!

Reprinted from *The Science Fact & Fiction Convention*
(For those who don't know, the 1987 Eastern pulled its staves for the 10 SF books/films--& 3 science fact--they'd take to a dinner interval with them. These are the results--from the press.)

No	FILM TITLE	VOTES	No	BOOK TITLE	VOTES
1	Bladerunner	69	1	Lord of the Rings (Tolkien)	53
2	2001	62	2	Dune (Herbert)	24
3	Dark Star	48	3	Little Big (Crowley)	21
4	Alien	39	4	Book of the New Sun (Wolfe)	18
5	Forbidden Planet	38	5	A Canticle for Liebowitz (Miller)	16
6	Star Wars (I)	35	6	Moon is Harsh Mistress (Heinlein)	16
7	Aliens	35	7	Tiger Tiger (Bester)	15
8	Silent Running	34	8	Disposessed (Le Guin)	15
9	Dr Strangelove	26	9	Forever War (Holdeman)	12
10	Brasil	23	10	Left Hand of Darkness (Le Guin)	12
11	Rocky Horror Picture Show	22	11	Ringworld (Niven)	11
12	Terminator	19	12	Do Androids Dream... (Dick)	11
13	Star Trek (II)	18	13	Stand on Zanzibar (Brunner)	11
14	Solaris	15	14	City & the Stars (Clarke)	10
15	Dune	14	15	Neuromancer (Gibson)	10
16	Time Bandits	12	16	Pavane (Robert)	10
17	Back To The Future	12	17	Stainless Steel Rat (Harrison)	10
18	Day The Earth Stood Still (The)	12	18	Way Station (Simak)	10
19	Metropolis	12	19	Hitchhiker's Guide To... (Adams)	10
20	Star Wars (II) - Empire	12	20	More Than Human (Sturgeon)	9
	Star Trek (III) - Search For Spock	11			
	Barbarella	11			
	Soylent Green	10			
	Star Wars (III) - Return of...	9			

SANTA CLAUS BITES HEAD OFF LIVE BLASPHEMOUS GIBBERING MONUMENT TO NECROTIC EVIL ON STAGE!

The great OUSFG Christmas party will be held jointly with the D&Dsoc on Friday 27 November in Christ Church undercroft (same as last year) from 7 pm (or was it 7:30?) till midnight. Tickets are being printed now (well... soon) and will be sent out nearer the time; put in orders to Mo or me now (the sooner we know how much money we have to juggle with the better we can organise and budget the thing). Cost: £3 to members, £3.50 to nonmembers; if you don't drink alcohol you get a £1 discount. Tickets will be available on the door but if you know you'll be coming it would make things infinitely easier for us if you ordered them in advance...

What do you get for your £3? As much booze as you can drink and we can afford, a disco (hopefully featuring the Battlefield Earth Bop ("Do the Psychlo/come on baby, do the Psychlo..."), fun, frolics, fancy dress (not compulsory, but don't be embarrassed--it's usually about 50% fancy dress, and there will be small prizes (including Best Excuse For Not Wearing Fancy Dress)), Neal having his loincloth surgically removed by presumably lust-crazed women dressed as angels...

Give us the ackers, mate! You know it fakes sense...

THE SPUNG SAYS>

"The answer is to suck it in and out, not use your knees"
--John Bray

"Look, I may be statistically slightly deviant from the norm, but I'm not weird." --Neal Tringham

RIVAL TO 'SPUNG' SLAMMED FOR HIGH JOURNALISTIC STANDARDS HORROR!!

TEEN SUICIDES LINKED TO REJECTION SLIPS

NOTE POST-MODERNIST
ASCENDING LINE (oys)

Sfinx, officially separate from OUSFG (as far as the Proctors are concerned), has through its chequered 18 year history been intimately associated with the Group, and is now as always desperately combing it for contributions for the seventeenth Sfinx, number 5 (there have been two series of Sfinx—old series 1-11 (1969-76), plus an unnumbered edition in 1978 which bankrupted the magazine (rumours abound that uncountable hordes of the issue lurk in the bowels ((or, as Paul would have it, "bowls"... —ed)) of Wolfson College—ready to devour any mortal foolish enough to disturb their frightful slumber...), and new series 1-4 (1982-7)).

The magazine's heyday was in the early 70s when real writers such as Ian Watson and Rob Holdstock (plus the fledgling Dave Kangford) had stories published (interesting fact no. 1: Dave Kangford had a story in the Michaelmas 71 Sfinx 5—his first term in Oxford—and then nothing until Sfinx 9, Spring 1974. Odd.). Crazy, glassy-eyed Sfinx junkies have demanded to see these stories reprinted (well... I think Neal and Maria must have thought it a Good Idea at some time), so the Best Of Sfinx ((working title: Scraping The Barrel 1969-1984 —ed)) should be coming in time for the 1988 Eastercon, to be held next year (shock) in Liverpool (join now—before rates go up again (moan, whimper)).

However, far more important than such ephemera is Sfinx 5, part of the long term plan conceived by a group of fanatical fen to recreate the Golden Age of Sfinx and hence of all speculative fiction. ((What, you mean November M1981? —ed)) Sfinx 4, snappily laser printed, was by far the best produced Sfinx since the almost legendary Sfinx 9, when one thousand copies were sold by hawking them around college rooms—true dedication—and may have been the best written too! However Sfinx 5 will be even better... provided we can find the writers and artists (repeat after me: I will write a story tonight... I will...). Basically we want anything vaguely speculative fictionally ((sic —ed)), up to about 5000 words, preferably shorter. ((The next sentence is deleted on the grounds that I never really believed in the freedom of the press anyway. —ed)) If there is sufficient interest we can have a Sfinx writers workshop next term—so get writing, or we'll send Neal round to sing you a medley from the Battlefield Earth soundtrack.

mangled from a manuscript by Paul Gray

Sfinx editors: Neal Tringham (Exeter), to whom stories should be sent; Paul Gray (St Anne's); Ivan Towlson (New)

NEO-HEINLEIN WALKS THE EARTH?

Bones Of The Moon by Jonathan Carroll

At the time of writing, two of the Kangford Book Club selections for 1987 (Aegypt and The Urth Of The New Sun) are still trapped between hard covers. Nevertheless, I desperately want to read them; so when the third KBC selection came out in paperback, I leapt upon it, hoping it would provide an adequate stopgap. I wasn't encouraged by the blurb: "Cullen James dreamed of the perfect man—and she got him. Better still, she got pregnant..." (sound familiar—apart from being straight out of Maria's worst nightmares?).

The book kicks off with the axe-murderer downstairs from Cullen being dragged off, whereupon we are treated to a review of her life so far. About four pages into this, it dawned on me that I had read this style of dialogue before, albeit in somewhat more acute form, in the works of the mighty Robert A. Heinlein. Curiously, a few pages later, it became increasingly clear that the main characters were all Heinlein cut-outs with rudimentary personalities grafted onto them... I began to wonder whether it was worth carrying on. But carry on I did, into the dream-sequences so highly praised by Stephen King (or somebody—copy not available to check) for capturing the authentic ambience of dreams... Now I don't remember many of my dreams, but they sure as hell are not so phenomenally, mindbogglingly mundane as Mrs James'—or, presumably, Mr King's—are (many of you will know of my dream-vision of the true nature of cyberpunk). Come on, even Lovecraft's dreamlands are better than this, and they're still far from adequate.

This book has some nice bits and a reasonably effective climax, but it's basically predictable, poorly-characterised, often poorly-written and seriously unoriginal. Strictly for people who liked Glory Road.

Ivan Towlson

"ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF" PROBE QUIZ

Angel Heart (18) dir. Alan Parker

The text for today's sermon, my children, is taken from Sympathy For The Devil... well, OK, Lucifer doesn't actually say, "Pleased to meet you—I hope you guess my name" when Harry Angel first meets him, but it is written all over his face; and private eye Angel certainly is puzzled by the nature of his game. Go and find this pre-war crooner, says Lou Cyphre, I want to collect some... collateral off him. So off Harry goes, searching here, searching there, searching most of Louisiana, leaving behind him a trail of brutally murdered bodies and followed by a pair of inexplicably suspicious cops...

The film is well done in typical Parker style with at least one genuinely shocking moment (the final shot of the film), but it's not terribly innovative or interesting—not cliched, granted, but... Still, I did feel a bit of sympathy for the unfortunate Angel as his true situation was brought to light, and Parker does bring in some worthwhile themes (if we accept the horror-novel consensus about soul-selling, then who in fact is Harry Angel?). Definitely worth seeing—but not necessarily worth seeing twice. I'll give it three and a half. IFT.

"WE ARE NOT AMUSED" SHOCK HORROR

Equal Rites by Terry "GoH" Pratchett

So here we have it, the long-awaited sequel to The Colour Of Magic and The Light Fantastic. Unfortunately it looks rather as if, though Mr Pratchett may have heard of brilliantly original third books in series, he hasn't quite got to grips with the idea yet. The basic concept (the newly-born eighth son of an eighth son—destined to be a wizard—turns out to be a daughter) is good, and some of the character are very nicely done, but funny moments are rather thin on the ground compared to the previous two books. Not to mention the fact that the number of appearances of the phrase about the Things from the Dungeon Dimensions having a self-assembled look seems to have broken my previous record of this type, the number of times ~~the names~~ names take mirrorshades on and off in Count Zero...

Not a bad book, then. But not really a good one, either.

Neal Tringham (in haste)

Actually I thought it was pretty tedious.

Ivan Towlson (in brief)

WE'RE ONLY IN IT FOR THE MONEY

The OUSFG merchandise is coming! We are about to order some mugs, with the design by Chris as shown at meetings; the cost is £2 per mug, which I should say is somewhat below cost price... Deeply worthwhile, profoundly tasteful and jolly cheap. Just add tea! (Batteries not included.)

And the continuing saga of the sweatshirts... We expect to be putting in an order around the end of term. Now there has been much talk of a new design (by Paul), so if there are any artists out there interested in submitting random doodles of penguins, sheep or bug-eyed monsters, now is the time to do it—if we don't hear anything soon, we'll have to continue with the existing design.

All interest should be directed at Mo Holkar (Hertford); if you can't find him at meetings, try Ivan Towlson.

NO COMMENT SUFFICIENT... NONE NECESSARY

Rocky Horror is coming to town! No, not the boring old film, this time it's the boring old stage play instead, at the Apollo in George St from Monday 16 Nov to Saturday 21 Nov. Some people from OUSFG are going on the Friday (but... but... but... they're showing Brazil on Friday! waah!) and there may—or may not—be tickets left. Chris Hughes (ChCh, or to be found at B4 Bullington Rd, tel 727903) seems to know what's going on, so if you fancy a night on the town wearing shiny butm fish-net tights and corsets, now is your big chance.

... that gives me an idea for next year's hunt party...

MACKEREL PERVERT IN BLUE LEOTARD SHOCK PROBE!

Once upon a time in America there was a comic called Captain Marvel, the hero of which could say a magic word and turn into a superman in a blue leotard. After licensing problems stopped its distribution in Britain (or indeed anywhere—the creators were sued because Captain Marvel was far too much like Superman) a man named Mick Anglo ((!)) started an English version called Marvelman, which eventually disappeared around the early '60s. Our story now jumps to 1982, the year when Warrior (a British comics magazine publishing monthly black and white strips) first came out. For most of its lifetime, Warrior carried a continuation of Marvelman, written by Alan Moore and drawn by a number of artists including Garry Leach and Alan Davis. This began from the premise that the Marvelmen of the Mick Anglo comic were created by a branch of air force intelligence known as the 'Spookshow' as a cold war weapon, and that their (very silly) sixties adventures could be read as the record of a series of artificially induced dreams designed to keep their immensely powerful minds under control and sleeping. What made these episodes interesting, however, were their constant references to the Marvelmen's potential as supermen. The first strip (when reprinted in Miracleman 1) begins with a quote from Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra: "Behold... I teach you the Superman! He is this lightning... he is this madness!"

The Marvelmen are 'artificially involved' ((sorry --ed/typist)), gifted with assorted psi powers (embarrassing perhaps, but probably a necessary rationalisation) and mentally very different to men—even to their own alternate bodies, who are homo sapiens. From the strip Out Of The Dark:

Out of the dark, he is coming. A burning man of power and perfect beauty. That, ultimately, is why they must kill him. That, ultimately, is why they can't...

((Sounds like the blurb to one of Lionel Fanthorpe's more restrained efforts to me --ed))

Eventually Marvel, the American comics company, threatened to sue Warrior (apparently on the grounds that any strip with Marv in the title should pay them royalties) and Marvelman stopped appearing, shortly before Warrior did. Several years later an American independent company called Eclipse Comics began republishing all the existing strips in colour, and followed them with new ones by Alan Moore and a wild variety of artists, retitling the thing Miracleman to avoid problems with Marvel. The first few of the new issues, finishing off Book Two, were not very good (degenerating to plot thrashing in issue 10) but with issue 11 and the start of Book Three, the comic acquired a new (and good) artist, John Totleben, and a new direction. Book Three is being written as a mythology of sorts, with the surviving Marvelmen playing the roles of gods in an alternate 1987 looking back to the early 1980s and the continuation of the previous plot. Issues 11 and 12 are dominated by Greek and, to some extent, Christian religious imagery, making for an interesting new perspective on the Marvelmen as Supermen. Issue 12 (released last month and available at Rainbow's End on the Cowley Road (FREE PLUG!)) also has Moore's views on H. sapiens' sexual response to superhumans, which I found fascinating despite the increasing use of his recent prose style, which has so many metaphors per paragraph that it becomes very difficult to work out what the hell he's talking about. ((No it doesn't. --ed))

Buy them while you can—Moore will probably stop writing them after Miracleman 15, and in any case some new independent could set itself up as Miracle comics any time now, forcing the destruction of all back issues and a name change to Mackerelman...

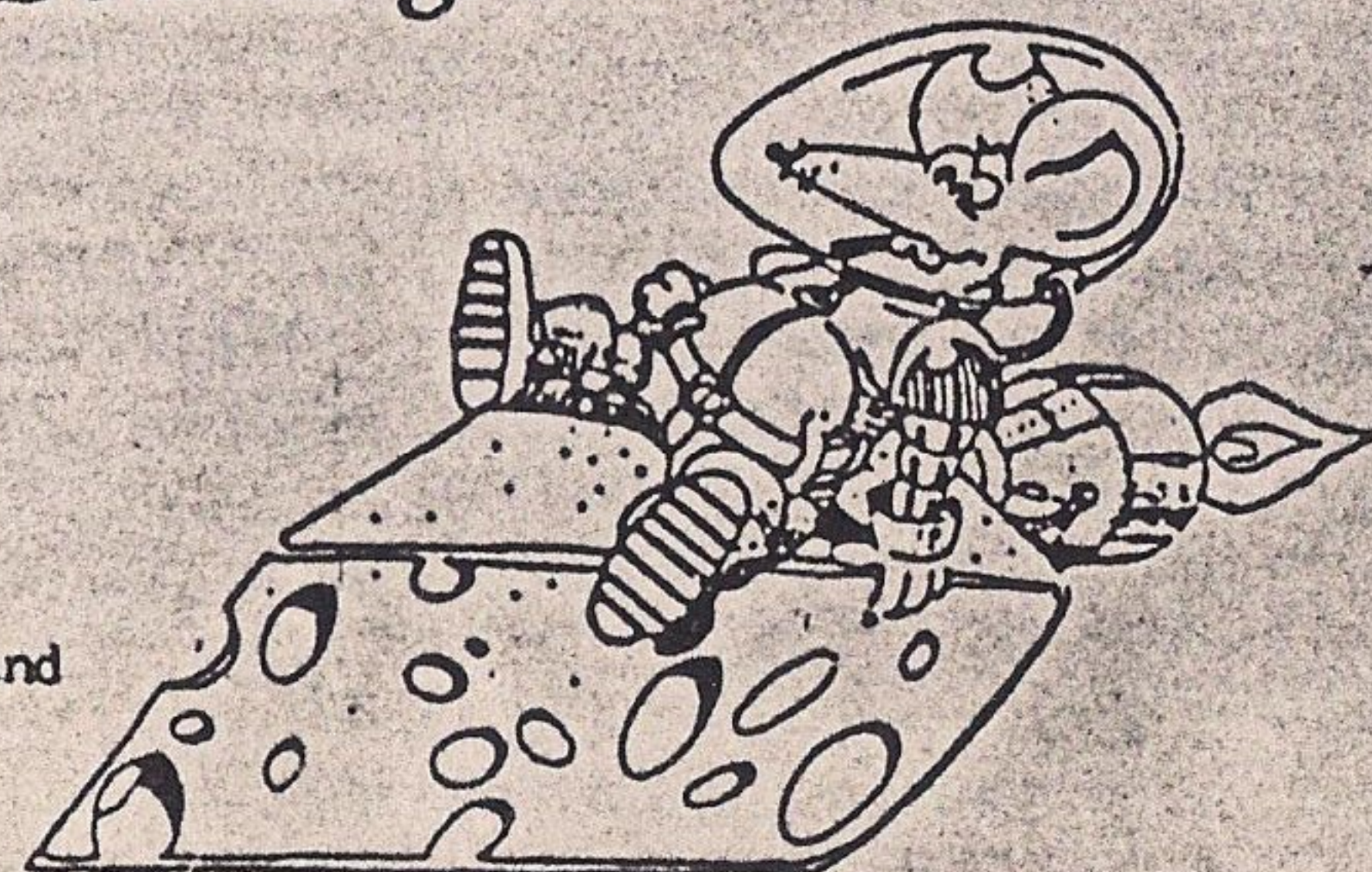
Gurk?

Neal Tringham

The 1990 Worldcon in Holland? Sounds great!

The 48th World Science Fiction Convention will be held at the Netherlands Congress Centre from August 23rd-27th 1990. Guests of Honour Joe Haldeman, Wolfgang Jeschke, Harry Harrison, Andrew Porter. Membership rates to 1st December 1987: attending £28, and supporting £16. Expensive, yes, but not as expensive as it will be next year...

worldcon 1990, PO Box 95370, 2509 CJ The Hague, Holland



FIONA GEORGE ATE MY YUPPIE!

Uncle Meat by Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention (by special request of Neal) Frank Zappa, rock's number one weirdo, has just had his 32-album back catalogue bought up by the (previously heavy metal oriented) Music For Nations, who intend to reissue them on compact disc in batches of three or four over the next three years. The first lot, which arrived in the shops a couple of weeks back, consists of the classic Freak Out (a double album on one CD, with some remixes), completely remixed versions of Hot Rats and Ruben and the Jets, and a double CD of Uncle Meat including 45 minutes of new material taken from the forthcoming "movie of the same name which we haven't got enough money to finish yet," as Zappa described it when the original LP was released in 1969.

The new edition, apart from carrying two full hours of music and speech, contains (at last) a description of the plot. (This bears no relation to either the soundtrack or the spoken extracts, which in turn bear no relation to each other. This makes sense.) An evil scientist lusts for revenge after being laid off—assembling stolen equipment and mystical potions in a Van Nuys garage, Uncle Meat and his Mexican slave Bimbo prepare to rule the universe with an army of mutant monsters... A rock'n'roll combo is kidnapped from the Whisky-A-Go-Go; disguised as groupies, Uncle Meat and Bimbo lure them to the garage on the pretext of giving them the chance to expand their consciousness. They place the victims on little mechanics' carts and cover the bodies with psychedelic posters. The serum is administered by giving each a blast from a nasal mist squeezer... and when Uncle Meat throws the switch, the noses under the posters slowly become erect...

The music? It's weird. Bizarre sounds, bizarre lyrics, bizarre spoken snatches. The Rolling Stone record guide has this to say: "Here, Zappa the moralist-satirist temporarily disappears, replaced by an incarnation as metaphysician. The vocal fragments, spoken parts and even the songs consist largely of autobiographical allusions, poetic texts, linguistic games and gnomic manifestoes on aesthetics."

It's also very funny.

The film extract displays Zappa's satiric wit in a way that the music doesn't, harking in places back to the savage We're Only In It For The Money with its remarks on changing the world. More important, though, and more prominent is the absurdist, stream of consciousness side of Zappa's writing. It seems primarily concerned with the making of a monster movie ("We're breeding a whole new generation of monster lovers..."), but also features hamburgers, Italian translation lessons, clothed showers and toilet brushes, most of which send at least one of the characters off into ecstatic moans of "oh, that gets me so hot..." (satire on Rolling Stone? Quite possibly).

This also is very funny. Also very strange.

I'm looking forward to the movie (due out on Zappa's video label Neal Soon Now). Until then, this will do more than adequately, thank you. Totally inspired, man!

There, Neal, is that enough for you?

Ivan Fowlson (with reluctance)



DAMP DEBAUCHERY HORROR PROBE

← This is an experiment.

I don't imagine for one minute it'll photowry, but I have nothing else to put here, so I may as well try. If only to prove that one upas or one I could have got my legs at that angle.

(The feet are Neal's. I don't know why.)

Paul Marron