

ASPIDISTRA FIVE

is edited by Susan Glicksohn, who resides temporarily at 32 Maynard Ave. #205, Toronto, Ontario M6K 2Z9. It will be printed with the invaluable assistance of Michael (Mike, Boy Wonder) Glicksohn, and sent to a small, exclusive mailing list composed of Those Who Still Care. Extra copies of #4 and #5 are available for 50¢. Tim Kirk anti-pollution posters are still available for 50¢ each, as are copies of past covers at 2 for 25¢. Please, no US cheques or stamps.

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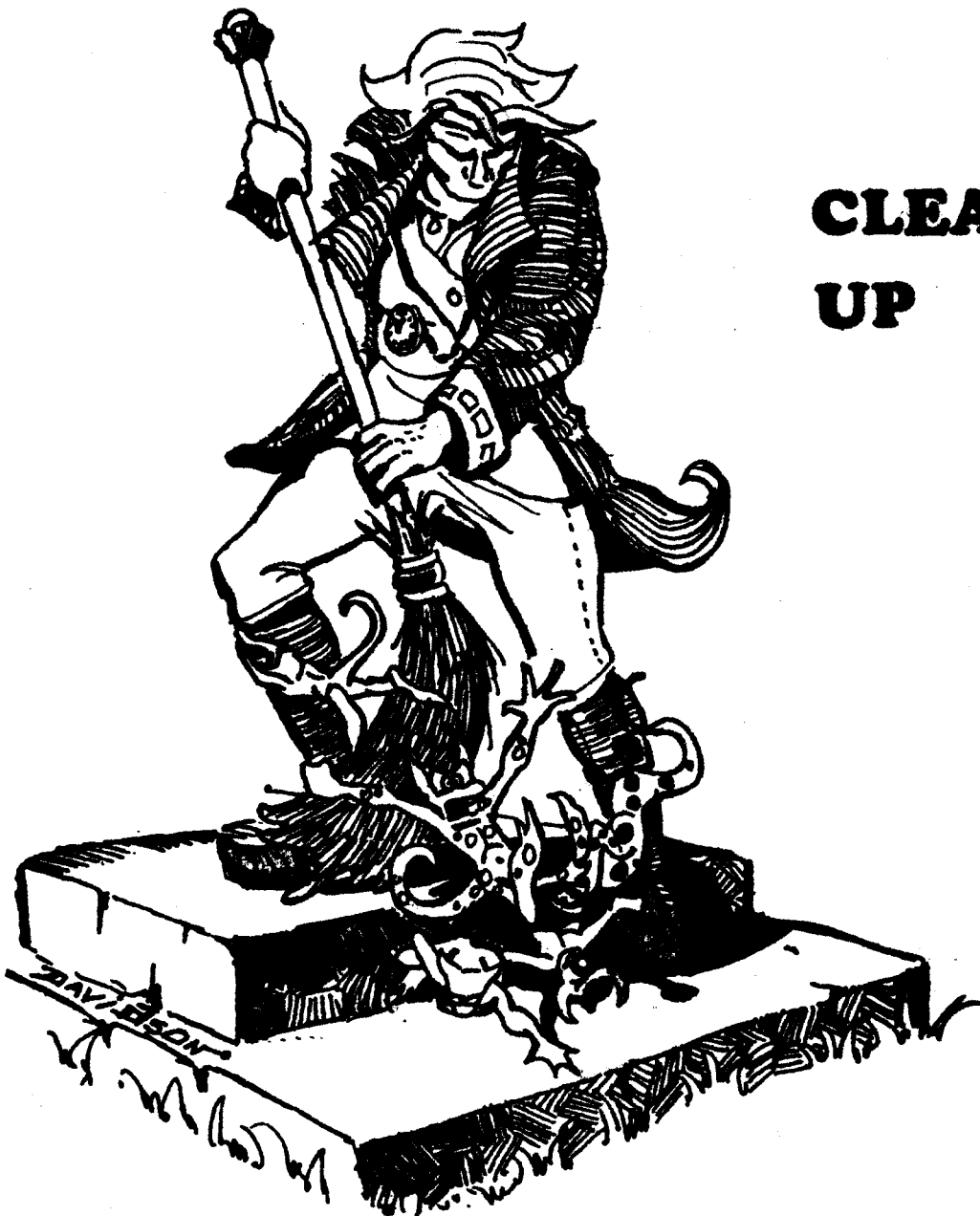
Mike Gilbert

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CLEANING UP



And here I thought I was the only person in the world who remembered poor ASPIDISTRA!

I've just returned from a marvellous, enjoyable, goshwow-it-was-fun holiday in San Francisco. For details, watch for XENIUM, a soon-to-be-appearing Glicksohn personalzine--we couldn't stand the thought of the mimeo sitting idle... Of immediate relevance, though, is the fact that people--an egoboostinly large number of them--sought me out at Westercon to ask The Question: "When are you going to publish the last ASP?"

So, with the final push provided by the knowledge that You Out There cared about ASP, here it is, typos and all. (I just noticed "egoboostinly." Grrr. I'm doing this fairly fast, directly onto stencil, with no fancy layouts; otherwise, seven-draft, procrastinating Susan never will get the magazine done.) What happened? Well, Gentle Readers, I planned to put out this final issue at the end of last September, after I finished the first two chapters of my thesis. Those chapters, representing more research time, re-re-writing time, and wading-

through-rotten-Canadian-novels time than I care to think about, were finally brought into a semblance of written form (200+ pages of it) by late February.

It was that kind of year.

Fortunately, the ASP letters don't appear to have dated too badly. I've edited them, but will run them without comments--mostly to save time again (I'm such a compulsive re-writer I roughdraft editorial comments!) but also to let the writers have the last word. If you have any comments, argue with the letterhack concerned. Paul Walker gets to lead off--if you remember his letter last issue, people, yes it was a parody of the "gee, why didn't them scientists ever tell us about pollution" attitude prevalent in the shortlived "ecology movement."

Paragraph break to proofread, and the phone just rang. University of Regina, at last. PEOPLE, I HAVE A JOB!! Eight-month temporary teaching appointment. As of September, I'll be commuting between here and the Wild West. I'll be employed!! Teaching Canlit! I got one of the four or so jobs open this year in my field! I have a job! Excuse me, stencil. I've got to go out and buy some champagne, and call Rosemary and Angus over to help me drink it--and call Mike, who's still in San Francisco. A JOB!!

... If you held on through the above ravings, you'll be glad to know I've calmed down a bit, though I still feel like several Christmases have all come at once--the job market was that bad. Keep in touch with me, as I lecture on agrarian novels amid the wheatfields, yes? COA, effective September 1 (but I'll be at TORCON, yes indeed):

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Regina
Saskatchewan S4S 0A2

I enjoyed Sandra's "Wheatfield Woe" when she first sent it to me as a parody of my thesis-novels--but now it's even more appropriate! Westward ho!

And the other contribution to death-sentenced ASP takes us east. There was a vague suggestion in ASP 4 that Mae Strelkov, who is a beautiful, warm, lovable person on paper, would be an equal joy to meet in person. People agreed. And thanks to the hard work, and time, and energy of Jean Bowers--the banking and record-keeping and organizing genius--and of Bill Bowers--and not even for the sake of our friendly pseudo-feud will I denigrate the help he gave through INWORLDS--there is a Mae Strelkov's Friends Fund to bring Mae to Discon 2.

Thanks to You Out There, to everyone from the Wollheims with their overwhelming generosity to the equally heartwarming, wonderful people who send a dollar, and a letter, and still feel they have to apologize because they feel they should do more: the Fund is a success. Already, we have almost collected the plane fare through cash donations. Auction material on hand will help pay for Mae's hotel room. Maybe there will be enough for some travel in North America too... Thank you for donations past and donations future on Mae's behalf until she can thank you in person.

And meanwhile, meet another facet of a fascinating lady through her writing.

That's about it. A strange feeling, this, finally getting up the energy and enthusiasm, and making the time I haven't had for a year, all to kill off a fanzine. All of a sudden, ASP is enjoyable again, not a chore I must get to, real soon now along with all the other responsibilities--the thesis, the All Our Yesterdays Room and other matters for TORCON, the articles I promised to write.

I enjoyed doing ASP, though as I explained in #4, over a year ago, I think its usefulness is over. ENERGIUMEN, of course, has passed into history too; but I'd like to keep the friends I made through both. Keep in touch? Mike will be sending you XENIUM, I'll be writing in it in faroff Regina... Enjoy ASP 5, hello, goodbye.

THE

MAE STRELKOV'S FRIENDS

FUND

SF conventions, for me, exist mainly as places to meet other fans: people whom I only know on paper, people whom I have never met, who are my friends. One of those friends is Mae Strelkov.

Whether you remember Mae from the lettercolumns of CRY, or have met her more recently through letters and articles in ENERGUMEN, OUTWORLDS, TOMORROW AND..., ASPIDISTRA, PLACEBO, and a growing number of other fanzines from Canada, Australia and the United States, you know she's a fascinating person.

Raised in China, Mae has lived most of her life in Argentina, where she and her husband Vadim share a ranch with children, cattle, crazy goats, pumas-- a whole world she'll create for you with skill and zest. A talented author, and an artist too, Mae is equally at home, and equally fascinating, writing about her lively family--or the world's problems; about linguistics, and the strange pattern of words and symbols she finds repeating themselves through the oriental, western and Amerindian cultures she knows so well--or the antics of her pet skunk; about the Catholic Church, and its effects on the world as she sees it--or your latest fanzine.

"Fun awaits you in the little things of life continually, and laughter, at our bizarre estate as 'monkey-men aping God'.... Chinese... Hebrews... my favourite peoples. Next? Indians and natives and our local self-styles crillos. Mebby English, if not too-too English! Next? Oh, anyone. (Dolphins, I think, would be my next selection for 'favourites.' Also cats, skunks, and goats under the age of 3 years)....

"I like knowing nice people well--how they think and feel, even the "flaws" they think they may have. (As if we aren't all similarly 'flawed')....

"I take to heart things like religion and local politics, and the enslavement and crushing of natives and bygone Indians, and their vanishing myths, customs, languages. If someone wants to upset me, tackle them!"

-- Mae Strelkov, from TOMORROW AND...9

Mae is one of fandom's Good People. Mae is the sort of person fans go to conventions to meet: an interesting personality on paper, who promises to be a warm friend in person. Mae's friends--and I hope you, reading this, are one of them-- would like to meet her. At DISCON II, in Washington, in 1974.

But we need your help.

Mae Strelkov lives isolated in the hills of Cordoba province, Argentina. DISCON II is in Washington. The plane fare that would bridge that gap costs, at the moment, US\$ 616, Buenos Aires-New York return. Mae cannot afford the fare; and neither can her friends, as individuals. Perhaps, though, Mae Strelkov's Friends can raise it.

Mae Strelkov's Friends is a fundraising organization chaired by Joan Bowers and me, Susan Glicksohn. What we need is your support, in the form of:

+cash donations, obviously. One dollar from every Friend would get Mae to North America, at least!

+material for a fan auction, to be run through the pages of the Bowers' INWORLDS and possibly at TORCON 2; fanzines, art, books, anything you can donate

+material, both articles and art, for a fannish first: a Bowers-Glicksohn (or Glicksohn-Bowers) Strelkovzine, to appear after TORCON, with all proceeds going to the Friend Fund

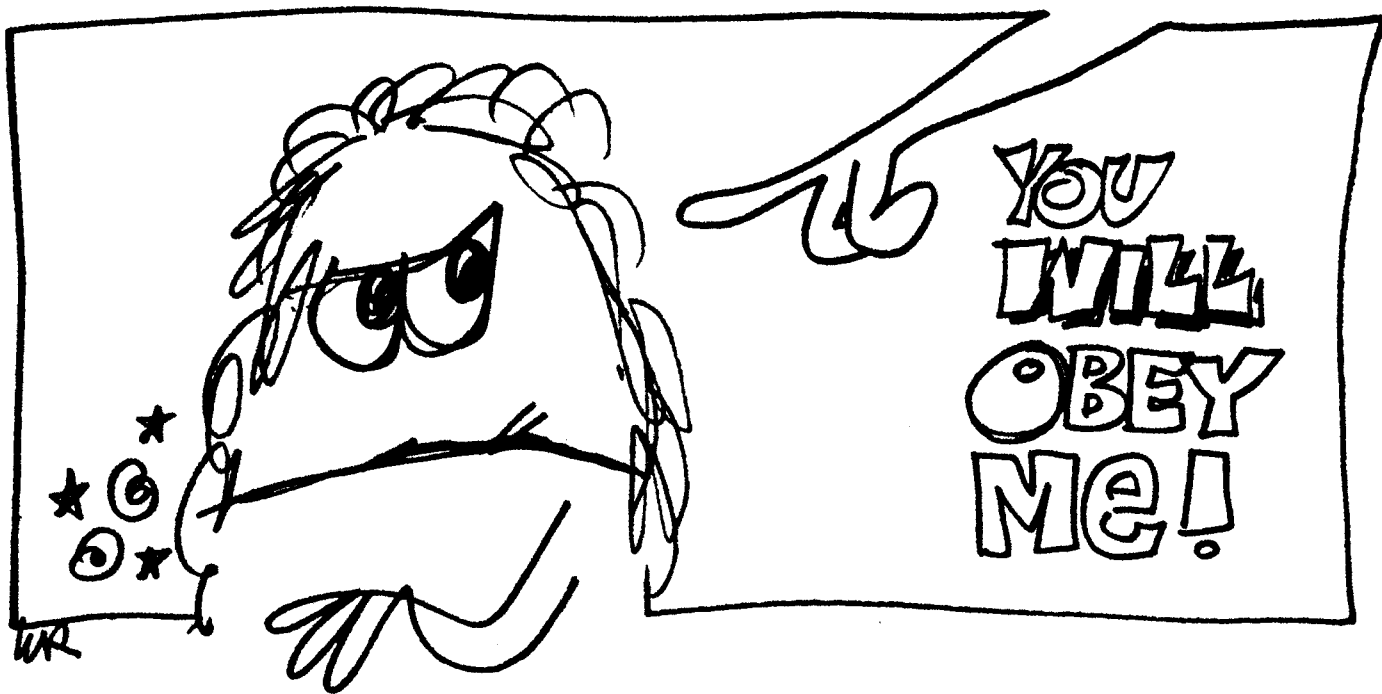
+moral support. Spread the word through your letters and fanzines.

+encouragement to Mae herself. Write to her at:

Casilla de Correo 55
Jesus Maria
Cordoba, Argentina

and discover a new friend. Oh, write airmail. The Argentinian postal system makes the North American service look perfect.

What we need is your help: NOW. By May 1, 1974, Mae Strelkov's Friends need at least \$700 in the Fund's special account so they, and Mae, can make plans to fly her to DISCON. Accounts will be kept, and money refunded if we can't raise the plane fare. But we will. If you'll help. A dollar, and your support: TODAY.



Please? Help us; and meet a new friend. Write to:

Mae Strelkov's Friends
c/o Joan Bowers
P.O. Box 148
Wadsworth, Ohio 44281

Mae's article which follows introduces her far better than I can. The art credits belong to:

Bill Rotsler (this page)
C. Lee Healy (twice)
and Connie Reich Faddis, in that order.



A silly person wrote recently that when you've passed the age of forty, you've had it, you've reached and passed your peak and the rest of the way will be downwards. I have passed that peak, I'm way beyond fifty, and I would say there are peaks of experience galore in a lifetime. It is silly to select one from the others as the peak above which none other towers.

Actually, I suspect the peak experience we each will feel will be death. An intoxicating feeling when the human at last selfishly (this is the old Chinese interpretation) turns his back and curls up in the cocoon of "unfeeling" as does the little silk worm.

Each morning should be a new "peak" as the sun bursts forth in the east in the archaic pak term for new births and beginnings:



= elongated sun at dawn on horizon

(Pakar, pakarini, from China to the Andes, linking Dawn Ancestors and newborn babies with the sun emerging elongated like the head of a babe from the birth canal after its "night in the womb of darkness.")

Nevertheless, there are some peaks sweeter than others, and I am remembering today a moment that seemed exquisite at the time; and yet I did not value it then above all the other pakarini "dawns."

It was beside the storied lake of Hangchow back in China, and I was not yet quite eighteen (which is a lovely age, when one's focus is sharper on everything around, and one's reactions are keen to the point sometimes of pain.)

My mother had for years been talking about my Chinese aunt and cousins with whom she corresponded, saying that I must see them before I left China to go to a university in the U.S.A. (Plan that was changed to a trip to South America, when I met and married my husband, Vadim.)

As a girl of seven I had met them... little girls my own age, in Chinese clothes in

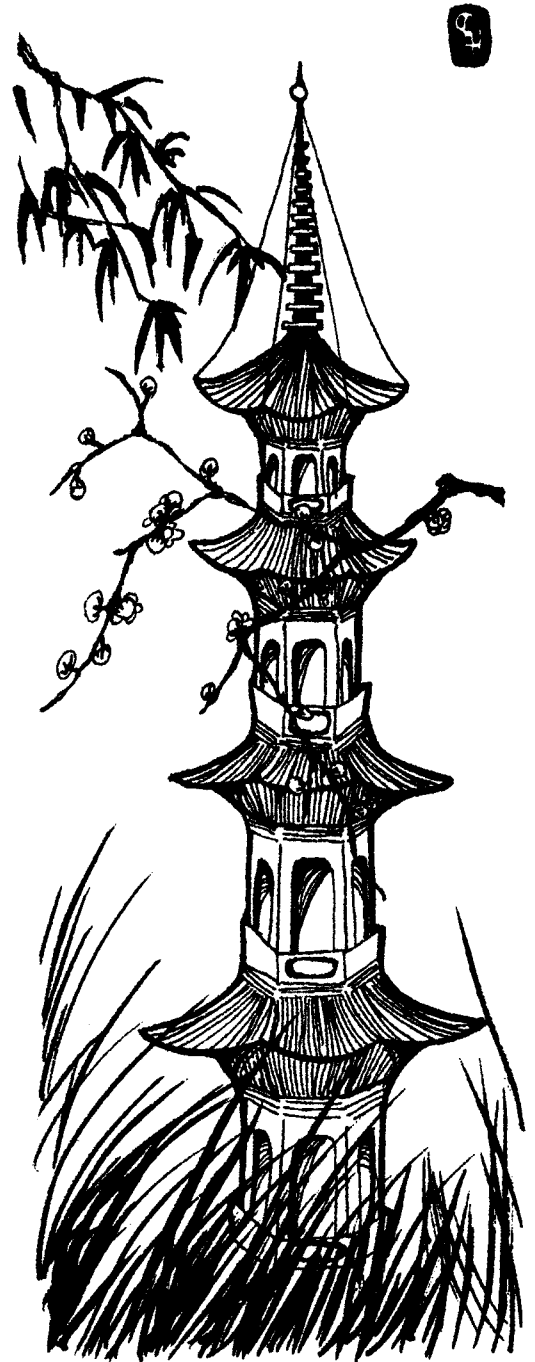
a Chinese home. They were the daughters of a baby girl thrown away in the ancient fashion to keep the population down (isn't birth control kinder?) in Huchow, mother's childhood home. (Her parents, George and Emma Mason, were Baptist missionaries, first white folks allowed in.) So the baby was rescued--still squalling-- from its normal fate, which would have been to become a little "ghost soldier" as its tiny skeleton mouldered in a baby-tower of the city wall. (This custom of making walls with the "bricks" of immolated babies was apparently a world-wide old idea. Folks thought this strengthened and protected such defences, even as heroes' heads were buried at city entrances.)

Well, that baby was rescued, and grew up as my mother's adopted sister in Huchow. She duly married a Chinese merchant of reasonable affluence, and they had a lovely biggish home overlooking a creek full of boats, near the famous lake.

The first time we visited them, we went by Chinese houseboat, a whole string of boats pulled by a horridly belching old tug, down endless waterways between fields and old pagodas and countless little toens overhanging the streams. This time I'd been sent off by prosaic train, and was met at the station. It had all been so nicely arranged, and I not even paying attention until I got packed off on schedule.

The heat was already terrific, as Chinese summers can be. The house, though, was cool and breezy, with open windows and a courtyard full of prized flowers and shrubs. The "uncle" was a little old gentleman in silken robes, and I didn't quite approve of him, in my childish innocence, because he watered his favourite plants regularly in his own way, politely peeing at them in a discreet fashion. As he varied his attentions from bloom to bloom, I imagine the roots profited, rather than were scorched. Anyway, I didn't approve, but pretended not to notice, to the great relief of my modern young cousins who wished Daddy wouldn't be old-fashioned like that. And I must say, it was a beautiful courtyard.

My girl-cousins were studying art at a famous academy on the lake-shore. How I envied them. My own father, inclined to take the Bible always literally, worried about that Old Testament command about not making a graven image, and was terribly strict towards my tendency to want to draw and write and paint. "Whoever loveth and maketh a lie shall have his part in the lake of brimstone," he also quoted, as I'd attempt a little story for our school magazine. Even poems worried him... "Worshipping Nature instead of God," he phrased it! But mother had been a painter almost from birth, and was famed for her paintings,



which she gave away freely until she married my dad and never painted again, so as not to unnerve him. Indeed, Mother's paintings--owned by every China missionary she knew--were never saved by her, so I own not one; only a carved wooden box, and some tiny pen-and-ink sketches. It's understandable, though, that my Chinese aunt, who'd adored her "oldest sister" encouraged her daughters to follow in their English/American aunt's footsteps and become artists too. They also embroidered beautifully, for all forms of Chinese and Western art were taught at the Academy.

My aunt and uncle seemed to feel it was their duty to show me every temple on every hill, every pagoda on every peak, for miles in all directions. It was really heroic of them for they were so little and middle-aged. I will not say "old"--not of them! But "quaint"? And "Old School"? Oh yes, indeed...

So each morning, when my five cousins went off to their schools, my aunt would put on her neatest black long skirt over the black trousers, under which peeped forth her unbound little feet in neat black satin shoes, and a light Chinese jacket-top, and with her shining black hair tightly bound up in a bun, she'd take up her black umbrella--looking so brave and ready for the trek. And the little old man in his grey watered silk scholar's gown would lead the way off into our Wild Blue Yonders.

They reached only to my shoulders, and walked with such little steps, that it was hard to accomodate my stride to their pace. Besides, we walked single file. The old man led the way, quite ignoring us until we'd reach some Point-of-Interest. Then he'd pause, turn to regard me sternly, point with his cane and expect me to know all the rest. Maybe if I got very excited and begged for more details, he'd add who got killed here when. Terrible tragedies happened there periodically, and in one rebellion the lake was so full of bodies you could walk out on them for "half-a-li" (league). The place was alive with these ghosts he evoked so casually... they quivered for me in the dazzling lights of reflected ripples everywhere. Our faces were ablaze with the knowledge of China's continuity here, as the boatman would pole us across some bright shallow to an island shrine.

Everywhere, they'd insist: "Take a photo! Make a sketch, as your mother did!" And I'd settle on an ancient slab of rock, worn with human passage... a river of protoplasm quivering with the passion of the imprisoned souls seeking a Buddha or a Laotze or "Truth" which we all desire so stubbornly, until dogma shrivels our human potential. I'd take out a blank copybook and scribble with blue ink a quick sketch of what little I could glimpse of each monument... blocked by beaming faces, as throngs of delighted Chinese pushed each other to get nearer.

"You speak the Shanghai dialect perfectly!" they'd marvel, turning to my aunt and uncle, standing by so proudly. I was their niece, came the boast at once. "Oh, wonderful! She is true Chinese," they'd cry. "She must stay with you and marry one of us and have Chinese children." Greatest honour... they wanted all my children to be theirs, members of their race.

I'd put the book away and grin and joke until my uncle would sternly pull out his ornate silver western-style watch and remind me we must proceed "on schedule" at once to the next monument. Back to our pleasure-boat we'd hurry, while the crowds followed crying Tzai-lai! "Come again!" and I swore I would. Oh yes, even as a ghost, I have to go there again!

Everything was a ritual. To honour the boatman's sagacity (and display his own), my uncle never cut a second from the daily bargaining process, while my aunt and I, as befitted "mere women" stood respectfully in the background. But it was lovely. I had adjusted myself to their rhythmic pace through life, from pak to tziak ("dusk"). My girl cousins would take me to the Academy to meet all the other students. It was my element, I belonged there, and why must I go, be sent away to my American aunts? (I'd not yet met my husband, just weeks ahead it would be, in Tsingtao.) Many of the girls were boarders. They took me to see their rooms; and I cried out with fascination

at their scroll-work on the walls. "How do you write her name in Chinese" the girls asked my cousins, who proudly replied: "She is La-mei for the la-mei-hua," a most delicate flower loved in China. And with swift exquisite strokes the brushes flew over tissue paper, creating Chinese characters like swallows in flight: "To La-mei from Pao-pei," (Precious. Or from "Moss Rose" or "Pearl"--so many names.)

And they'd cry: "When you're in Lovely Land, Beautiful Country, Mei-kwo," (America) "you'll not forget us? You'll remember me by this scroll, I, Precious?" "I'll never forget you!" I said earnestly, tears already gathering, it was so sincere. Alas for the scrolls... they were all washed away in a flood in the Argentine Delta, in 1959. But the memory stays. Will I meet them as shadows, as dreaming ghosts in the dancing lights of midday on the lake? The pavilion across from the Academy must still be there. Yes, and Chinese youth must still be seated there drinking the delicate green tea with a floating blossom of tea to grace it, and I amongst them though they know it not.

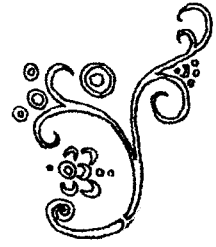
But my mind swiftly returns... and returns...

And the same quivering reflections that saw my face, see theirs, and return them to the sky again, till the whole Universe is a quiver with the light of us all.





WHEATFIELD WOE



The sod house stood alone on the grim prairie. It was a mere sodden speck in the desolation that was Saskatchewan. Throughout the brutal winter, howling polar winds ravened round its crumbling walls while the pitiless sun beat down upon its unsound roof during the equally brutal summer.

This abode sheltered--in its grossly inadequate fashion--two woebegon settlers. Susan, the wife, had once been comely but the fragile blossom of her beauty had been withered by the wind and scorched by the sun. The crystalline peals of her youthful laughter had given way to incessant wails. Her once-bright eyes were red with incessant weeping.

And every silvery bead of sorrow shed enraged her husband Michael all the more. He had been a merry lad in green and pleasant England but all merriment had fled from the crazed eyes that peered through the matted tangles of his unshorn hair. What rested upon his head might once have been a hat. But the snows of many winters and the sweat of many summers had reduced it to a squalid mass of moldering felt the colour of chicken dung.

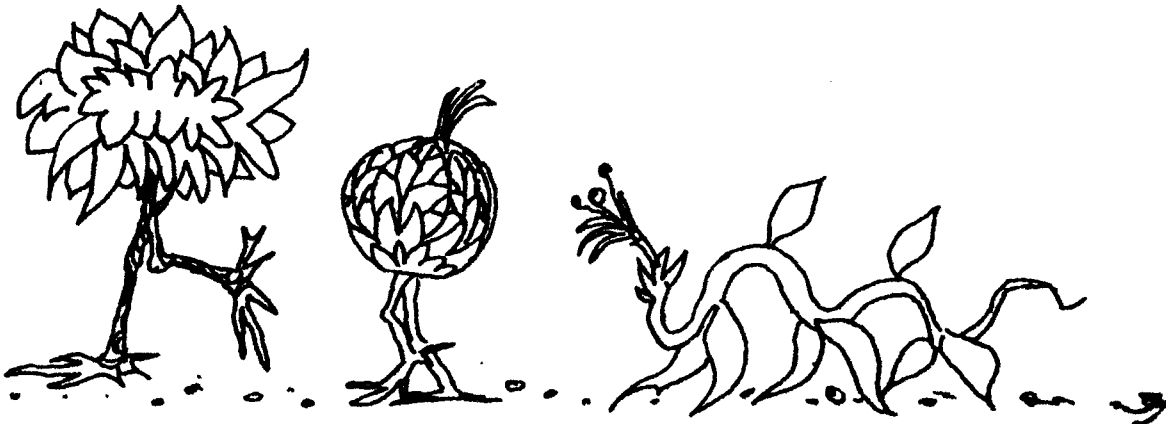
Night after night he sat staring bleakly at the stove, stroking his ragged beard with one horny paw and clutching a bottle with the other. Such paltry funds as they possessed were squandered on that devil's brew, India Pale Ale, trekked in at scandalous cost from the effete East. Susan twisted her faded sunbonnet strings in her work-worn hands. From time to time she ventured close enough to replenish the smouldering sod fire. (Once, when snowbound, they had been reduced to the sacreligious expedient of burning dried cod. She shuddered at the recollection.)

"Michael, Michael," she whimpered. "What is to become of us? We have finally reached the end of our tether."

Her besotted spouse grunted unintelligibly.

"Year after year disasters strike! Woe piled upon woe!"

"Woe!" he croaked.



AN AGRARIAN TRAGEDY

BY SANDRA MIESEL



"The blizzards."

"Woe!"

"The hailstorms."

"Woe!"

"The droughts."

"Woe!"

"The murrains."

"Woe!"

"And now the LOCUSTS!"

"Woe!"

Susan's voice rose to an hysterical shriek: "And the angel flew over the wheatfield crying, 'Woe, woe, woe! Never shall the sound of the Massey-Ferguson reaper be heard in thee again, never--'" Michael hurled his empty bottle at her head but it thudded harmlessly against one muddy wall. Flaunting the tag-ends of her long-ago Sunday school training was Susan's last feeble pretention to gentility, a practice that never failed to infuriate her husband.

Somewhat cowed by his response, she continued, "In devouring our ripe wheat these foul insects have devoured our last hope of livelihood. There is no more money to buy food." She trembled hesitantly before disclosing the full extent of their plight.

"There is not even enough money left to buy your ale."



This revelation struck Michael like a thunderbolt. Roused from his habitual torpor by the prospect of extremity he cast about for a way to mend their fortunes. He briefly contemplated offering his wife's fair body at neighbouring farms for a modest consideration but discarded this notion, realizing she was no longer fair enough to tempt even the loutish local husbandmen.

Yet out of desperation was born inspiration. If grain could be fermented, why not grain-gorged grasshoppers? He harvested the locusts, and after a frenzy of experimentation converted their bloated bodies into the elixir of ultimate ecstasy: Hopper Hooch.

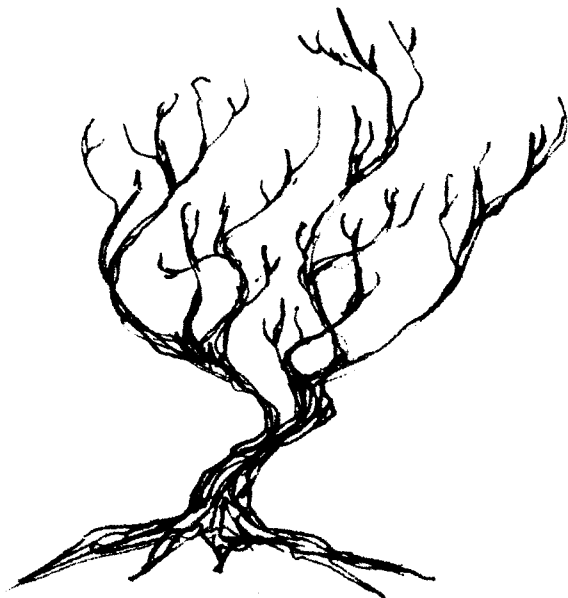
This exotic liquor immediately commanded brisk sales throughout the township. Not only did it serve to blur the harshness of pioneer existence better than any other potable obtainable, Hopper Hooch boasted prodigious aphrodisiac qualities. Production grew apace. Prosperity seemed within their grasp until the fatal night Michael imbibed too deeply of his own concoction.

Paroxysms seized the intoxicated man's shaggy limbs. His speech dissolved into grotesque chitterings. Gesturing obscenely, he commenced hopping and leaping about in an outlandish fashion more befitting an ape or insect than a man. With one mighty bound he overleapt the vat of newmade liquor; with a second, slightly less mighty bound he overturned it. The valuable potion spilled out upon the parched soil. He hopped across the fallow wheatfields with loyal Susan in fruitless pursuit, shabby nightgown flapping about her ankles.

"Michael, Michael, come back!" she cried, but the vicious wind swept away her vain pleas. The tragic finale unfolded by the light of a gibbous moon. Michael recklessly attempted to leap over their dwelling, failed, and broke his wretched neck.

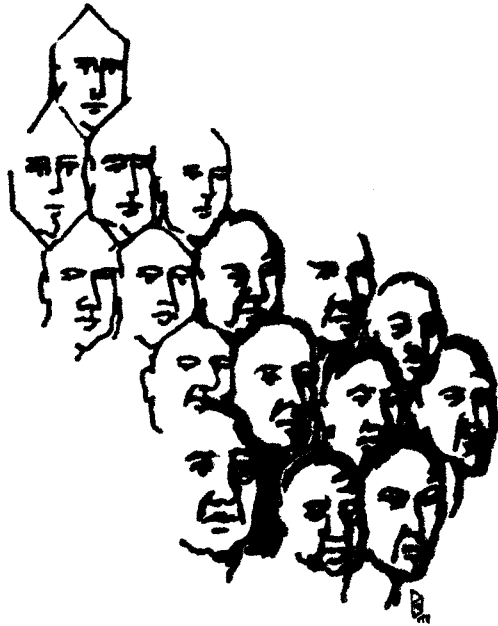
Susan's only legacy was a pool of reeking mud, for her late spouse, out of misguided craftiness, had stubbornly refused to reveal the formula for Hopper Hooch to her. Thus the secret was buried with Michael in the doom-laden prairie.

Yet despite her sorrow, Susan discovered hitherto unsuspected ties of sentiment binding her to the wind-scoured land. She would not even consider seeking the protection of her only living relative, a demented uncle in Whale's Bladder, Newfoundland. Instead she chose to eke out a marginal existence as an underpaid charwoman in a Saskatoon brothel. Now and then on especially frigid winter evenings, she would extract the last remaining bottle of Hopper Hooch from her battered chiffonier, twist the faded strings of her old sunbonnet in her workworn hands, and drink to remember.



[Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is of course purely coincidental.]

THE LETTERS



Paul Walker
128 Montgomery St.
Bloomfield, NJ 07003

Of course, pollution was known long, long ago. "Ecology" is a word that somehow slipped in under the door. Not long ago, a TV interviewer asked a biologist what all those crackpot researches on "Sex Life of the Rhode Island Grasshopper in Old Ebb's Swamp" were all about. They kept popping up on lists of foundation grants. The biologist explained that there were people called "ecologists" who were trying to understand various simple organisms and how they interacted with their environment. This struck me as the time as most fascinating, a most worthwhile effort, but it was not until a few years later that the science became popularly known.

I remember when I first read of Rachel Carson's SILENT SPRING on the front page of the NY TIMES Book Review. I must have read that piece two or three times to convince myself I was actually reading what I was reading. Insecticides? Dangerous? Ban insecticides? Is she out of her roach-stomping mind?

The reviewer didn't help any. He acted as if he had written the book years and years ago. As if anyone who did not already know what Miss Carson was saying, was a reactionary ignoramus. Subsequent reviewers followed his lead and soon there was a small, elite group of self-declared "insiders" who claimed they had known it all along.

To this day it is hard to find a sane, reasonable commentator on the environment. The problem is that here in the States the real issues have become hopelessly entangled in factional prejudices. Most of the books on pollution today are not really about the environment at all, but political muck-raking exposes of those "mealy-mouthed, grasping fat-cats!" who seek to restore "sweat-shops" and dissolve organized labor. Or some such nonsense. The real facts about pollution and its effect on the environment are scattered to the winds.

Ultimately, the environment is the issue, not pollution. Rene Dubois is the only environmentalist who has expressed this idea in any kind of reasonable terms. He talks of the "quality" of life and how, despite material gains, it is steadily decreasing. He asks what kind of life our children can expect if there are no more clean rivers, no pure air, no forests to wander in, no glen that may be called peaceful. What effect will this have on future man?

Behind this lies a striking shift in values, which as far as I know may be confined

in its fullest sense to life here in the States. The fundamental motivation for industrial man has always been the survival principle. In short, earn enough to keep you alive. A man's life depended on his livelihood (i.e. industry) and the improvement of the quality of his life was intrinsically connected with the growth of industry. Even when he achieved a quasi-middle class security, a home in the proverbial "good neighbourhood," then eventually the suburbs, his security was basically economic and dependent on the health of the industrial economy.

Talk of America's wealth was, and still is to a large extent, fallacious, because that wealth was originally in the hands of a tiny portion of the population, say two percent at its height. The effect of income tax was to redistribute a great deal of wealth, and the effect of the welfare state was to distribute it downwards to the poor rather than horizontally to the middle class. Welfare meant that a great deal of money was available to a class of people who had never been recognized as consumers before. The People had Cold Cash! And it had been recognized that one of the causes of the Great Depression had been that there were not sufficient consumers to absorb production. Now, with strong unions and welfare, there was, it seemed, an unlimited consumer market for whatever industry chose to make.

The growth of that seemingly inexhaustible market has been steady in the past twenty years, and with "planned obsolescence," despite critics to the contrary, I do not see why it should not go on growing steadily, at least at the four per cent increase in the Gross National Product required to absorb America's incoming labor. Americans have shown themselves willing to accept lower standards of workmanship, and shorter durations of the life of goods, if it means prices they can afford and goods that more or less satisfy their wants--if it tastes sweet and saves time, it's good.

The curious fact of this growth, which is historically unequalled, is that the industrially-inspired survival principle has given way to the Life Ethic. For one thing, industry, it has been conceded, is giving way to technology--and the nine-to-five, machine-oriented man of the industrial revolution is giving way to the managerial man, the "service" oriented man whose job is still largely abstract.

People are no longer thinking whether tomorrow will be there or not. They know it will be, and that it will be just as good, if not better, than yesterday. This security, and their present economic/material well-being has removed the age-old motivation to "make a bundle" that was the basis of the Horatio Alger/ American Dream of twenty or thirty years ago. The truth is that a large majority of Americans are willing to settle for less than their left-wing critics think they are. Acquisitiveness has shifted from a vertical, make-money orientation to a horizontal, achieve-respectability orientation, and the children of the formerly poor who became "rich" are not being urged to go on and make more money, but to achieve scholastic status and prestigious professional reputations.

The principle of Man Aspiring to Conquer the Universe is part of the Survival Principle, part of the industrial era. The truth is, as Russia and China suggest, that man will gladly settle for a bowl of rice and a warm roof over his head. When he is assured of a bowl of rice and a warm roof, he may turn his attention to living for what inspiration and recreation the environment provides. However, until this generation, people had to take the possibility of economic and social disaster into account. Possibly no generation in the history of man, or Western man at least, was ever raised in the basic economic security of this new generation.

(This may sound like a gross generalization--what generation? I am speaking of generation in terms of the whole culture it has spawned, not as social groups or individuals. "Generation" includes the young and old who are affected by the culture.)

Pollution, until recently, was evidence of industrial growth. Smoking chimneys, highways filled with automobiles, rattling jackhammers, oil wells, giant dams, bulldozers

moving mountains, were portraits for inspiration. The Country Is On The Move. Progress Is Our Most Important Product. Better Living Through Chemistry. All remnants of the industrial era.

Well, the industrial era has not yet come to an end, and it probably won't for a long, long time to come, but the change in people's attitudes has come, and is coming. We are in an age of transition. The interest in the environment is a reflection of that change.

I mentioned the Life Ethic, but would be hesitant to offer any hasty definitions or even swear there is such a thing. Certainly, it does not include the hippie vision of Back to Nature. I think what is happening is that man is moving out to the suburbs and taking his cities with him. Man is a tribal animal who needs his cities. The old cities have proved inefficient, if not stifling. For one thing, they restricted certain activities by monopolizing them, such as the theatre in New York. I think in the near future we will see a redistribution of cultural activities as well as populations across the United States. I think we are on the verge of international cultures that will sprawl halfway around the world yet remain as close-knit, as in-group as aspects of Greenwich Village. Fandom is an example. This will follow in the wake of multi-national corporations, which may constitute extra-national states.

Pollution is not the issue, ultimately. The Quality of Life is. It is wrong to mix environmental concerns with political zeal, for it confuses the issue. Much educating, in a quiet, reasonable tone of voice, is required. People must be made to understand that saving the aardvark is not the point, but preserving a world that is fit to live in is.

The satirical targets of my little whimsy were those such as John Campbell, Goldwater, and Poul Anderson who sneer at the new environmentalists for totally irrational reasons. Yes, pollution was known long ago, but its menace, the whole concept of ecology and its significance for the future of man, was only popularized as of late. Why? Where have all these seers been? Why didn't they open their mouths and yell long ago? Why didn't they write about what they claim they knew about?

All right, I'm a dummy. I didn't know about this stuff. But, hell, am I expected to know everything? That's why I rely on our so-called experts. Their job is to tell me what I ought to know, and they did not do it, and now they come on as if it was all my fault. Well, I know about it now. I'm concerned. I'm willing to listen and do what I can. And part of that may be just getting mad at certain people and demanding that they cut out polluting my world. Is that so radical?

((Yes, Gentle Readers: I could argue for pages with Paul's views and conclusions; in particular, I find his opening and closing statements contradictory. Experts such as Rachel Carson have been telling us "what we ought to know" and we, including a younger Paul, reacted with ridicule or indifference. However, if I start arguing, I'll never get the rest of the letters done. I'm working on a tight timeschedule here. It's July 21. Between now and TORCON I have to finish the basic draft of my thesis, at least; make at least one trip to Regina to find a place to live; pack and arrange to have a basic minimum of books and clothing shipped; help Michael pack the rest of our stuff, because he wants to move closer to his school; finish the TORCON fanhistory display; help with XENIUM 4; help the concommittee any way I can... oh yeah, and prepare some lectures. As you may have gathered, initial enthusiasm is rapidly giving way to sheer PANIC. Don't expect me to be coherent, at TORCON.

At any rate, let me ask again that if you have quarrels with Paul, or bones to pick with any other letterwriters, do it directly with them.

Or maybe start your own ASP-type magazine?))

Paul Novitski/ Alpajpuri
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Eugene, Oregon 97403

The whole ecology foofarrah seems to boil down to this, Susan: Here we are, a race of beings aware of our own existence in the universe, and, to the extent our sciences : reach, aware of our placement in that universe (and more immediately in the terran ecosystem.) We understand many of the processes by which our universe operates, we know a lot of ways to manipulate it, and we can see whole bunches of effects we're having on it already.

The question is, what exactly do we want our universe to be? We can change it, we are changing it, simply by being here. It obviously isn't the best of all possible worlds we find ourselves living in--what is the best for us?

Homo sapiens is of course a natural species. As far as we know we evolved on the Earth; as long as we're here we're undeniably an element in Earth's ecology. Every entity has chemical, physical, biological effects on its environment. Flashfloods cause erosion. Luna causes tides, and serves as the timepiece governing metabolic cycles through the biosphere. Viruses burrow into other cells to reproduce, flies regurgitate acids which dissolve potential food, ants build cities, beavers chop down trees, and humans construct their own set of environment-influencing systems. We (terran life forms) are the environment.

The back-to-the-land advocates are wrong, I think, in assuming that (1) a natural wilderness will remain the same even if they are in it, and that (2) natural wildernesses are unchanging systems until Man intervenes. Man isn't some kind of primal destructive force in the universe, the sole personification of Change. So where are the dinosaurs? Where are the Neanderthals? Where are last year's flowers? No, the terran ecology may be a closed system (if you include the Moon, the Sun, and all the other galactic entities which exert an influence on energy states here at home--ask an astrologist about THAT), but it's a constantly changing system. We're part of that change. And now that we've arrived on the scene with enough intellect to perceive gestalts in the ecosystem and manipulate it as we wish, we're faced with the responsibility of deciding how.

This is what the Garden of Eden myth is all about, for me; as long as you're unaware of yourself, you're Innocent, you're free; but as soon as you become conscious of the fact of your own existence in the universe you're handed the responsibility of guiding yourself through that universe. The unrestricted joys of babyhood are over, guys and gals; it's time for Let's Be Adult.

Just what are we going to do? Eliminate certain gadgets from our culture like electric can-openers and cars and heart-lung machines? What are your priorities? Just how selfish are you?

Most of us will agree that cities (areas of high population density) have a pejorative effect on the human mind. All that stimulus, all that crowding, it drives the soul deep into the mind. In Ocean Park, cars passed our house maybe twice or three times a day. The silence was so complete (except for the wind in the trees and the ocean's quiet murmur a quarter mile away) that my mind literally seemed to expand to fill the psychic space. My senses were open, my thinking cleared, I was generally happier and healthier than I was steeped in the continuous random onslaught of sound in Portland and Eugene. But Grant Canfield (and many others, including myself to an extent) like the city, at least one or two cities in particular, the nicer ones. City people are going to be different in some way than country people; they're going to acclimatize themselves to different sets of stimuli. Who, exactly, do you want to be?

So we return to the idea of self-determination. We're on the threshold of exciting

breakthroughs in genetic surgery, genetic engineering such as we've only read about in sf books till now. With our medicine we can assemble parts of people into functioning systems, practically a la Dr. Frankenstein. We can create life forms from raw chemical material in laboratories, transplant embryos with ease, and maintain banks of sperm and eggs and eyes and blood. It's becoming increasingly obvious that homo sapiens isn't a static entity at all. As a species we're evolving with every birth. What sort of creatures do we wish to become? Or, more aptly, in what directions do we wish to grow?

By the end of this century, when we're finally in a position to really change ourselves and our universe as we wish, we're going to die from the destruction we've wrought to ourselves and our world lo these many generations.

Won't that be sad.

Angus Taylor
221 Avenue Rd., Apt. 2
Toronto 5, Ont.

As I've mentioned before, I think there's too much hacking at the branches of this whole pollution problem, and not enough getting at the roots; one of the main roots being the alienation of man from his whole environment--societal, physical, and biological. A culture based on destruction (of parks for highrises, of animals for food, of "gooks" for "freedom", of interpersonal relationships for status, of human values generally for technological "progress") is seriously warped and needs to be re-examined in its entirety.

There's not enough empathy in the world, Susan. It's the Juwain philosophy we need, if you remember your basic Introduction to Simak O10. So we have a world conference on the environment and some countires suggest a moratorium on killing whales (only a moritorium of course, after all, it says right there in Genesis about how God gave us dominion, i.e., do with as we please...), but it takes some non-delegate freaks to suggest a moritorium on killing people. The U.S. doesn't want other delegations to "confuse" the issue by mentioning its policies of mass murder and ecocide in Indo-China; China and France think the rest should keep their noses out of private (national self-interest) matters like atmospheric nuclear testing; the underdeveloped countries don't want to hear about controls on industrialization. And BY GOD, CANADA, you've got a nice lot of fresh water up there, haven't you? Now, are you going to be friendly and share it, or are we going to have to come and make you see reason???

It's pretty frustrating. I've just written an incredibly sarcastic letter to the Honourable Mitchell Sharp regarding our very profitable \$\$ role as a silent ally of the US in Indo-China. If I'm not around when ASP 5 appears, you'll know the R.C.M.P. have taken me away. Not that letter-writing does a great deal of good. On the other hand, though the world's a terrible mess, I haven't quite given up hope. We're not home yet, but we're just about a moonlight mile on down the road.

Harry Warner, Jr.
423 Summit Ave.
Hagerstown, MD 21740

You can't. If ASPIDISTRA commits suicide, I can't file it in consecrated envelopes. ((Death is occuring by euthanasia after a painful period of gafiation.)) You'll wake in the glare of the 9 A.M. sunshine, an hour after going to bed on the first night of TORCON, and you'll be unable to sleep from the sudden impact of remorse over what you did. How can you preach ecology and then remove forever from this starship earth a perfectly good fanzine title like ASPIDISTRA which nobody else will ever dare to use again because of the comparisons with the dear departed which would result? How do

you know the full extent of the crime you may be committing because destiny might have willed a future issue to fall into the hands of a Standard Oil executive who will be converted by the ninth line on the 16th bluecolored ((no, Harry, that was the Other Zine)) page and thereupon will do such missionary work at his next golf match that the tide will turn on the entire Pacific Coast beach area?

Despite the traumatic effects of your editorial, I managed to get some coherent reactions to the remainder of the issue. They included the amazement that yet another superlative Mae Strelkov piece could follow so quickly on the previous one. She started me to wondering about skunks, with those references to the intelligence of this pet. Could the skunk be the dryside equivalent of the dolphin, a creature with a potential or secret intelligence which a certain barrier has always prevented man from appreciating? It's conceivable. I assume that the skunk has survived the evolutionary struggle with less trouble than the animals which avoid extinction by more complicated measures like claws, teeth and flight, and maybe the simplicity of the skunk's primary weapon has caused it to become a contemplative thinker less bothered by its ego and id than the animals which man knows best. I once knew a skunk which took its owner for walks on a leash through Hagerstown every evening, and it didn't seem the least bit depressed or brutalized by the fact that it had undergone minor surgery on its aroma-creating apparatus. Intact skunks used to stroll around our house when we lived on the edge of Hagerstown, but I never got acquainted with them.

Some good news from Maryland, perhaps: the state now has a law against excessive motor vehicle exhausts. It's so complicated that only the state policemen who receive special training will be making arrests. It involves visible exhausts, of course, and I imagine that they aren't necessarily the worst, but maybe it'll be a start. I'm becoming positively obsessed with my hatred for motor vehicles and am restricting the use of my old car in many weeks to Sundays, when I have no other way to take out the dirty laundry and get the clean laundry without paying a big taxi bill and when there are no decent restaurants open in easy walking distance. I've noticed something this summer since the weather finally turned hot. I've been sitting in this steaming house on many weekends with the doors and windows closed in order to listen to the radio or records or the audio part of television. I don't think its imagination that makes it hard for me to hear such things when I open the doors and windows; I'm positive that the traffic racket is much worse than it used to be. I don't know if it's a case of louder motor vehicle noises or faster average speed past my house, but I'm certain that trucks and autos didn't drown out music and talk from my loudspeakers like this a half-dozen years ago. (The number of passing vehicles has increased sharply, to make things worse.) There's something else about motor vehicles. Offhand, I'd estimate that I've never seen two out of three people who live in this general area walking down the sidewalk. Those two-thirds of my neighbours never got anywhere on foot further than the parked car. This neighbourhood is only one block away from a drug store, restaurant, tavern, big public park, elementary school, and vending machines for soft drinks and cigarettes. A supermarket is within three blocks. How many of those people who never walk anywhere make most of their trips to their cars so they can drive to these very same types of establishments miles away? I know we can't ban private autos or even non-essential use of private cars without doing enormous damage to the economy but I'd love to see gasoline rationed stringently enough to discourage all these piddling little trips that must represent an enormous proportion of all the autos in motion on local streets at any given moment.

Joan Bowers
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Wadsworth, Ohio 44281

Ted White's article gave me mixed emotions. It sounded like a sob story/cop-out at the end. Admittedly, the bit about "biological heritage" and "archetypically" ticked me off. Is impregnating women what man is all about? Is a man's biological heritage,

operating through the hormones that intermingle with his emotions, penetrating deep in his unconscious, telling him that intercourse is right? Just substitute "him" for "her" and that sentence is absurd. Not to mention the reasoning.

Mark Mumper
1227 Laurel St.
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Ted White's thoughts on abortion should signal the end of the matter in these fannish circles--he has considered most of the dilemmas inherent in the question, and has provided an acutely personal account of an abortion situation. Not much can be said in opposition to his views, save of course subjective disagreement, which in any case does not lend itself to extended argument.

I don't want to get into a long discussion on the subject of Japan's ecological disasters, but Linda Bushyager is wrong in thinking that they are doing more to reverse their damage than this country is. I would venture to say that our pollution is almost laughable in the face of the Japanese horrors. They are only now beginning to realize the consequences of their actions, and the results are not pretty. One village, which uses water that has had mercury and other chemical goodies dumped into it for some twenty-thirty years, has been experiencing massive birth defects and adult crippling for several years. The government is doing nothing to stop the dumping, and the corporation responsible of course denies any fault. In Japan the industries and the government are even closer related than in the US, and their willingness to remain blind to their crimes is frightening. If I were to pick the most likely country to burn out from eco-damage, I would undoubtedly point to Japan. Watch closely, folks.

Eric Lindsay
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Faulconbridge, N.S.W. 2776
Australia

On reading ASP #4, the first thing that really struck me was how unbelievably frank Ted White's article was. Our newspapers continually bleat about how bad things are, and about the problems of the unmarried, deserted, raped mother of five, and her plight at the hands of qualified money-sucking medical practitioners/ unqualified backyard butchers (pick your own adjectives from the above, the newspaper remarks are much the same in any case.) It is easy to develop a cold, fault-finding attitude. Someone once claimed that fully half the world's neurotics developed from indulging in others' misery as detailed in the pages of the daily press.

I agree with this. Logically I should condemn Ted for contributing to the flood of problem stories. Logically I should criticise his relatively casual attitude towards drugs, claiming any troubles it causes him are his own fault. Yet despite this logic, I find myself moved, deeply, and forced to think about abortion and population, and how this affects people as individuals, rather than as a group problem. This is more difficult than picking a comforting slogan from someone else and mouthing it over and over. Ted's article makes no promises, but I think it is more moving than ten years of sob columns in the daily press. Thank you for being honest.

I trust you are aware that the governments of all nations are doing their best to decrease pollution. You will have noticed the downgrading in importance of primary and secondary industry, the increase in tertiary and service industries. Increased expenditure on education, and this for longer terms. The increase in paperwork required for such things as income tax and other government forms, and the promotion of relatively pollution-free types of activities such as TV viewing, and a campaign against the converse, such as cars, by fines, by details of how they fall apart (viz Ralph

Nader, a secret agent of government?) It is obvious that they (and we all know who they are, don't we?) really do care, and are conducting a secret campaign to reduce pollution. The reason for the secrecy is obvious, they have to avoid the upset it would cause to both labour and business if it became known. Rejoice, fen, the world will not end buried under old car bodies, it will end buried under a ten-foot-deep layer of waste paper.

Promote ecology... grow weeds! (I'm good at that.)

Sheryl Birkhead
23629 Woodfield Rd.
Gaithersburg, MD 20760

I live on a farm. When we moved here, about twenty years ago, it was way out in the sticks, but slowly the city is moving out.

In the last few years we have begun to notice foam and residue in the stream down back. The land on all three sides has been sold for developing (but they can't get the right of way to one area, so it's going to stay farmland for awhile, at least--they'd love to have us sell to them....) One side is already a development. We've had a lot of trouble with kids and so on--several field fires, one mower blade broken on rocks and debris deposited in a hay field, kids riding mini bikes over ripe grain and hay, sand in the tractor gastanks--and on and on. The land is posted, but it doesn't help a lot. We had one pair who even "moved in" and set up a tent under one of our big rocks, and were smoking--they said they didn't think anyone "minded". Aside from other considerations, I suppose it is best it wasn't the Shorthorn bull that found them first.

This is pollution, of a different kind. ((Or a combination of simple ignorance and outright vandalism.)) Gates are left open, so stock get out. We have a mighty big dog, so no-one has brazenly tried to come in the front gate, but I've caught many people fishing and so on. Remember that I mentioned the bull! Aside from common courtesy, safety is also a factor.

A woman at a laundromat found out we owned a farm and asked if she could bring her school class out to visit. We had to say NO and she told us that we were very selfish people. She didn't stop to think that most kids simply don't know how to behave around animals and fences. We just can't take the chance that someone might get hurt. AND, everyone seems to be a know-it-all; I can only assume that they think there isn't any "special" way to behave around the "larger" animals and proceed to behave "normally." With all the land around being sold, I hate to think of what these kids would ever do if they actually HAD to work with an animal without either killing it or themselves!

The last time I was up to Canada was on a field trip--went all the way up to Cobalt. Agh, the stench and fumes! But I also found the forests we camped in to be the most beautiful I have seen. Also--I could tangibly feel, see, and taste the pollution as we came back down into the States.

It is still very comforting and serene to go down to the back pasture and over the hump of the hill (so you can't see the housing development) and sit on the rocks, watch the stream and the cattle, and just enjoy the peace. Now it is, but I don't know for how much longer.

Gary Hubbard
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Personally, I remember always hearing something about impending environmental disaster.

In the 50's it was axiomatic that "if the bomb doesn't get you the monoxide will," or the overpopulation will, or the food shortage will, or the power shortage will. I remember reading about the problems of air pollution in My Weekly Reader back in the fifth grade, reading about overpopulation in the Sunday supplement of the local newspaper, one of my teachers talked about the dangers of food additives and recommended a book called 1,000,000 GUINEA PIGS which condemned (among other things) corn flakes (and that in 1957).

As far back as 1940 scientists were warning about the dangers caused by putting detergents into lakes and streams. And in 1950, Aldous Huxley wrote an article for REDBOOK called "Your World in 2000 A.D." In it, he said: "During the next fifty years mankind will face three great problems: the problem of avoiding war; the problem of feeding and clothing a population of two and a quarter billions, which, by 2000 A.D. will have grown to upwards of three billions; and the problems of supplying these billions without ruining the planet's resources."

But in 1950, who was listening? Huxley was talking about a problem that was in the future, but the future is now.

((And we are living in the world of THE SHEEP LOOK UP. Little things, not the headlines about shortages, get to me--like returning from California, where the gas stations are closing early, or even completely, due to fuel shortages, to find that in three weeks food prices have risen noticeably. Nixon removes price controls, and the price of bacon in Toronto rises by 50¢! Scary. Soylent green, anyone?))

Patrick McGuire
11A Graduate College
Princeton, N.J. 08540

I'm only moderately sorry to hear ASP is closing shop. My own concern over the environmental crisis does not (much) overlap into Nature Worship. And how could it? Nature is so clearly Out To Get Me. For four days at an International Youth Camp (love that Soviet terminology) at Sochi on the Black Sea, I can show one skinned knee and one battered hand, both the result of the combination of high waves and rock beach; a bad case of sunburn; and a bee sting. Didn't turn my ankle, though: I almost always do when I Go Back to Nature.

I mentioned the lack of pollution-causing paper bags and cups in my letter from the USSR: Soviet avoski, net shopping bags, are really clever things. They can be easily bunched up in the hand so that they are never bigger than the load, and they are incredibly strong. Unlike the situation with paper sacks, you never have to worry about the things breaking at the bottom. I suppose they are unlikely to catch on in North America regardless of the paper situation so long as private cars abound--not that many people have occasion to carry rather heavy loads for long distances. As one of the carless minority, I think the avoska I brought back will prove quite useful.

Aljo Svoboda
1203 Buoy Ave.
Orange, CA 92665

We had a Smog Alert yesterday. For a few hours in the hottest part of the afternoon, it was hard to breathe. Still, we're starting to get used to the raw throat, the feeling of nausea, and the fire in our lungs. Maybe we're beginning to adapt. Too bad. This would've been Earth's last chance to get us while our defences were down. Unfortunately, it looks as though we'd survive even an ecological catastrophe. Dammit, will Man never become extinct? Well, I'm sure Earth will get its time, eventually. It'll be a long recovery, I think.

WAHF:

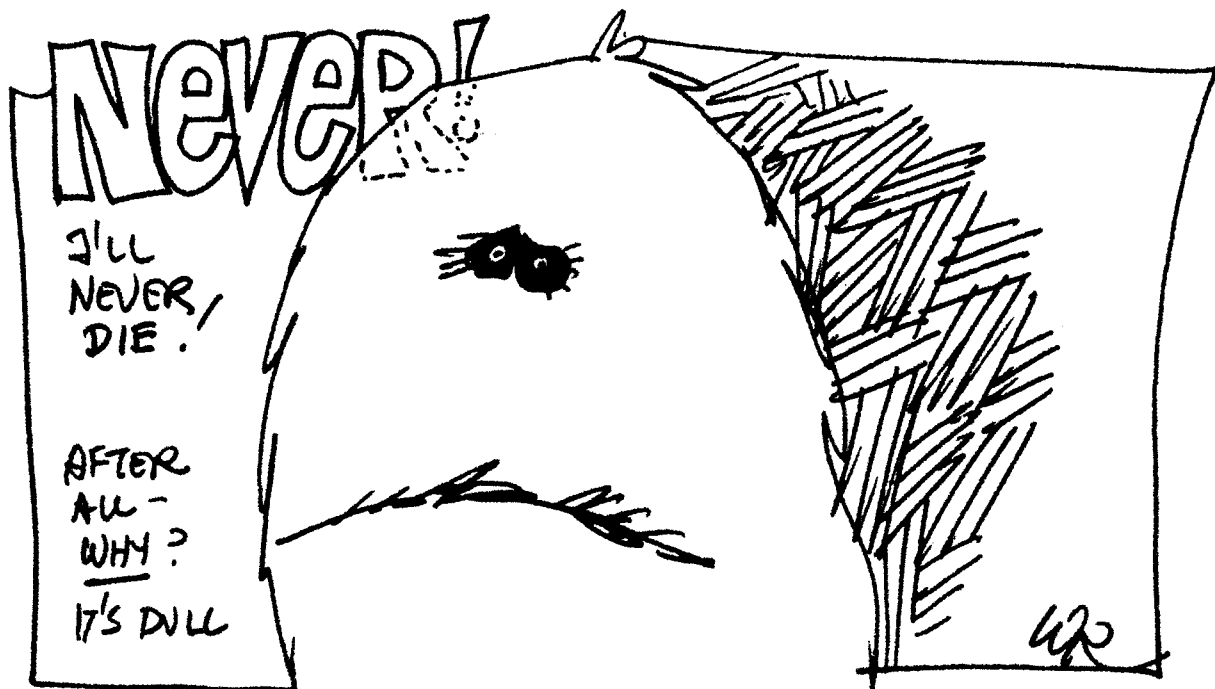
CY CHAUVIN will be happy to send instructions for creating vases, bookends and so on out of paper mache (old newspapers) and recycled objects such as peanut butter jars, bricks, plastic lids, and bottles. Write to him at 17892 Peters, Roseville, MI 48066.

DEVRA LANGSAM: "Lunarians donated \$15 of recycled money to TAAF--well over 40 lb. of aluminum scrap, and about 1,000 lb. of glass. All of which I carted to the collection depots--see, cars, are good for some things."

NORM HOCHBERG: "Re: Grant Canfield's letter. Isn't it possible to develop an ecological system which is part urban in makeup and still balanced? Aren't Silverberg's urban monads an attempt at that?"

And thanks for writing to: MIKE GILBERT, PAUL DOCHERTY, DAVE PIPER, GREG BURTON, DAVE HULVEY, STEPHEN FRITTER, JOHN ALDERSON, LEO J. MURRAY, and anyone I may have missed.

WAHF, in particular, The Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust. Sale of the Tim Kirk anti-pollution posters earned almost £ 11.00 for the Trust, which collects, protects, and breeds threatened species of wildlife. The posters (8 1/2 inches, black-and-white, on heavy cover stock, suitable for colouring and/or framing) are still available from SuaMi Press for 50¢; I'll probably have some at TORCON.



Maybe so, Bill, but the doomed ASP is on its last gasp. I suppose I'll never know whether it Did Any Good, or Raised Your Consciousness, or whatever--but I enjoyed creating it, and apparently You Out There enjoyed reading it, arguing with it, and putting down your own thoughts in response to it. I've noticed all along the letters came less in response to individual articles or statements than in response to the general ideas raised in ASP--your views on the future of this planet, and of humankind on it. So I suppose ASP stimulated each reader into a little bit of individual thinking--or a lot, as Paul/Paj's letter indicates, for example.

Again, please keep in touch with me while I'm in Regina. And thanks for asking where ASPIDISTRA was. That's why it's finally here. And maybe, someday, another zine...

