

Tightbeam 215

For Members of the National Fantasy Fan Federation



January 1999

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Susan VanSchuyver

Welcome to 1999! I hope you all had a nice holiday season and are working hard on those resolutions! (grin--I have never done resolutions--not sure why.)

This seems like a good time to talk about hopes and dreams for N3F. What is the future of our wonderful organization? The immediate future will bring a continuing need to cut costs or to continue the cost-cutting measures we have started such as mailing Tightbeam and TNFF together. On the positive side, I would like to see more people participate in the zines either through short LoC's (since we can't afford lengthy ones), bureau reports, or other means. Angela Scott recommended that more people be mentioned in the zines. One idea she had was to do short biographies of people. I could do that as part of the Round Robin Bureau Report, or we could even start a new bureau called Member Biographies. The Bureau Head could collect information about members and write up a few short biographies every other month. Does anyone want to give that a try? Any other ideas to get more people involved in the club and to get more people mentioned in the zines?

If you have other ideas you want to discuss with me, please write to one of my addresses printed on the inside front cover of TNFF.



The Amazing World of Trading Cards!

by Beth Phillips

I have recently received many, many new (new to me but some are recent releases) trading cards. It's still great fun. I just got rid of a bunch of stuff ... actually had a bit of room ... then someone "dumped" 3K+ singles/200+ wrappers on me. Had lotsa fun going through it all, too. Some crap, some worthless, some OK, & some good cards in the big box. I hope to complete several "new" sets soon.

In TB #211, Janine asked for trading card arcana to be explained. Don't know if it can be. (Btw, I had to look up "arcana" - isn't that pitiful?) For me personally, it's having trading cards, owning 72 or 90 (actually 89 if there's a checklist but sometimes the checklist has art on it) pieces of art. Some of it is stunning - Bob Eggleton comes to mind, he's a genius! An incredible artist. I also like Brom, Chris Foss, Bernie Wrightson, John Berkey (also stunning), Darrell K. Sweet, Don Maitz, Tim White, Luis Royo, Boris Vallejo, Julie Bell, Larry Elmore, & the list goes on & on ... can't forget Frank Frazetta. There are some new artists that are great, too.

As for movie or TV show cards, I have no explanation other than a certain "love" for the movie &/or show. Some stuff just has a visceral effect that's hard to ignore. I recently received some Pepsi cards, Miller Beer cards & Coca-Cola pogs. The first two really appealed to me, so now I'm trying to complete the sets. What are they? The various advertisements from over the years. I'm planning to do the Coca-Cola ones, too, but there are 11 different sets!

I have a lot of cards - 25 three-ring binders full, plus 200 or so in a box, but I'm selective about what I collect. Only what I like (that visceral effect). I've come across people who collect everything that comes out & that's tons of cards. Can't figure out how they can enjoy it. Then there are the people in it only for the money - they take a lot of the fun out of the trade. They don't understand the name - trading cards - just want money.

I've learned great patience with this hobby - it can take a year or more to complete any given set. I've had a couple sets that take just over a year to complete & then happiness ensues.

About the only thing I have no interest in are the comics cards -- Spiderman, Superman, etc.

Now, this is just the non-sport card hobby, there's a whole other world of cards out there that I dare not (& don't want to) dwell in -- the sports cards. I also found a love for "colossal" cards, trading cards almost the size of a comic book. I have only a few from the Keith Parkinson set but I love them! They're like blow-ups of the smaller cards & then I sigh because all the cards aren't that big. You get to see all the missed detail from the small cards. They are fabulous.

The newest "fad" is the autograph cards - they're a real bear to collect these chase cards (so named 'cause you have to chase after them to get them; some people call them special

cards), because no one wants to trade them, only sell them. The 2 newest Star Trek sets have 26 autograph cards per set (with a 3rd set of 26 more due out soon). Shatner's card seems to be the most coveted (don't know why) & therefore costs \$350-500. That leaves a lot of collectors in the dark because it's not affordable. The Season 4 Babylon 5 cards had 10 autograph cards. From my 2 boxes I got one Bruce Boxleitner and traded it for a Pat Tallman card. I like P.T. better than B.B. & the girl I traded with is a huge B.B. fan, so we both benefitted. I know there's no way I'll ever collect all 10 & it doesn't bother me one bit. I saw an ad in a magazine where a guy had 7 (!) of the autograph B5 sets at \$1,000 per set. Outrageous. The Trek auto sets (if you can afford the set) go for around \$3,000 (add up the prices of all the different cards) and people pay it!

Some people are just too fanatical in their pursuit of absolute completion.



✍️ Letters of Comment ✍️

Mark Nielsen
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Ed Meskys: I know of one other black sf author, who might be considered major or not. He is Steve Barnes, who has written several cyberpunk novels with a black supersoldier-type protagonist.

Sounds as if Octavia Butler is using science fiction to make social extrapolations and commentary. The synopsis (The Parable of the Sower) you gave sounded promising. This sort of story sometimes works for me and sometimes not. I think Ursula LeGuin does it quite well.

Science fiction which features a dystopia (or negative future) have become yet another cliché. But sf is populated by cliché. As long as the story has something else positive to offer, I don't mind this convention. For example, I really enjoyed Paul McAuley's short story "Seventeen" in Asimov's SF Magazine a couple of months ago and you couldn't get much bleaker than that. At the same time, I couldn't stand the same author's dystopian novel Fairyland. Maybe it was the thematic focus that made the difference. Fairyland was much more nihilistic in tone and direction.

Susan Van Schuyver: "Gattica" was much more like written science fiction than your average film. It made some extrapolations of science and then showed the effect of that science upon its characters.

"Saving Private Ryan" was rather realistic, at least the

first scene. Makes you think about the real prices of war and takes the "hawk" right out of you. Hopefully some government officials will see it. War is sometimes necessary, but not merely to make a political point.

Often friends and family worry about how they should behave around the mentally ill. Sometimes they tip toe around the person, as if they were made of glass. But a strong sense of self, coupled with a willingness to share emotions and time with the mentally ill person in an appropriate manner, can help defray the tension. Sometimes, humor can help (sometimes not). Also, maybe it will help to realize they have a physical illness caused by an imbalance of brain chemicals, and not a character weakness. The mentally ill are, in general, no more at fault for their condition than someone with another chronic illness such as diabetes or heart disease.

Davis L. Travis: As you say, many mushrooms do look like penises, but I was interested to see, when I consulted a text on mushrooms and related fungus, that a number of them are star shaped as well. Here's a related joke I wrote a number of years ago: Why was the mushroom so popular? Answer: He was a fungi.

Perhaps you should try a subscription to SF Age (or at least read a few issues). The editor of that magazine has a markedly different taste in stories than Gardner Dozois, one that is more centrally part

of the genre of sf. While I prefer Asimov's, SF Age is a real alternative prozine if you are looking...

It's incredible how many sf books are produced in a year's time. You can only read so many...

Do you have access to the Internet? If so, I can recommend Amazon.com for mail order books. The prices are comparable with the local book shop when you include shipping and handling.

Angela K. Scott-Gosnell
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[This arrived too late to run in TB #214, so it's running here. Apologies, Angela. -Ed.]

Happy Holidays! Yes, the joys of the holidays are again here. I'd like to say, though, that these times of cheer can indeed bring great despair to people who are alone, facing hard times, are ailing or struggling with mental illness. We all need to reach out to others -- and not only during the "holidays of charity."

In TB, I've written about the little-understood suffering of those with mental illness, as I myself am a depressant. It's a struggle faced by many, yet remains largely silenced.

[Not anymore, Angela. I recently saw a public service announcement for clinical depression on one of the major cable channels. More and more people are realizing that clinical depression isn't rare or unusual. The help is out there, folks, and sometimes it's only a phone call away. -Ed.]

Rick Brooks: I don't know if you received treatment at any point, but I'm glad it's improved. There are various

levels, factors in and kinds of depression. Diagnosis and help is available and should not be something one feels ashamed about. Many do not seek help that they need and deserve. [Amen to that! -Ed.]

Susan Van Schuyver: I hope I can be of some help to you. If I didn't have the love and understanding of family (some who suffer from depression also) and caring, patient friends, I would not have made it this far. My husband has learned a lot about mental illness (even before our marriage) mainly from experience, also from written materials and my therapy. He told me he wanted to support me and help me all that he could, but he was not going to be my "crutch." Sometimes the line is blurred between being supportive and supporting the depressant completely. It's an unhealthy role to take on too much, to live the depressant's life and help too much. The depressant must be their own person and take responsibility for themselves. They need to receive professional diagnosis and treatment and to do so may need help, must have encouragement, and it may help to be present with the depressant for an appointment.

A depressant may need to be monitored, esp. where medication which must be consistently taken is involved. Offer emotional support with patience, affection, and trust. Engage in conversation and listen with care. Don't disparage feelings, yet point out realities, positivity, and offer hope. Do not ignore remarks about suicide or self-destruction. Invite the depressant for walks, outings, and other activities, and if

they refuse, be gently persistent (often we isolate ourselves, but being alone so much is not good). But don't push them: too many demands may cause the depressant to feel worse. Though diversion and company is needed, it can't be forced.

Don't minimize their suffering or make them feel wrong or guilty in any way

(usually we have enough feelings of hatred). Be reassuring, and be better educated about mental illness in general, for the understanding will be apparent to the depressant and you'll be better able to help them. Most of all, be there, and have sincerity and caring in your heart. Love is the light amidst the despairing blackness within...We all need love.



MEETING JOHN INMAN III : THE SEARCH FOR WOLVERHAMPTON

by Dorothy Kurtz

Despite the title of this article, my main reason to visit England was not to meet John Inman or even to attend the pantomime that he was in titled "Adventures of Robin Hood." I had planned to visit England, whether or not I got to meet and/or see Mr. Inman. So, metaphorically speaking, if visiting England is the cake, then seeing John on stage is the icing, and meeting him is the cherry on the top.

Since I had visited England in 1976, '82 and '84, this article will not cover such major sights as the "Tower of London", "British Museum", "Westminster Abbey", and so on, because I've "Been There - Done That." (A working title that I had planned to use for this article, in case I didn't get to meet John. Otherwise, I might have also used "Playing England By Ear.")

So, starting in chronological order, this is how I spent a little over a week in England ...

Friday, 11 December: After flying British Airways from Philadelphia, I landed in London in the morning. Once in London I checked into my hotel, the Tavistock, but only left my luggage there. There were no rooms available until late in the afternoon. I stayed in this hotel in 1982 and I noticed that they remodeled the lobby area into a more art-deco style since then.

Since I was to spend Friday fighting "jet-lag," until the late afternoon, I

took the Underground to Covent Garden and visited the Theatre Museum, Russell St., WC2E 7PA.

This is an interesting museum that covers the history of the British Theatre from the time of Shakespeare to the present day. There are exhibits of stage models, costumes, paintings, drawings, photos, props, and videos. Some new exhibit areas covered the Classical Greek Theatre; 2 stage designers, Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966) and Tanya Moiseiwitsch (b. 1914); and the Ballet Russe displays of Diaghilev. Other exhibit areas covered: (1) How the story, "Wind in the Willows" by Kenneth Grahame, was transferred from the book to the stage. (2) Diana Rigg and Ian McKellen were on a video explaining how performances have been recorded. (3) A collection of theatrical paintings of different actors of the past.

The only thing worst than being tired is being tired and hungry. So, I had lunch at a nearby pub, "The Punch and Judy," where I had a pretty good cottage pie, before heading to my next destination: Rock Circus, The London Pavilion, 1 Piccadilly, Piccadilly Circus, London, W1V 9LA.

Those of us who grew up listening to rock and roll music will find this place interesting but commercial. You put on a pair of headphones and go into different rooms where wax figures of rock stars, from Bill Halley to Janet Jackson, will sing their songs. The final event is the rock show that takes place on Europe's largest revolving auditorium, covering the history of rock music, with

more rock stars in wax singing their songs. Even though it is very commercial, if you are of the post World War II "baby boom" generation, or younger, it is worth visiting, once. (Listening to some of the other visitors singing, often "off-key," can also be fun.)

SATURDAY, 12 December:
After finally getting into my room yesterday and getting a good night's sleep, I decided to visit the Science Museum, Exhibition Road, London, SW7 2DD. When I looked at the floor plan in the museum's guidebook, I knew that I would never be able to see it all in a day. So, I headed to my favourite section, the Exploration of Space. Most standard travel guidebooks made this area sound like a section with a few space exhibits and not much else. Nothing could be farther from the truth!

This area on space exploration has more exhibits than, the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, and the Maryland Science Centre in Baltimore combined! It took me most of the morning hours to see the different subjects covered in this area alone: History of Spaceflight, How Rockets Work, Britain and Europe in Space, Use of Space, Robot Explorers, How Satellites Work, Man in Space, and Living and Working in Space.

The exhibits displayed photos, videos, sample rockets, space suits, satellites, etc. They even had the Apollo 10 Command Module that carried 3 astronauts in orbit around the moon in 1969. (Apollo 11 was the first moon landing; And yes, they did have a replica of the lunar lander.) Other than spending about an hour's break for lunch in the museum's

cafeteria where I had a pretty good vegetable lasagna meal, I spent the rest of the day in the museum exploring the other areas that interested me. They included: Flight; Ships, Marine Engineering and Docks and Diving; Transport Treasures and a few other areas, briefly. Most of these areas covered the history of their respective subject in samples, models, photos, pictures and videos. I did stay until almost closing time, and still, I couldn't cover all of the museum. Neither should anyone else try. Stick to your favourite sections.

SUNDAY, 13 December: I didn't come to England this time around just to sightsee. I also intended to meet some friends that I had made in the UK through correspondence and a few phone calls. Today I was to meet the first of them, Bev, and her husband Steve. They travelled down from Leicestershire, and met me in the lobby of the Tavistock hotel. Bev and I share a mutual interest in science fiction and we have written to each other for about 6 years. Together we took the underground to Waterloo Station to visit the Museum of the Moving Image, South Bank, Waterloo, London, SE1 8XT.

I have been to the American Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, Queens, New York City, which impressed me. I was until I saw this museum in London. There was much more to this place and in a logical type of chronological order. This museum covers the history of moving images, from shadow images to TV, videos and films of the present day. In addition to viewing exhibits, there are also plenty of

hands-on exhibits that are very popular with children. In each section, costumed museum guides act out the era that they are in, for example: Turn-of-the-20th century dressed staff are on hand to answer questions or do a presentation in the silent film era.

In other areas: There was a mock up of an early 20s Russian revolution film train, showing films from that time; Hollywood displays, especially in the 1930s; A section on British films; Films during World War II; The early days of television and much more. As good as I had once thought the Astoria, Queens museum was--it can't hold a candle to this museum!

Afterwards, we had dinner at their restaurant, where I had a roast chicken dinner, and a chance to sit down and talk with Bev. (What more could I ask for?) Later, we continued our conversation at a pub near the hotel that I was staying at, before we parted company.

MONDAY, 14 December:
Another day that I get to see another friend. This time I was travelling to see him. However, first off, he advised me to visit him in the afternoon, after I spend the earlier part of the day visiting Southend, Essex. I must have been one of the few Americans who, upon leaving Tower Hill station, walked in the direction of the Fenchurch St. Station, instead of the Tower of London. My reason was to take the train to Southend.

Southend is about 40 miles east of London and is a resort town with many attractions that are mostly open during the warmer weather seasons. However,

this town doesn't become a ghost town in the winter. There are some attractions open in winter too, just not as many as in the summer. I've noticed a similar parallel between the resort towns of the New Jersey shore areas, such as Atlantic City, Wildwood and Cape May, and the British resort areas such as Brighton, Blackpool, and Southend. A few generations back, families in the Northeastern USA would spend their week or 2 of vacation time at the New Jersey shore.

Meanwhile, their British counterparts would take their main holiday time at a resort town along Britain's coast. Nowadays, with better and cheaper ways of travel available, many people in the Northeastern USA prefer to take their main beach vacations in places like the Caribbean, Florida and/or Mexico. Their British counterparts prefer their holidays along the Mediterranean in France, Spain and Italy. So, both the New Jersey shore towns and the British shore towns mostly attract people who visit for the day or weekend, or those who can't afford the more 'exotic' places.

Southend reminded me of Wildwood, NJ, in its usual resort offerings: arcades, amusement rides, fast food, and take out food concessions, hotels, etc. What made Southend different was having the world's longest pier. Even though it was closed in winter, I still could take photos of it. Then I attended the Southend Sea Life Centre, Eastern Esplanade, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS1 2ER.

There is a chain of these places in different parts of the

UK and a few in other parts of Europe. While I can't compare it to the Sea World theme parks in the USA, I did find that the few hours that I had spent there interesting and educational. The centre that I attended focused on the sealife of the Thames Estuary with photos, display tanks, literary and audio explanations throughout the place.

The tanks had displays of different fishes, seahorses, rays, shellfish, and sharks. My favourite part was the walk-through underwater tunnel, where the fish swam over and above me. After this, I headed to the Royals shopping mall where I had some chicken curry in their food court, while listening to children singing Christmas carols nearby. (I've been to shopping malls in the USA and Canada, and this mall wasn't too different from them, but I did go because I could usually find reasonable priced food in a food court.)

After lunch, I took the bus to Leigh-on-Sea, to visit my friend, Ivor. He too shares an interest in science fiction and space exploration. We have corresponded for about 3 years. I had dinner with him and his wife. Then afterwards, I got a taxi back to the station to get the train back to London.

TUESDAY, 15 December:
After 4 days of what felt like running around, I slept a bit later. By the time I got up, cleaned up, and got dressed, it was time to take the Underground to Green Park Station. I walked over to the Hard Rock Cafe in time for it to open. I've been to Hard Rock Cafes in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, and I thought that while I stayed in London, I should try the restaurant that

started it all in 1971. The menu was the same as the others with similar prices. I had fajitas while I watched the videos and looked at the memorabilia. (The address is 150 Old Park Lane, London, W1.)

Later that day, I visited Page's Bar, 75 Page St., Westminster, London, SW1P 4LT. I first heard about this bar on a TV travel show that was doing an episode on London. I e-mailed someone in England, asking if he ever heard about a "Star Trek" theme pub in London. He e-mailed me back the web site and e-mail address of this place. After checking the web site, I decided to e-mail the pub manager to ask for a possible interview and "Photo-op," and he gave me his "OK" for it.

In person, the place looked smaller than the web site pictures revealed. However, I entered and took photos of: (1) The large model of the Enterprise from "Star Trek: The Next Generation"; (2) Several posters; (3) A display case of "Star Trek" items, including a smaller model of the Enterprise, from the classic "Star Trek" series from the 1960s. (4) I even took pictures of their carpet! It had designs of the Star Fleet insignias on it. Then I had an interview with the bartender in charge at the moment, Stuart Hicks. (The manager wasn't there because he was attending a sneak preview of the new "Star Trek" film, "Star Trek: Insurrection".)

Stuart told me that this place has had this theme for about 5 years. However, in about another year or year and a half, they plan to redecorate the pub to a more traditional

pub theme. (So, any "Star Trek" fans out there--see it while you can!) He then mentioned to me about the Saturday video events at the bar, when they show about 4 episodes from the different "Star Trek" series: Classic Trek, Next Generation, Deep Space 9, and Voyager. On those nights, a sizable number of people show up in costume. Some of their regular customers are on the committees of different "Star Trek" and science fiction conventions, and the pub advertises for them. After spending some more time there taking in the atmosphere and drinking a few gin and tonics, I decided to call it a day and head back to my hotel.

WEDNESDAY, 16 December:

At the suggestion of one of my editors, I took the tube to Warwick Ave., and waited with several other people to take a guided walking tour of the Little Venice section of London. (Yes, I do know that John lives in this area, however, I have heard about Little Venice long before I knew that John Inman existed. No, I don't know where he lives--nor am I interested. There are limits to these things. I felt the same way about where certain people live, when, a few years back, I toured certain areas of Southern California, in the Los Angeles area: Beverly Hills, Bel Air, Malibu, etc. I was interested in the areas themselves but not where certain famous people live.)

Our tour guide from the Original London Walks tour company, Emily, told us many informative and interesting facts about this neighbourhood, including the fact that it was

the poet, Robert Browning, who first called this area "Little Venice." The area itself has many stucco houses and Victorian buildings. Our group also walked along the canals, while Emily talked about life for the average canal family and along the canals in general. She also pointed out places where certain famous people (show business types, writers, and others) had lived.

One of my favourite places was St. Mary's Church on Paddington Green. The earliest mention of a church around there was in 1222, but this parish church was founded in 1324. However, the church's present restored interior looks the way that it did in the later part of the 1700s in the Georgian style. Several famous painters, sculptors and other people in the arts, are buried in its churchyard, the most famous being the actress, Sarah Siddons. After the tour, I had a ham sandwich at lunch in the nearby Warwick Castle Pub.

That afternoon I met another friend, Pearl, her daughter, and granddaughter, at the lobby of the Tavistock hotel. Again, she too shares an interest in science fiction with me and she is one of my newer contacts. We have only been writing to each other for about a year. She travelled down from Coventry and we decided to take a walk around the immediate neighbourhood, the Bloomsbury section of London. Later, we had a light supper at a bagel place.

THURSDAY, 17 December:

This was the day I travelled to Wolverhampton in the West Midlands via "Virgin Trains." While John Inman was not the reason for my visiting England, seeing his show was the reason

for my visiting Wolverhampton (about 15 miles from Birmingham, England's 2nd largest city).

After checking into the Britannia Hotel, I had a very filling bangers & mash (sausages and mashed potatoes) lunch at a restaurant nearby called "Peppers."

That night I attended the opening night performance of the "Adventures of Robin Hood." They were also celebrating the opening night of the refurbishment of the Grand Theatre, Lichfield Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1DE.

The evening started with the manager and few other officials (I forgot their titles) giving speeches. Two of the speeches were brief, but a third speech got a bit boring and long winded. However, soon enough, the show started.

Some of my British friends were concerned that I wouldn't understand the humor in a pantomime. I had some doubts myself, but I was curious as to what a pantomime show was like, and I'm now glad that I attended. While the plot was simple (Robin Hood outwitting the Sheriff of Nottingham and winning the hand of Maid Marion), the rest of the show with its humor, costumes, songs, etc., made for a very elaborate affair!

This is the type of show that can entertain both adults (especially with some 'naughty' humor, but it wasn't obscene, because most of it would go over a young child's head), and children (children are encouraged to "cheer" the hero, and "boo" the villain, and participate in other ways). Many of the comedy routines imitated vaudeville, burlesque, and I noticed some slapstick

that was similar to the style of the "Three Stooges."

John was as funny as ever in his role as "Nurse Wanda," governess to Maid Marion's younger sister and brother. He mostly entered the stage shouting in his high-pitched voice, "Are You FREE?," and the children in the audience answered him in return, "I'm FREE!" His costumes were so elaborate (and a few were a bit bizarre) that he could give the Mummers from Philadelphia a run for their money. (As I grew up near Philadelphia, I used to watch the Mummer's Parade march up Broad Street on New Year's Day. If John were born in or near Philly, he would have been a mummer.)

The range of music varied, and I even recognized a song from the musical, "Grease." I could understand about 90% of the humor. (I lost the humor only with references to certain British celebrities not known in the USA.) However, I do recommend that Americans visiting the UK should attend at least one pantomime during their stay. There is nothing like it in the USA. Even New York City has nothing like it. It is unique compared to most of the West End shows, many of which I can see in New York or Philadelphia.

Because it was opening night for both the show and the refurbished theatre, during intermission, each person in the audience received a free glass of champagne and a box of two Cadbury chocolates. We also received free souvenir programme books. What a classy way to conduct an opening night!

John was very good with children because I noticed that during the show, there was a

singalong, and he invited some children from the audience to come on stage and join him. For their effort, the children received some chocolates.

Afterwards, I headed back to my hotel hoping that, maybe, I could get a quick photo-op with John the next day.

FRIDAY, 18 December:

After breakfast, and while I was taking a bit of a rest in my room, there was a knock on the door. It was a message from Ron Lynch and John Inman saying that I could see John briefly at 12 noon.

Then, Ron telephoned my room. While telling me how and where to go about, to meet John, he asked if I liked the show or understood it. After giving him my answer, he went on to explain that the theatre still was not finished. They had no place to hang the costumes. They had to rehearse in another place and things had been hectic in general. However, he said that, hopefully, things will be closer to normal the following Monday. He also said that the director is removing some of the jokes for being too naughty. (Ron Lynch is John's personal assistant-secretary-yeoman? He also travels with John on his USA tours.)

At noon I showed up at John's dressing room and a few seconds later, John came out flashing his bright blue eyes, with a smile on his face, as he said, "Hello," to me. After taking a few photos of him, he told me that he is looking forward to the 3rd night of the show, when the "normal" people will be attending. Then, he went on to explain what he meant by "normal." The first night crowd had a lot of patrons and supporters of the

Grand Theatre itself, as noted by "those boring speeches before the show" (John's words). The second night, the night to come, is sold out to football(soccer) players, so he didn't know what the outcome of that would be. However, he went on to say, "The third night should have a more 'normal' audience," and he will know how the show goes. He also said that he should be touring the USA in Late March, but he didn't know at this point, what cities are on the itinerary. Finally he told me that he says, "Hello," to his USA fans, before we parted company.

After this, I collected my luggage, took the train back to London, and headed out to the Heathrow Hilton Hotel, near the Heathrow Airport, to stay the night.

The next day, I took a flight back to Philadelphia.

To summarize my trip: I can't get over how well everything went. I got everything I wanted out of this trip and more. I would like to thank Dave Langford of Ansible, for providing me with the information on Page's Bar.

When I met John Inman, I found him as charming and witty as ever! I look forward to meeting him again on his USA tour. I would like to thank the following people who helped make this meeting possible: Bill Robertson, Carole Sorrell, and Ron Lynch.



RED DWARF

Season Summaries by LaVern Loretz, Jr.

UPDATE: OCTOBER 1998

The first 12 episodes have been upgraded. These digitally enhanced shows are much clearer, colorful (with the ship brighter red and slimmer), plus, if I'm not mistaken, in stereo. The beginning contains new material either to attract younger viewers (it is more lively with plenty of movement) or, as is the powers-that-be's way, to tease the watcher with previews of upcoming seasons. My guess is seasons 7 & 8.

Cast:

David Lister	- Craig Charles
Arnold Rimmer	- Chris Barrie
The Cat	- Danny John-Jules
Holly (computer)	- Norman Lovett
Hilly (computer)	- Hattie Hayridge
Kryten	- Robert Llewellyn

The Powers-That-Be at the BBC:

Bob Grant, Doug Naylor, Paul Jackson and Ed Bye

1992

Season Five

EPISODE ONE: "Holoship" *

Starbug crosses paths with a holoship containing a crew with everyone like Rimmer. They want Rimmer and he wants to goonce he learns what the life of a colony of holographic images is like. But there is a price: he must take an IQ test. Think SATs multiplied a hundred times over. Learning of Rimmer's decision, Lister, the Cat and Kryten begin interviewing computer-given applicants for Rimmer's replacement. Rimmer's plan to increase his intelligence backfires when his brain rejects a mind-patch which had turned him into a Jerry Lewis/Nutty Professor-like guy. That's not all: when he learns that he would be replacing a girl he likes, he backs out. Why? Because she would have to die. (I guess even holographic images have a limit.) Rimmer must have a heart after all, and ends up back on Red Dwarf.

EPISODE TWO: "The Inquizator" *

En route back to Red Dwarf, the crew meet a rogue self-repairing android whose only ambition is to judge mankind, then go back in time and eliminate those who, in his jaded opinion, wasted their lives, and give those lives to those more deserving who died prematurely. Kind of a nice premise, huh? Forget it. Lister and Kryten are found guilty and are tracked down. Their replacements are no better, intelligence-wise. But since this is a one-parter lasting only 25 minutes, they learn how to defeat the Inquizator, which holds a time travel device on its sleeve. Kryten cuts off and steals the device, then retreats into the

past. No explanation given! I've seen this episode at least 10 times, but I still don't completely understand everything.

EPISODE THREE: "Terrorform" *** (only for the beginning)

Starbug has crashed. Kryten is injured. He detaches his left hand and it seeks Lister and the Cat's help. (Forget Rimmer, he's hopeless.) The hand crawling up Lister's leg and typing Kryten's distress message is very funny. This is where the show goes quickly downhill. Rimmer is trapped in his own subconscious. The premise is interesting but the sexual scene is uncalled-for. Isn't this supposed to be a comedy fit for preteens? Anyway, Rimmer meets his self-loathing in the form of an ugly, bony creature reminiscent of those in the "Alien" movies. The end makes some sense, wherein his friends save the day (again!) by fighting off Rimmer's deepest fears, enabling Starbug to leave.

EPISODE FOUR: "Quarantine" *

Finding an abandoned Earth colony, the crew think they are rescuing one Hildegard Landstrum, but she's only a berserk holographic image which suffers from a deadly virus. The Red Dwarf crew also become infected. Not realizing this, Rimmer imprisons his shipmates in Red Dwarf's quarantine room. Lister, the Cat, and Kryten, after only a few days, are at one another's throats. It doesn't take them long to learn that it's Rimmer who's not well. (This is news?!?) Using a vial of "good luck serum" (catchy name, that), the three manage to not only find but construct an electronic device to counter the virus in Rimmer. Rimmer is then put in quarantine (to be safe, which isn't a bad idea), and the rest are last seen in women's gingham dresses acting like birds in a cage to amuse the intended. [Incarcerated? -Ed.]

EPISODE FIVE: "Demons and Angels" *

Lister and Kryten invent a machine that can triplicate strawberries! You're laughing, I know. Accidentally, they make a pair of other Red Dwarfs -- one negative, one positive. In doing so, they set off a delayed explosion. Oh, you remember they have none! Oh, well... Because of this, they seek out the other copies and find demonic and angelic replicas of themselves. The Original Lister is made into a remote-controlled zombie. The original crew discover this and are able to disarm him (an implant in his neck, no less). The copies of Red Dwarf vanish and the original reappears. It has exploded. Funny stuff? Very little, unless you count the brainless angelic crew marvelling at their blood leaking out after being shot.

EPISODE SIX: "Back to Reality" ***

Starbug lands on yet another world with an abandoned science lab. After exposure to an alien chemical which causes group hallucinations, the four awaken in a cockpit of an Earth Total Immersion Game: they've been in it for four years, and not on Red Dwarf. The Cat is Dwayne Dibbley, with a Captain Kangaroo haircut and teeth big enough to open soda bottles. Kryten is Cybernetic Detective Jake Bullet, who is half-android. Rimmer awakens as

Billy Doyle, a bum, and Lister find's he's Billy's brother from a different parent, and a fascist dictator on a violent world. Hilly, their computer, saves the day before they turn out like the dead science people. This has some very clever writing and directing.

Notes from the Swamp

by J. G. Stinson

Some of you may be wondering if the N3F will still be around by the year 2000. Some of you may be wondering how we can increase our membership and find new ways to attract those new members. Some of you may not care whether the N3F continues and are thinking of letting your membership lapse when it next expires.

For Group 1, instead of wondering about it, decide if having the N3F around is important to you, and if it is, get off your butt and do what you can to keep it going and get it growing. For Group Two, crank up those synapses and send in your ideas to Our Prez, and do what you can locally and regionally to help. For Group Three.....well, do us all a favor and drop a letter to the secretary, Jennifer Mackay, RIGHT NOW, so she can delete your name from the roster and we don't have to waste any more of your precious time.

Rant over.

Thought the "magic" of Interlibrary Loan (I can't say enough about this wonderful system!), I've recently discovered the works of Jane Fancher. She writes a lot like C.J. Cherryh, which is no surprise considering they've been housemates and first readers for each other for several years, but there's an element of "sass" in Fancher's work that Cherryh doesn't have, and I find it fun and refreshing. She has two series going: the Ring books (Ring of Lightning and Ring of Intrigue, with Ring of Destiny to follow) and the Groundties trilogy (Groundties, Uplink, and Harmonies of the 'Net). Both have fascinating characters in richly detailed settings who get into more trouble than a puppy in a trash heap. If you like Cherryh, check out Fancher.

My latest obsession is fractals. I can't parse the math on them, I just like looking at all the purty pitchurs. Wow. I downloaded a program from the Web that lets me make my own fractals. This is some serious time-sink, folks; could be worse than the Web! I've read Gleick's *Chaos: Making a New Science* and found it both comprehensible and readable, elements I've only found in books by Carl Sagan in the past. Math heads who haven't read this yet should enjoy it, even if not wowed by geometry.

John Glenn returned to space. Who woulda thunk it? But it sure was splendid to see him up there in the Shuttle. And the International Space Station is actually getting into space now, albeit one module at a time.

If you haven't made your reservations for the nearest Turn of the Millennium (or a One Year Early) Party, you're probably too late.

BAG OF BONES by Stephen King

This is King's first book since his much-publicized move to Scribner Books. Scribner got a good deal, no matter how much they ended up paying King: this is a solid, mature, involving book.

That said, those who read King for the blood-and-guts horror will probably be disappointed. There's little of King's previous emphasis on horror as gross-out here, although the set-up elements for gross-out horror are vividly present. The difference between *Bag of Bones* and, say, *Christine*, is that King concentrates more on the internal life of one character, his viewpoint narrator. The richness of the narrative that results is highly engaging to those who like their horror served as terror. To those who prefer terror, the frisson is all, and King delivers frissons in spades here.

Mike Noonan is a best-selling romantic suspense novelist who can't stop grieving over the loss of his wife, who died four years previously from a brain aneurysm. He's stopped writing, but he's been able to keep earning money as a writer due to the books he'd been writing on the side while working on contracted novels. He's eventually drawn back to his isolated Maine summer house called Sara Laughs (after a locally known blues singer from the turn of the century). The problem? The house is haunted, and by more than one ghost.

King makes the reader feel the ache Mike feels when he thinks of his dead wife, the thrill he feels when her ghost comes to help him solve a decades-old mystery in a small Maine town, the fear of the odd things that begin to happen to Mike as the ghosts start talking to him. The author's ability to make everything in the book seem real is still intact, and King suffuses this book with a warmth that is, on the surface, at odds with the scary elements of the story. Without that warmth, though, it wouldn't be as good as it is.

My hat's off to King for pulling off a tour de force. I don't expect the big-name critics to agree, and I expect a lot of loyal King fans will toss this book aside in disgust. It's a book about love in a variety of manifestations, and it's about loss and moving on, and it has a lot of subtlety. I like that.

Recommendations:

MOONFALL, Jack McDevitt

FRACTAL PAISLIES, Paul Di Filippo

DARKER ANGELS, S. P. Somtow

DONNERJACK, Roger Zelazny & Jane Lindskold

RUNNING WITH THE DEMON, Terry Brooks

A KNIGHT OF THE WORD, Terry Brooks

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