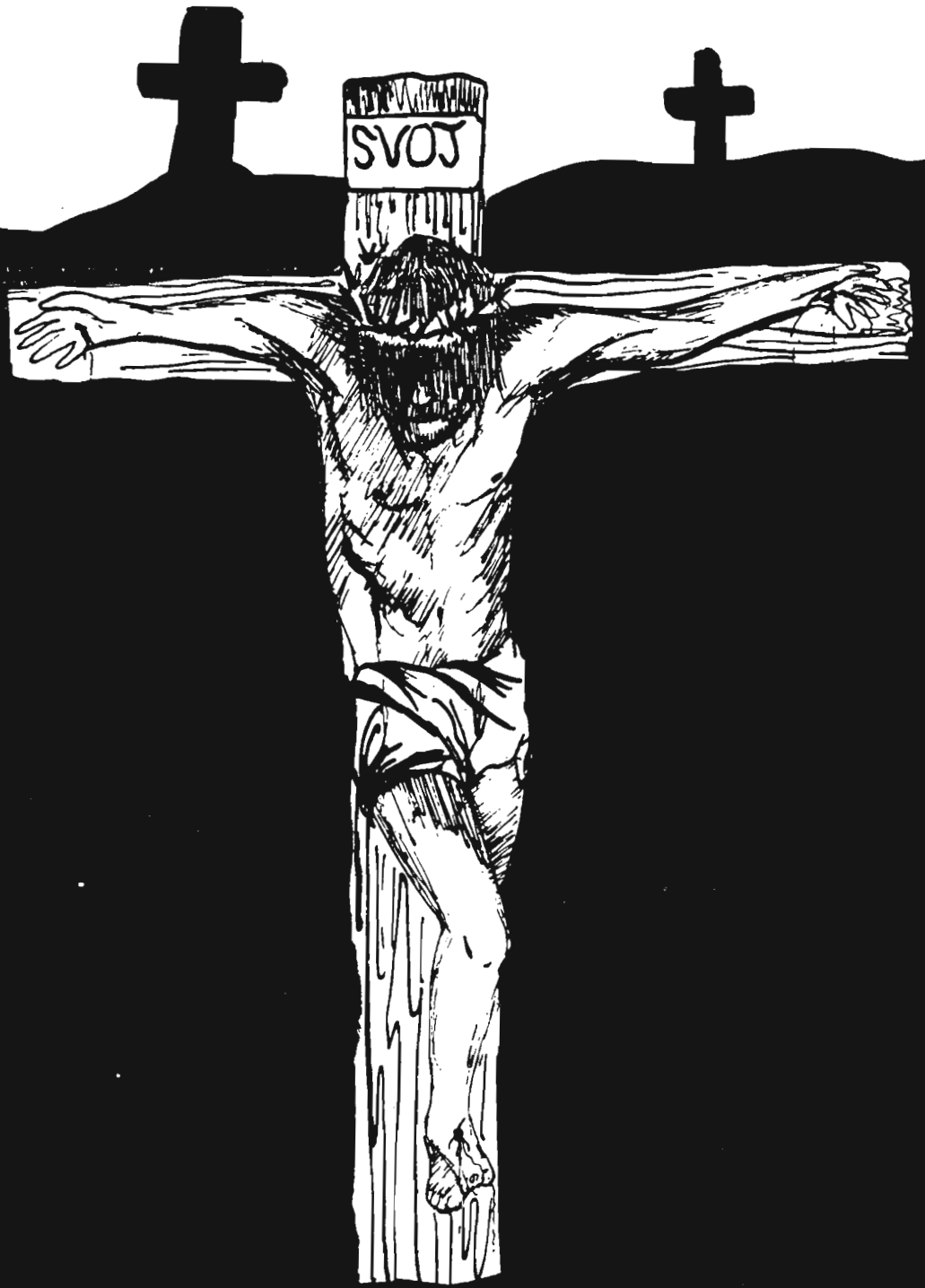


ARROWS
of
DISEASE



6. RELIGION

EGOTORIAL

You may have noticed that this issue of *Arrows of Desire* appears three years late. This is not a record. We therefore break format somewhat to offer the following:

Apologies are due to this issue's contributors for subjecting their material to so much entropy. Whilst inherently unfair to mention particular names (but let's face it, who cares?), AOD offers best wishes to contributor Michael Abbott for the success of his involvement with the *Attitude* project*. We would also like to point out that potential reviewers and critics may rest up for a while, since Paul Di Filippo has filled every available position.

Special apologies to Graham Joyce who already contributed to AOD #7 (*Bloody Foreigners!*) some time ago. His piece on the Greeks will indeed appear there.

Arrows of Desire publishing history:

#1	November 1988	(<i>Gen</i>)
#2	May 1989	(<i>The Rock 'n' Roll Stories</i>)
#3	November 1989	(<i>Love, Lust and Like</i>)
#4	April 1990	(<i>Hate, Fear and Loathing</i>)
#5	November 1990	(<i>Death</i>)
#5 ¹ / ₂	April 1991	(<i>Comments on #5, response article</i>)
#6	November 1994	(<i>Religion</i>)
#7	Second qtr 1995	(<i>Bloody Foreigners!</i>)
#8	Fourth qtr 1995	(<i>To be announced in #7 - try to guess</i>)

Back issues are not currently in print; this does not preclude requests for them which, if sufficient in number, will be dealt with sympathetically. A possibility under consideration is an omnibus reprint. Opinions welcomed.

*The *Attitude* fanzine is edited and published by Michael Abbott, John Dallman and Pam Wells. Available for the usual from Flat 4, 27 Terront Road, London N15 3AA, UK (jgd@cix.compulink.co.uk). Recommended.

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Listings, factual pieces and "Joke" compiled by S V O'Jay; miscellaneous quotes compiled by Steve Jeffery and S V O'Jay; *And Finally...* supplied by Steve Jeffery.

Cover Art: **Bruce Benedickter**

Interior art: **Black Flag: Cacey Goff Chile (p8), Sididis (p16), Mary Goff Wannabe (p35)**

...felt it was one to deal with in the "usual" fashion, that is, *omerta*, but in the personal sense. Nobody should know. Well, not nobody as such, in the Oxford sense of the word, but more realistically in a damage limitation way. The less they know. The better. For all of us. Me.

What changed? Later for that, but I'll point out that it seemed and seems strange that a shared bed could be so sexless for so long. They knew, really. A lot of other things could have taken excuse status very easily, especially when the cynic has it that you're trying to deal with a fake Scouse from Notlob (as Monty would say - or have said, Graham).

"Do you believe in a love at first sight?"; "Yes, I'm certain it happens all the time"; "What do you see when you turn out the light?"; darkness, actually. The long riders of the imagination assenting to apportion something other than a physical explanation to the astigmatically-enhanced points of light behind closed blue eyes. We don't get fooled again.

Are you out there, then? Is there really something emotional, spritual, physical about the acceptance of the chalice, the wafer, the body, the blood? Transubstantiation of the electrical zap pathways of axons into something life-enhancing, life-directing. It worked. "What's it like to be the most beautiful woman in the room?". "When I see her, I'll ask her."

Symptom or result? Remembering times past when the organisational skill of others overtook the real need. Bay of Pigs. Dallas. Brighton (own goal). Ready for this, perhaps, or just another escape clause. Please read the small print on your lack of insurance. There are no guarantees, there is no alternative.

The cost in friendships would tend to be high, especially after so long. But, well, fuck, if they're so easily broken (selfish again) what were they worth? The right stuff is gonna endure, right? (Actually, yes.)

I told myself everything was taken care of as I got on the plane. It had to be, didn't it? The Church of Spirit had failed me enough not to be worth missing, the Church of the Poison Mind left behind (or so it was hoped); all sacrificed on the altar of Church of Self?

Adequate flight, it got us there. Time will tell, it always does.

And in Arcadia I....

Let's start with a very brief comment on *AOD #5*, written unusually before I have even read it! This summer (1990) I spent a lot of time undergoing manipulation of my neck, only to be told that it is falling apart. The bones are degenerating, already I have "the neck of an eighty-year-old", and I am unlikely to see this decade out. Suddenly, death looms: I'm never going to do most of the things I want, osteo-arthritis already stops me from enjoying some of them, and penury hardly helps.

Do I really want to read what people **not** faced by the immediate and certain threat of death have to say about it? What does it mean to me? And does the declared theme of *AOD #6*, Religion, actually have anything to say to me or indeed to do with life, death or anything else useful?

To me, death means simply waste: there's a helluva lot of shitstirring antagonism to received ideas lurking in Ken Lake's mind waiting for time to get out; there's a lot of useful information, and nearly sixty years of meaningful experience waiting to be shared. And before you can do more than skim the surface, the body and the brain are to decay and be lost forever. Waste indeed!

Don't bug me with sentiment: I've no room for it. Sure, I enjoy good experiences, I gain emotional and aesthetic pleasure from some of them. But what kind of pleasurable emotion do you expect me to radiate now? I mean, be fair - intellect, ratiocination, philosophy even; investigation, extrapolation, wonderment, these are still around, being triggered all the time. I'm willing and ready to give and take love, on a one-to-one basis anyhow, but I am too full of anger to be capable of loving the world, its people - most of whom are so fuckin' ignorant, bigoted and stupid that I have no sympathy for them - or even specific nations, tribes, groups or self-declared categories like fandom, lesbians, stamp collectors or poll tax protestors.

Do people threatened by death turn to religion? I dunno - I'm the Odd Man Out because religion has always fascinated me anyway. I've marched with the Sally Army, studied with the Witnesses, argued with the Mormons (a singularly stupid group), been bored by the *Book of Common Prayer*, gloried in the poetry of the *Upanishads*, been repelled by the *Koran*, wondered at the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and many a time and oft lost myself in the celebration of the Mass, the central "mystery" of Christianity.

For several decades I've taken the opportunity occasionally to attend the Ukranian Uniat liturgy - this is basically the Russian Orthodox one with a Ukranian accent plus prayers for the Pope, more recently being celebrated in modern Ukranian rather than Old Slavonic, so I've had to learn another language to sing along. I sometimes attend the Russian Orthodox Cathedral, and I'm a member of the Latin Mass Society which celebrates the old Tridentine rite rather than that boring populist modern post-Vatican II service.

Just recently I've rediscovered the Armenian Church and, with the help of a liturgy given me by Avedon Carol's parents, I'm learning to sing in that obscure language the many beautiful chants of this even more obscure yet pioneering church. So I'm spoiled for choice, if religious experiences are what I seek.

Why should I want them? Do I believe in God, in the Godhead of Jesus, in the dogmas of the Catholic or any other Faith? Do I support the Catholics with their celibate clergy, the Orthodox where all priests are married but all bishops celibate (coming from the monasteries), or the Armenians who feel it's up to each priest to make up his own mind? Do I believe in the infallibility of the Pope, the collegiality of the Orthodox metropolitans or the separateness the Armenians claim among their greatest gifts? Do I care?

At varying times in the past, all these - and hundreds of other - theological problems and concepts have grasped my attention. I've read this and that, studied this and that, asked the right and wrong questions and been given some very dodgy answers. Why should religion be trammled with all these complexities anyway?

There are two separate ways of looking at religion. Some see it as "the Word of God" setting out specific patterns which must be followed, specific dogmas which must be believed, with the threat of eternal damnation - or at least a nasty time in Purgatory - if you can't bring yourself to swallow precisely this year's version of this sect's beliefs and practices. That side of religion has caused probably more wars, deaths, tortures, unhappinesses and the destruction of more lives and souls than anything else in this world, and I've come to feel that even if any one set of beliefs is correct, and even if some God has actually laid them down, we are better off ignoring them.

That may sound harsh: who am I to throw out the product of the love, the devotion, the research and study and dedication of millions of wonderful people? My only answer has to be that it's the same guy who rejects the end product of more millions of bigoted, brutal, ignorant, power-hungry, primitive and contemptible people who have propagated these same teachings over the same centuries. Pick where you will, religious mankind has not shown itself notably more civilised, altruistic, kind, sensible or understanding than pagan mankind.

The second way of looking at religion is self-centred: what can I get out of this that will please, help, console, reassure me? The peace that overtakes the contemplative monk or nun at meditation - be they Catholic or Buddhist - is just one example. For me, ever since I managed to get on the same wavelength as the Catholic and Orthodox Faiths, it has been the actual celebration of their liturgies - the singing, the act of offering, the sheer majesty and warmth and inevitability and glory of the *ritual*, that has been the real attraction.

Most people in this century will find that incomprehensible. So be it. I **know** I'm no wackier than you and you, and I'm probably a lot saner than **you**, ducky, but that's not the point. What matters is that while you get your kicks from champagne, other noxious substances, sex, companionship, SF, fandom or any other art form, to most of those I can add the consolations of religion in the simple sense of being there, participating, singing (especially the older and more primitive chants - certainly **not** the self-conscious hymns of the more modern sects!), and coming out at the end with a crowd of other people, some of whom may also have been given the ultimate pleasure of participation at the same level I occasionally achieve.

But, you ask, how can you do this, be there, watch all this, sing or say these words, if you don't believe a word of it? I suppose I could ask you why you watch movies, read novels, participate in anything which **you** know to be untrue, unreal, invented; my answer has to be that regardless of **my** ability to believe, those who created the liturgy certainly did, and they wrought something that gives me my greatest pleasure today, and don't knock it, bub.

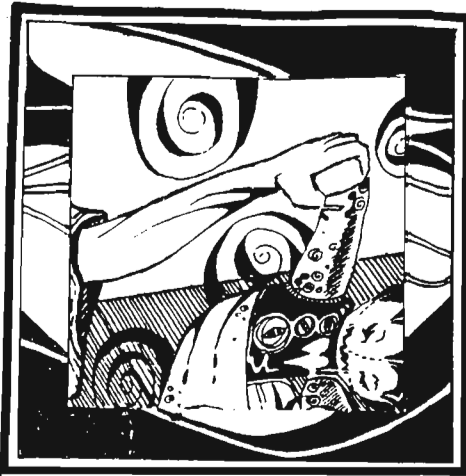
What, then, if anything, **do** I believe about what happens after death? With the vast range of reports, many of them of considerable scientific strictness, about "near-death" (by which they really mean "after-death") experiences, how can you ask?

The real point about all these reports is not their occasional divergences but the remarkable - unbelievable - degree of similarity in the experiences that people recount. The way one's consciousness drifts away from the body and looks down on it, then zooms upward into a tunnel that extends beyond sight, coming out into an environment where people one once knew wait to welcome: all these are standard furniture in virtually every report. Sure, there are a very few who have come back to claim with horror that they were "in hell" - all I can do is hope that I shall not be one of those! I confess I take comfort from the discovery that those who return to talk of hell turn out to be no worse, morally or ethically, than those who have experienced the ongoing existence of the majority: it may be that the "hell" experiences are self-induced.

To be honest, I am tempted to say that I could never accept the existence of any God who condemned anyone to perpetual torture, or darkness, or separation from the rest of mankind, on the basis of deeds enacted during a short, brutal life such as almost all of us experience. The total wiping out of a truly evil "soul" (whatever that word means) might be acceptable, but the story we get from almost everyone is that one's life unrolls before one, one comes to terms with it, and on arrival at the end of the tunnel there is no mention of this sin or that good deed. One can honestly only assume that such things pale into insignificance for a disembodied identity faced with a timeless existence where the words "period" or "future" become meaningless.

To summarise, then: I have to face the concept of death in the near future; I gain great comfort and joy from my kind of religious observance, and I repose my faith in NDE reports and the realisation that if they are all fanciful imaginings, I am going to be dead and unaware that I've been misled.

It's just that I'd sooner be able to feel I could get a whole lot more enjoyment out of my remaining time than I can foresee being my lot. Spare a prayer or a thought - even you may help me get more out of the fag-end of my life!



YES, I KNOW I CAN'T DRAGU HANDS



WHO DARES MISERY LOVE AND HUGS THE FORM OF DEATH, DANCE IN DESTRUCTIONS DANCE, TO THEM THE MOTHER COMES.



ACANDY COLOURED LOU THEY CALL THE SANDMAN CANDY COLOURED LOU



© CACEY '81

THE SANDMAN

BUDDHISM

Founded: About 525 BC, reportedly near Benares, India, by Gautama Siddhartha (ca. 563 - 480), the Buddha.

Sacred texts: The *Tripitaka*, a collection of the Buddha's teachings, rules of monastic life, and philosophical commentaries on the teachings; also a vast body of Buddhist teachings and commentaries, many of which are called *sutras*.

Organization: The basic institution is the *sangha* or monastic order through which the traditions are passed to each generation. Monastic life tends to be democratic and anti-authoritarian. Large lay organizations have developed in some sects.

Practice: Varies widely according to the sect and ranges from austere meditation to magical chanting and elaborate temple rites. Many practices, such as exorcism of devils, reflect pre-Buddhist beliefs.

Divisions: A wide variety of sects grouped into 3 primary branches: *Therevada* (sole survivor of the ancient *Hinayana* schools) which emphasises the importance of pure thought and deed; *Mahayana*, which includes Zen and Soka-gakkai, ranges from philosophical schools to belief in the saving grace of higher beings or ritual practices, and to practical meditative disciplines; *Tantrism*, an unusual combination of belief in ritual magic and sophisticated philosophy.

Location: Throughout Asia, from Ceylon to Japan. Zen and Soka-gakkai have several thousand adherents in the U.S.

Beliefs: Life is misery and decay, and there is no ultimate reality in it or behind it. The cycle of endless birth and rebirth continues because of desire and attachment to the unreal "self". Right meditation and deeds will end the cycle and achieve Nirvana, the Void, nothingness.

[Source: *World Almanac*]

ROMAN CATHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Programs like Alcoholics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous and Sexaholics Anonymous have helped millions of people with real problems. The recovery syndrome has swept the nation, and Catholics are not immune to its appeal. In fact, there is now a program, Roman Catholics Anonymous, designed specifically for people who are trying to "get over" being Catholic. Catholics join this program for five reasons: guilt, fear, shame, shame and more shame.

At their meetings, Recovering Catholics let loose with the truth about the traumas that have fouled up their lives. One R.C. is convinced that his punishment for putting the plastic poo-poo on Sister Renunciata's chair condemned him to life as an orderly in a nursing home. Another confesses that he used to try and drop his pencil so he could try to look up Sister Inviolata's habit. He is so ashamed of his behaviour that he can no longer have sex.

These and other injustices have led the Catholics in RCA to feel that they must reject their faith entirely. Nevertheless, we suspect that most of them will still want a priest when it comes time to meet their Higher Power.

THINGS CATHOLICS ARE AFRAID OF:

1. Sex
2. Small dark rooms
3. The colour black
4. Authority
5. Standing up to authority
6. Lining up
7. Hell
8. Being too lenient with their children
9. Doing anything wrong

THINGS CATHOLICS ARE GUILTY ABOUT:

1. Sex
2. Cheating at solitaire
3. Telling white lies
4. Using the office copy machine for personal business
5. Buying Campbell's soup with a Lipton's coupon
6. Parking at a broken meter
7. Jaywalking
8. Being too strict with their children
9. Refusing to answer the door for the Jehovah's Witnesses

THINGS CATHOLICS ARE ASHAMED OF:

1. Sex
2. Their bodies
3. Other people's bodies
4. Watching $9\frac{1}{2}$ Weeks at home alone
5. Wanting to get rich
6. Getting rich
7. Their thoughts
8. Their words
9. Their deeds

[From *Still Catholic After All These Years*, by Meara, Stone, Kelly & Davis]

From the very beginning I had only good intentions. People seemed unable to come to terms with that terrible unknown blackness after the end of life, and I was full of sympathy.

Of course I knew nothing about it either, but I invented a cosy tale to comfort others. Even when you're dead, I lied, you will forever be looked after, and there will forever be a "you" to be looked after.

Yes, yes, by sheer chance this might coincide with the truth; but coming from me (who neither knew nor believed it) it was a lie.

I added flourishes: ringing rhetorical assertions, circular arguments and special pleading. Really, all these literary frills were unnecessary. People wanted so much to believe. The good news spread. They were comforted and I was pleased, for a while.

The first argument arose over a minor point I had somehow neglected. (I think it had to do with whether my story implied an infinite, forgotten "beforelife" which preceded birth, to complement what followed death.) The believers settled it as believers will, not very conclusively, at a cost of three million lives.

I rewrote the scriptures to eliminate any possible dispute, but unfortunately the debate between those who accepted the new word and those who preferred the old was never quite resolved. Another six hundred thousand martyrs were made, or infidels slain. Again and again I struggled to clarify the message of simple, unadorned comfort, with an added suggestion that people be kind to one another. Once, a quarter of a million enthusiasts died for a misprint.

By this time there were upwards of nine hundred sects, each clinging fiercely to some distorted fragment of my original fiction. Many had added bits of their own, with which I almost invariably disagreed. Many settled down and gave up the sword, which looked promising until I noticed how, with few exceptions, they used their doctrine to justify subtler cruelties.

One large cult now insists that people with hair of a certain colour are unclean, unfit to share food or to read out my little message. Another puts so much faith in its version of the text that sick children are left to die if the words alone do not heal them. Almost every sect has developed its own extraordinary and offensive notions about women.

What can I say to these priesthoods? Having first unleashed the idea that it is wise and good to believe a message which is supported by no evidence at all but which cheers the believer, I cannot logically challenge the equally unsupported dogmas that they find soothing and I find monstrous.

As I said, from the beginning I had only good intentions. I wish I could stop hearing the nagging moralistic voice which whispers that in the long run, nothing but evil can result from the most comforting lie.

ADHERENTS OF RELIGIONS (WORLD), Mid-1991

Christians	1,783,660,000
Roman Catholics	1,010,352,000
Protestants	368,209,000
Orthodox	168,683,000
Anglicans	73,835,400
Other Christians	162,580,600
Moslems	950,726,000
Nonreligious	884,468,000
Hindus	719,269,000
Buddhists	309,127,000
Atheists	236,809,000
Chinese folk religionists	183,646,000
New Religionists	140,778,000
Tribal religionists	93,996,000
Sikhs	18,460,500
Jews	17,615,000
Shamanists	10,302,000
Confucians	5,917,000
Baha'is	5,402,000
Jains	3,724,000
Shintoists	3,162,800
Other religionists	18,268,000
Total Population	5,385,330,300

[Source: 1992 *Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year*]

Percentage of adherents as part of world population: Christians, 33.1; Roman Catholics, 18.8; Protestants, 6.8; Moslems, 17.7; Nonreligious, 16.4; Hindus, 13.4; Buddhists, 5.7; Atheists, 4.4; Jews, 0.3.

Adherents: As defined and enumerated for each of the world's countries in *World Christian Encyclopaedia* (1982), projected to mid-1991, adjusted for recent data.

Christians: Followers of Jesus Christ affiliated to churches (church members, including children: 1,658,149,700) plus persons professing in censuses or in polls though not so affiliated.

Other Christians: Catholics (non-Roman), marginal Protestants, crypto-Christians, and adherents of African, Asian, black and Latin-American indigenous churches.

Muslims: 83% Sunnites, 16% Shiites, 1% other schools. The definition excludes former ethnic Muslims who have now abandoned Islam, also followers of syncretic religions combining Islam with other belief systems. In the US, a recent detailed survey showed that most Asian immigrants previously thought to be Muslims were now in fact Christians.

Hindus: 70% Vaishnavites, 25% Shaivites, 2% neo-Hindus and reform Hindus.

Buddhists: 56% Mahayana, 38% Theravada, 6% Tantrayana.

Atheists: Persons professing atheism, skepticism, disbelief, or irreligion, including anti-religious (opposed to all religion).

Chinese folk religionists: Followers of traditional Chinese religion (local deities, ancestor veneration, Confucian ethics, Taoism, universism, divination, some Buddhist elements)

New-Religionists: Followers of Asian 20th-century New Religions, New Religious movements, radical new crisis religions, and non-Christian syncretic mass religions, all founded since 1800 and mostly since 1945.

Jews: 84% Ashkenazis, 10% Orientals, 4% Sephardis. The definition includes nonpracticing Jews, underground Jews, and crypto-Jews in Muslim countries.

Confucians: Non-Chinese followers of Confucius and Confucianism, mostly Koreans in Korea.

Other religionists: Including 50 minor world religions and a large number of spiritist religions, New Age religions, quasi-religions, pseudoreligions, parareligions, religious or mystic systems, religious and semireligious brotherhoods of numerous varieties.

Total Population: UN medium variant figures for mid-1991, as given in *World Population Prospects, 1990* (New York: UN, 1991). [General Source: *The World Almanac, 1993*]

HINDUISM

Founded: ca. 1500 BC by Aryan invaders of India where their Vedic religion intermixed with the practices and beliefs of the natives.

Sacred texts: The *Veda*, including the *Upanishads*, a collection of rituals and mythological and philosophical commentaries; a vast number of epic stories about gods, heroes and saints, including the *Bhagavadgita*, a part of the *Mahabharata*, and the *Ramayana*; and a great variety of other literature.

Organization: None, strictly speaking. Generally, rituals should be performed or assisted by Brahmins, the priestly caste, but in practice simpler rituals can be performed by anyone. Brahmins are the final judges of ritual purity, the vital element in Hindu life. Temples and religious organizations are usually presided over by Brahmins.

Practice: A variety of private rituals, primarily passage rites (e.g. initiation, marriage, death) and daily devotions, and a similar variety of public rites in temples. Of the latter, the *puja*, a ceremonial dinner for a god, is the most common.

Divisions: There is no concept of orthodoxy in Hinduism, which presents a bewildering variety of sects, most of them devoted to the worship of one of the many gods. The 3 major living traditions are those devoted to the gods Vishnu and Shiva and to the goddess Shakti, each of them divided into further sub-sects. Numerous folk beliefs and practices, often in amalgamation with the above groups, exist side by side with sophisticated philosophical schools and exotic cults.

Location: Mainly India, Nepal, Malaysia, Guyana, Surinam, Sri Lanka.

Beliefs: There is only one divine principle; the many gods are only aspects of that unity. Life in all its forms is an aspect of the divine, but it appears as a separation from the divine, a meaningless cycle of birth and rebirth (*samsara*) determined by the purity or impurity of past deeds (*karma*). To improve one's *karma* or escape *samsara* by pure acts, thought, and/or devotion is the aim of every Hindu.

[Source: *The World Almanac*]

All religions have been made by men.
(Napoleon Bonaparte)

Not God's Own Truth, but the nearest I can get to it nowadays.

Religion. I remember it well. I used to have it, and I used to have it real good. I remember quite a few occasions as a student making an idiot of myself explaining my views, urging them on others for their own happiness. Though in fairness to religion, in those days I made a fool of myself in many other ways as well.

Then I went through upheavals in my life, starting with college finals. That was followed by eight months unemployment, moving to a new town to get a job, and having to cope with a steady working week for the first time, getting up earlier than I ever had before. At the end of all this, my life more stable than it had been since I left home, I had time to think. I went to Church locally once, but four months later I realised I was no longer a Christian. I had lost my faith.

This saddened me: previously, for reasons convincing to me, I had believed in God, and in heaven as well. I was raised in the C of E and enjoyed its lack of dogma: the same thing that atheists and Catholics call wishy-washiness. It gave me the freedom and encouragement to think, leading to a religious view I found morally acceptable and compatible with my scientific knowledge. It was this somewhat individual view of religion that I discussed with my friends as a student, enjoying defending my consistent views against their equally consistent positions. Now, I ran those same arguments over in my own mind and satisfied myself that they were indeed consistent; but there was still a central element missing in my own mind which meant I was unconvinced. My cosmology was strong on forgiveness and love, weak on even temporary damnation, very tolerant of other faiths, and I had believed that God loved us all and would perpetuate our souls indefinitely in some pleasurable eternity that He, being omniscient, would know how to arrange. Now this ideal was gone, and I was certainly saddened. Wouldn't you be? I spent some time being depressed about this, learning to face up to the likelihood of my own personal extinction, not something I found at all appealing. Gradually I became used to it, but spent a while entertaining some pretty strange ideas about the universe while I adjusted.

What had happened? I hadn't been struck by a blinding dark on the road to Bournemouth. In retrospect, I could see that it had been creeping up on me gradually for some time: doubts, uncertainties, and a few difficult questions. Only when I had a settled life and a chance to think about things did all these come bubbling to the surface of my mind, and their combined force pushed me a long way over the edge into agnosticism. I still don't know why. I still can't say "I'm not a Christian because X"; it's something that happened at an unconscious level of myself that told my conscious mind about it when it was all safely over. A bit like falling out of love: you know it's happened, but you certainly can't pick out any one feature or personality trait of your loved one that made you do it. Perhaps it just means that I lost the student arguments I had with my friends. I remember one exception, though: someone who tried to cut off a discussion by saying "No-one's ever been convinced about anything religious from discussions like these, so the whole thing's a waste of time". I guess I proved *him* wrong.

Maybe it was the priests I know who didn't live up to my (quite modest) ideals. At college chapel, there used to be a cross above the altar. It was plain, but said something about the central miracle of the religion. One day I went to a service and it had gone. In its place was a large painting of a man walking up a hill; very pleasant, but I didn't see what it was there for. During the notices, one of the chaplains explained that they were trying this painting out as an experimental change, and would we please let them know what we thought of it, as they valued our input. He also named the picture. I forget what it was, but I do remember it wasn't remotely religious in subject. So after the service I went up to him and said that I thought it was a pleasant painting but had nothing to do with Christianity, and felt that it shouldn't be the centrepiece of a chapel. He thanked me for giving him my first reaction and asked me to give the painting a while longer and then let him know what I thought of it. In other words, they had made up their minds and were only consulting us to get people to agree with them. I could have put up with the picture, but not the hypocrisy; I never went to another service at that place.

There was also my parents' parish priest, who was insufferably superior from the word go ("Of course, I could lose you all in theology very quickly here..."), but redeemed himself by running off with a married woman in the parish. All he got for his troubles were two column inches and a passport photo in the *Daily Mail*.

These may be interesting anecdotes (or not), but I certainly don't see them making a difference to me. For two thousand years Christianity has been filtered through the minds of fallible men, and I wasn't really surprised to find two more being imperfect.

I didn't tell my parents about my loss of faith for some years. They are both Christians, and I knew they would be saddened on my behalf for the same sort of reason that made me sorry - the traditional consolation of religion. Whenever I visited them I dutifully went along to the parish church and apologised to God for my hypocrisy towards him, pointing out that it was only done for the sake of people I care for. Yes, I know that's being silly, but I was never convinced of God's non-existence either, and always thought I should be polite to Him. But I still felt rather sick of doing this lie. One weekend, I took advantage of a slight cold in order to stay away from church. My father, just about to leave, asked me "It is just because of the cold you're staying here, isn't it Michael?"

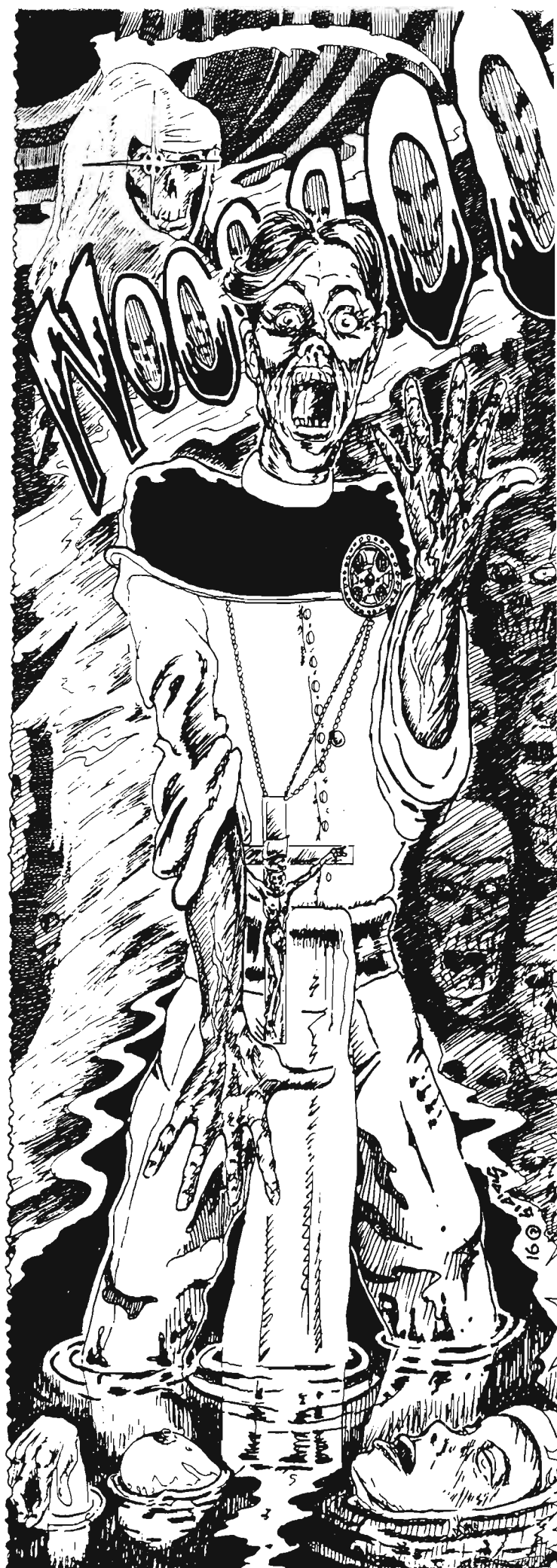
I couldn't give him a direct lie, and part of me had been looking for an excuse to end the sham. "Well, not entirely", I mumbled, "I'm afraid I'm also not sure I really believe in God any more." I waited for some kind of surprise reaction, but it didn't come. He just nodded understandingly, said "Don't tell your mother. She'd be distressed", and went out the door. On top of everything else I don't know, now I have to wonder when my father lost his faith, and how he coped with it.

So here I am today. Do I believe in God? Well, I'm no atheist, but I never regained any kind of faith. Although, six months after I realised I wasn't a Christian, I noticed something about the world. It was changing very fast, in all kinds of trouble, seemed not far from nuclear war and had a lot of environmental

disasters looming on the near horizon. It would, I decided, take a miracle to save it. If it lasted a hundred years it would *almost certainly* be due to the influence of some deity watching over it. So, here is an open invitation: if we are all still around, you are invited to a party in Easter 2087 to celebrate my becoming a Christian (of sorts) again. Major ecological disasters will preclude this invitation. If that sounds bizarre, then let it be noted for the record that I think we've made it through the last four years (to 1991) anyway.

Until then? There are two kinds of God that I can postulate. The first is quite a Christian god. He (or she) cries a lot, weeping over the hard his creations come to in his world, enacting upon one another, and reminding himself of the need to forge their souls and let them know the importance of choices. God the blacksmith and teacher. The second kind laughs a lot. He's fond of us, but not in any deep sense. The first of these I could love; the second scares me.

No, I don't believe in either of them. I don't have faith any more. All I have is hope.



GOD'S JUKEBOX

God Only Knows The Beach Boys
Like A Prayer Madonna
Save A Prayer Duran Duran
Satellite The Hooters
Jesus He Knows Me Genesis
Devil Inside INXS
Born Again Kiss
Piss Tank Kevin Bloody Wilson
Messiah Handel
Mass in E Minor Bruckner
Sympathy for the Devil The Rolling Stones
Sacrifice Elton John
Garden of Earthly Delights XTC
Where to Now St. Peter? Elton John
The Devil's Right Hand Steve Earle
The Devil Went Down to Georgia (I & II) Charlie Daniels Band
Me and the Devil Blues Robert Johnson
Promised Land Johnnie Allan
Honky Tonk Angels Dolly Parton
Paradise The Stranglers
Bat Out of Hell Meatloaf
Oscar the Angel Randy Travis
God's Comic Elvis Costello
Personal Jesus Depeche Mode
Sin Stone Temple Pilots
God Don't Never Change Blind Willie Johnson
Stairway to Heaven Led Zeppelin
Jesus is Just All Right With Me Doobie Brothers
Three Steps to Heaven Showaddywaddy
My Sweet Lord George Harrison
Rock 'n' Roll Heaven Righteous Brothers
Highway to Hell AC/DC
Running With the Devil Van Halen
Crying in the Chapel Elvis Presley
God Bless Texas Little Texas

"There, there", said the teacher, putting on the agony, putting on the style, as she stared in mock antagonism at the upturned desklids. "Questions are often their own answers", she added with a twirl of chalk.

One classmate, by the name Idle White, grimaced stage-off. There she goes again, he thought, putting nonsense into words, giving it a false credibility. He did not really think such things consciously. With him, nothing seemed to get beyond the verses of *Rock Island Line* and *Tom Dooley* which were part of the doubt matrix of his childhood. He was Fun Guy, and hoped he would never have to grow up beyond the break-even point.

He had wanted to start up a singing group called *Weirdmonger* - a makeshift folk ensemble with broom-poles and honky-tonks. His teacher could do with a dose of that to keep her sane, he considered, as he put up his hand to inform her that what she's just written on the board was a lie - "God is One and God is Three". In any event, she would rub it off with one of those felt pads by the end of the lesson. He always thought this was a maths lesson anyway.

"I know", she replied, "but out God is in ALL things, even mathematics."

Idle White had his own God - who was simply called Dog.

Idle, in fact, liked looking at things from various angles. He searched his Granddad's otherwise incomprehensible old books, studied human behaviour through the medium of brat eyes, threw dice to determine life's paths, collated instinctively the data of the multimedia and encapsulated all finally into his vision of Dog.

The creature grew upon this laystall of random thoughts, its roots showing like fibrously knotted circus stilts. Its colour was so sky-blue that, during those endlessly hot summers of Idle's childhood, Dog was more often than not invisible against its own background. But Idle knew it was there, walking with tree trunks - the nagging yaps sounding from the deep wideblue well above.

Idle sat in a double desk at the back of the formroom, next to a girl he wanted so badly to want him. But as yet neither had spoken to the other.

The tousled heads of the class in front of him were sunk deep into their cavernous desks, riffling textbooks, seeking out the chewing-gum which was once, in the forgotten past, stuck in place to hide the embarrassing love-knot graffiti; crooning songs they'd learnt from their parents' compilation records, concealing their faces so that the maths teacher could not ask them questions on the Nature of Number.

The girl was studiously copying from the board, as Idle gazed through the grimy window upon the playground (arcanelly diagrammatised with white-painted lines for games now never played). The sun made it seem as if the concrete were wet. He smiled as he saw, silhouetted against the town's humping hills, the imperceptible shift of tree-trunks. The leading pair must be the stilts bearing Dog, but what of the others? Everybody must have their own particular deity, rather than there just being One for all, Idle White said almost out loud. Perhaps, after all, religion DID have something to do with mathematics. Idle scratched his head in thought-acting... and nearly got through to the raw brain.

The girl looked at him quizzically. It appeared she's heard some words rattling at the back of his throat. She smiled. He tried to smile back.

"Would you like to come to the next *Weirdmonger* gig?", he finally managed to ask.

"Idle White!". The teacher was staring sternly. "I hope you're getting on with your sums and not brooding in the bosom of Abraham."

He put his hand up like a smart arse, to tell her that there was more to life than sums, but by now she's started to rub with vigour at the board, clouds of chalkdust billowing like the dry ice often used by Heavy Rock groups. Many of the other pupils were banging their deskclids up and down as if they, too, had musical aspirations.

Idle was pleased to see that the horizon was now perfectly empty. Dog was of course descending the hill to play with him at breaktime. The netball posts would become its wide stance - the unbroken blue of the sky still its Mystery, forging no outline for those with too little faith to trace out upon their tissue-paper minds.

As the bell went, Fun Guy came out in Idle, and he dashed off to the Boys' outhouse, a heady cocktail of sweat and piss hanging in the air in hot yellow clouds. He managed to hit the high window with his pent-up kidney tap. Perhaps that girl he fancied would like to become a *Weirdmonger* groupie, moonshot and dewy-eyed. He need not tell her that the group, so-called, was indeed a one man band with harmonica and knee-cymbals.

The sun shattered his eyesight as he quit the sanctuary of the Boys'. Dog hovered above on its stilts, unseen, unheard, but ever-vigilant of Idle's well-being. Idle wondered whether the Girls' outhouse was as equally nifty as the Boys', so he ambled over to that entrance, testing the air with enlarging nostrils. Then THAT girl walked out, still tugging up her knickers, he noticed for one glorious fleeting moment.

"Well, would you like to come to my concert?"

"Nope.", and she stalked off to play rhyming, slanging skipping games with her cronies by the netball post.

Tears filling his eyes with swelling multi-faceted jewels of light, he searched the sky for Dog. The raw brain extruded from Idle's revolving ear like a leash, as Dog exercised him around the schoolyard - the filaments of cheesy-pizza grey matter being tugged as Man and Master went walkies at either end of a perpetuating choke-chain of mental ectoplasm.

Nobody saw the connection, as the sky was clouding over for once.

Sky-blue Dog on stilts would soon be visible for those who had eyes to see it. Idle White smiled as he pulled at his own frayed inchwide of a striped schooltie and took himself into the classroom to to some extracurricular work on the mathematical undercurrents of Destiny.

He felt the weight of his head upon the neck and was relieved that it was still relatively full up.

Like most kids, his brain benefitted from a good airing at playtime and he was now eager to absorb all the knowledge of the Universe.

Weirdmonger was NOT a one man band, after all, since with Idle on desktop drums and Dog on superwoofer, they only needed Lonnie Donegan himself on skiffle-board to become a Holy Trinity.

GODS

Ian Creasey

In ancient days the deities of man
Were man writ large, with superhuman powers
But human hearts: a fighting, loving clan
Of demigods, who occupied their hours
With not a mere existence, but a life -
With which a mortal could identify -
Of passionate emotion, art and strife
In these our mundane waters, earth and sky.
Today the modern gods are immanent:
Unseen, unheard, unchronicled - they are
That which they are, that's all; convenient
Accomplices without an avatar.
A praying priest is like the thief the king
Reprieved: perhaps the horse will learn to sing.

There is only one true religion, but there may be many forms
of belief.

(Immanuel Kant)

The pain that is life when everything is a bit out of step.

When my old lover has gone to a dull but grateful new lover while the memory of our times together drives me mad. When my (not so) new lover "doesn't want any complications", so rings me up at ten day intervals to invite me over for a night of passion but disowns me in public. One day someone will appreciate me as I am. Hope keeps me going... just.

When I'm too knackered after my temp job to look for a permanent job. When I'm not even sure what I want to do. I live for the day when it will all miraculously work out.

When I wake up at four a.m. scratching at flea bites because someone keeps letting the cats in. Trains are late, people avoid each other's eyes in the lift. A taxi splashes me on the way to work. Things seem to conspire to get me down. I wonder what the point of it all is. And one day hope is not enough, only despair will do.

Drain the bottle. Any bottle. Four pints of beer, a bottle of wine, a glass of stroh, it all comes to the same thing. Destroy my logical mind, blot out thought. Dance away the tears, spin under the dazzling lights till I'm dizzy. Feel myself fall to the ground semi-conscious and love the feeling. Hit self-destruct and vanish into a million pieces. Screw my eyes up tight.

Cry "Help".
Nothing.

Then out of the darkness come small realisations - light, breath. Lying still in the grass, looking up at ants walking on a single blade. A memory: 'Consider the lilies of the field - they toil not, neither do they spin - how much more precious are you'. Small joys that make it worthwhile. To see dawn break, the colours creep out of grey.

I am alive and there are many things to see, books to read, films to see, views to look over, full moons to look up at, food to taste, liqueurs to collect, music to lose myself in and the expectation of a few more damn good fucks somewhen. Even if I end up having to pay for it.

If the worst comes to the worst I can live out of dustbins. Sooner than that, I could even work in McDonalds. There is nothing to fear. I can handle whatever comes my way. I hope.

ISLAM

Founded: 622 AD in Medina, Arabian peninsula by Mohammed (ca. 570 - 632), the Prophet.

Sacred texts: *Koran* (the words of God), *Hadith* (collections of sayings of the Prophet)

Organization: Theoretically the state and religious community are one, administered by a caliph. In practice, Islam is a loose collection of congregations united by a very conservative tradition. Islam is basically egalitarian and non-authoritarian.

Practice: Every Moslem has 5 duties: to make the profession of faith ("There is no god but Allah..."), pray 5 times a day, give a regular portion of his goods to charity, fast during the day in the month of Ramadan, and make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca if possible.

Divisions: The 2 major sects of Islam are the Sunni (orthodox) and the Shi'ah. The Shi'ah believe in 12 *imams*, perfect teachers, who still guide the faithful from Paradise. Shi'ah practice tends toward the ecstatic, while the Sunni is staid and simple. The Shi'ah secty affirms man's free will; the Sunni is deterministic. The mystic tradition in Islam is Sufism. A Sufi adept believes he has acquired a special inner knowledge direct from Allah.

Location: From the west coast of Africa to the Phillipines across a broad band that includes Tanzania, southern (former) USSR and western China, India, Malaysia and Indonesia. Islam claims several million adherents in the U.S.

Beliefs: Strictly monotheistic. God is creator of the universe, omnipotent, just and merciful. Man is God's highest creation, but limited and commits sins. He is misled by Satan, an evil spirit. God revealed the *Koran* to Mohammed to guide men to the truth. Those who repent and sincerely submit to God return to a state of sinlessness. In the end, the sinless go to Paradise, a place of physical and spiritual pleasure, and the wicked burn in Hell.

[Source: *World Almanac*]

There is no common denominator in the world today except religion; the world has become a neighbourhood without brotherhood.

(Billy Graham)

An SF checklist

Novels

James Blish	<i>Black Easter; The Day After Judgement; A Case of Conscience</i>
P K Dick	<i>Valis; Free Radio Albemuth; The Divine Invasion; Deus Irae (with Roger Zelazny)</i>
C S Lewis	<i>Out of the Silent Planet; Perelandra; That Hideous Strength</i>
Frank Herbert	<i>Dune, et seq.</i>
Michael Moorcock	<i>Behold the Man</i>
Roger Zelazny	<i>Lord of Light</i>
Walter M Miller	<i>A Canticle for Leibowitz</i>
Fritz Leiber	<i>Gather, Darkness</i>
Paul Park	<i>Soldiers of Paradise</i>
Dan Simmons	<i>Song of Kali</i>
R A Lafferty	<i>The Devil is Dead</i>

Shorts

Arthur C Clarke	<i>The Star; The Nine Billion Names of God</i>
Brian Aldiss	<i>Oh, For A Closer Brush With God</i>
Ray Bradbury	<i>The Man</i>
Garry Kilworth	<i>Let's Go to Golgotha</i>
Lester Del Rey	<i>Evensong; For I am a Jealous People</i>
P K Dick	<i>Faith of our Fathers</i>
Damon Knight	<i>Shall the Dust Praise Thee?</i>
Roger Zelazny	<i>A Rose for Ecclesiastes</i>
Robert Silverberg	<i>Good News From the Vatican; Up the Line</i>
Harry Harrison	<i>The Streets of Ashkelon</i>
Anthony Boucher	<i>The Quest for St. Aquin</i>

Steve notes: Most of the time religion has been the baddie of sf, with but a few glaring exceptions (Lewis' Christian apologia masquerading as sf).

Dick's obsession with early Christian mysticism through the whole of his 'Valis' period makes an interesting study of sf and religion.

JOKE

Jesus, Moses and St. Peter were about to start a round of golf on Heaven's champions' course.

Moses takes his driver, checks the breeze, lines up and swings: a beautiful straight drive, bouncing twice on the fairway, rolling onto the edge of the green and finishing 30 feet from the pin.

St. Peter, similarly, makes a near-perfect shot, bouncing once on the fairway, then onto the green, finishing 3 feet from the pin.

Jesus takes his sand-wedge and gives the ball an almighty slice; it goes straight up in the air and falls back onto the tee, and has so much backspin that it scoots off in the wrong direction into a cluster of grassy mounds, finally trickling into a rabbit hole.

Suddenly, a small rabbit bursts from the hole with Jesus' ball in its paws, and runs past the surprised Moses and Peter up the fairway.

Meanwhile, a kestrel hawk which has been circling above goes into its hunting dive and catches the rabbit about 100 yards further on.

The rabbit is carried away, still holding the golf ball, finally letting it go at a height of 70 feet or so.

The ball bounces off a tree-trunk, careens across the fairway to hit another tree, caroms back, running around the edge of a sand trap and onto the green.

It strikes Moses' ball, knocking his off the green and heading itself toward the middle, hitting Peter's ball square-on, and then trickling sideways to drop gently into the cup.

A hole in one.

Moses and St. Peter are dumbfounded.

Jesus, hand on hip, looks skyward with an exasperated expression.
"Dad! Don't fuck about, we're playing for *money*!"

CATHOLIC FACTS

From the *1993 Catholic Almanac (US)*:

The number of nuns in the U.S. dropped below 100,000 for the first time in many decades. The new figure was 99,337, reflecting a loss of more than 2,300 in the previous year and over 22,000 in the previous ten.

332,000 Catholic marriages were performed, down 4,000 from 1992, and the lowest figure recorded since the early 1960s, when there were only about two-thirds as many Catholics in the U.S. as presently.

The number of baptisms or initiations of baptised Christians from other religions increased by nearly 33,000 to 1,180,707.

Approximately 2 million U.S. Catholics are African-American; the number has almost doubled in four years.

The number of priestly ordinations increased to 864 from 620 the previous year.

The overall number of priests stood at 52,277 (down 800).

LOS CATOLICOS HISPANOS: DATOS Y ESTADISTICAS

Los Catolicos hispanos actualmente forman la tercera parte de la poblacion catolica en los Estados Unidos.

Los Catolicos hispanos formaran la mitad de la poblacion catolica en los Estados Unidos en el ano 2000.

La iglesia catolica pierde actualmente 60,000 catolicos hispanos cada ano a los predicadores protestantes fundamentalistas a los cuales el pap Juan Pablo II se ha referido como "lobos rapaces".

WORLD: DISTRIBUTION OF ROMAN CATHOLICS

Africa	119,244,000
Asia	121,311,000
Europe	262,026,000
Latin America	397,810,000
Northern America	96,315,000
Oceania	8,095,000
(former) USSR	5,551,000
World	1,010,352,000

(Mid-1991 projected figures)

The first thing that strikes me about religious beliefs - speaking of those movements we are most familiar with, at any rate - is that if such convictions were held by one person alone he would be adjudged mentally ill, suffering from delusions. They are, in fact, indistinguishable from fantastical but fascinating mental constructs I have heard from diagnosed schizophrenics. But because these extraordinary ideas are believed by many, they are given respect, even managing sometimes to take control of nations. The accusation of mental delusion is levelled only at religions other than one's own.

The theme of insanity goes way back. Abraham, legendary patriarch of Jews, Arabs, and by implication father of the whole vast edifice of Judaic, Christian and Moslem belief-systems, heard the voice of God telling him to kill his young son, and so set about doing so. How would the social services react to such behaviour in our time? The tale is a straightforward description of paranoid schizophrenia. Maybe the history of the West would have been different if little Isaac could have been taken into care.

The readiness with which large masses of people can be made to accept - and even fanatically defend - teachings originated by people whose mental state one might wonder at says a great deal about the nature of the human psyche.

That's not the point. Christianity (and therefore Judaism) claims to have its basis in historical events such as the Exodus rather than the teachings of any individual person. Through these events people came to put their trust in the teachers, and this basic formula can be seen right through to the time of Jesus, whose miracles gave him validity. Besides all that Abraham never acted as a preacher or gave any teachings. His importance lies in the simple belief that the covenant was first given to him. So there.

The above paragraph appears to have been added while I was at the pub by my daughter Heather, who earlier expressed her scorn for people who have never studied religion, know nothing about it, yet proceed to pronounce upon it. Still, when was a true thinker ever deterred by the superior knowledge of others? Her interpolation might as well serve to bring me to my next point, which in true polemic style is a tactic to anticipate my readers' most obvious objection. Yes, someone will say, but you are missing the essential thing about religion, which is that it deals with human feelings, not intellectual facts. Unfortunately, religious doctrines seem unable to leave 'facts' alone. More than once I have tried to argue with door-knocking missionaries that religious teachings are shooting themselves in the foot by e.g. denying evolution, and that they would do better to avoid all scientific questions (though this becomes increasingly difficult, especially now that science, in the form of AI research, is about to invade the subject of the mind itself). But to no avail. When people embrace a religion they accept **all** of it. Beliefs, opinions, attitudes, perceived 'facts' all come in a package.

It is no good, really, forming an attitude about this phenomenon. It is itself an anthropological fact. As a lemma to this fact there are some who suggest that

the major religions were intentional experiments on the part of a super-intelligent human elite, aimed at injecting various influences or ideas into society so as to further the evolution of civilisation. And sure enough, each new big religion does seem to bring with it a new idea or set of ideas; not new in the sense that nobody thought of it before, but new as a force in (to borrow a word) the noosphere. Which would mean that the World's Great Teachers, if I may be unskeptical enough to call them that, didn't particularly believe what they were saying.

It's been some time now since a new world religion got started, which naturally suggests that one is due before too long. What will its New Idea be? Hard to say, but fun to speculate on. What is predictable is that it will co-opt the sciences of the time. Religions do that (at any rate major state religions - I'm not speaking here of sects like those which proliferate in Christianity), and modern science is, of course, formidable. So, we'll have a doctrine which takes on board the whole super-duper cosmological physics of maybe a century hence, wrapping it up in some kind of metaphysics and who knows what else. Heavy, man, heavy!

The trouble with that, naturally, is that such an organised religion would have a vested interest in ensuring that science progressed no further. Here would be a super-intellectual patriarch (maybe an AI super-intellect?) telling you **THIS IS THE WAY IT IS, IT'S PROVEN AND THERE'S NOTHING ELSE**. And people will believe him.

Speaking of religion... what about us? Us science fictioneers? How do we figure in the universal anthropological phenomenon of religion? Let us not suppose we stand aloof from it. Most, if not all of us got hooked while young. We have a conviction we cannot let go of, and if we are asked what it's all about we have a central concept: the Sense of Wonder. This is the essential experience, the experience we go hunting for. We will go to extraordinary lengths to obtain it. We will, almost literally, crawl through shit, reading millions of words of rubbish so that occasionally, maybe only once in ten years, we come up against something that leaves us feeling stunned for an hour, a couple of days, or longer...

Sense of Wonder counts as a religious emotion. You might even find something like it mentioned in the Bible. In the Cabbala, dubiously touted as the mystical side of Judaism, something similar - Awe - is the name of the path leading from the seat of human consciousness to divine consciousness. Of course, this is to speak of the raw material of religious feeling: the first thing to vanish once religions become formalised and attitudes become obligatory.

So, Prediction Number Two: when the New World Religion takes hold and they start burning books (or whatever they'll do to whatever are books by then) as usually happens, and if there's still a Sense of Wonder literature, guess what will go into the flames (be data-wiped, sense-prohibited) along will all the latest research stuff?

Excuse my maunderings, my disjointed thoughts, but who knows? Maybe disconnected mentation will be a prescribed feature of the new religion? On

which Heather, both light and bane of my life, disdains to make further comment. Or do I seem to hear, like a ghostly conscience, a shrill cry?

What crap, Dad! What absolute crap!

If someone told me I would be Pope someday, I would have studied harder.

(Pope John Paul I)

One of the oldest problems puzzled over in the Talmud is: "Why did God create goyim?". The generally accepted answer is that somebody has to buy retail.

Die: to stop sinning suddenly.

God builds his temple in the heart on the ruins of churches and religions.

(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of unspiritual conditions. It is the opium of the people.

(Karl Marx)

The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble to us; and I for one must be content to remain an agnostic.

(Charles Darwin)

GET RELIGION AT THE MOVIES

SIDDHARTHA (1973)

Dir: Conrad Rooks.

Shashi Kapoor, Simi Garewal, Romesh Shama, Pinchoo Kapoor, Zul Vellani, Amrik Singh. Arty, uneven treatment of the Herman Hesse novel. Dazzling cinematography, however from Ingmar Bergman's chap Sven Nykvist.

THE MIRACLE OF OUR LADY OF FATIMA (1952)

Dir: John Brahm.

Gilbert Roland, Angela Clarke, Frank Silvera, Jay Novello, Sherry Jackson. Account of a religious miracle witnessed by farm children in the 1910s. Intelligent script tastefully done.

HERE COMES MR. JORDAN (1941)

Dir: Alexander Hall.

Robert Montgomery, Evelyn Keyes, Claude Rains, Rita Johnson, Edward Everett Horton, James Gleason, John Emery. The original and best: superb fantasy-comedy about a prizefighter sent to Heaven before his time, sent back to inhabit a new body. Won Oscars for original story and screenplay, and includes a lightning-fast appearance of a young Lloyd Bridges. Remade in 1978 as the not-as-good Warren Beatty vehicle *Heaven Can Wait*.

OH, GOD! (1977)

Dir: Carl Reiner.

George Burns, John Denver, Teri Garr, Paul Sorvino, George Furth, Ralph Bellamy, Barnard Hughes. God (Burns) appears to summon John Denver as his messenger, to tell the world He's alive and well. Sounds cringe-worthy, but is actually very good with little in the way of cheap jokes. Followed by two execrable sequels: *Oh, God! Book II (1980)* and *Oh, God! You Devil (1984)*.

JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR (1973)

Dir: Norman Jewison.

Ted Neeley, Carl Anderson, Yvonne Elliman, Barry Dennen, Joshua Mostel, Bob Bingham. An adaptation of the Rice/Lloyd-Webber musical that actually improves the original. Rivetting and controversial. Ubiquitous porno star Paul Thomas appears in the chorus.

KING OF KINGS (1961)

Dir: Nicholas Ray.

Jeffrey Hunter, Siobhan McKenna, Robert Ryan, Hurd Hatfield, Viveca Lindfors, Rita Gam, Rip Torn. Beautiful (though not toally perfect) remake of Cecil B. DeMille's 1927 silent. Must be seen in CinemaScope, as it loses it on TV. Narration by Orson Welles.

LIFE OF BRIAN (1979)

Dir: Terry Jones.

Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, Michael Palin. Suffered a little in the edit, but on the whole a a good sustained feature with little in the way of "sketch" format to distract, and an odd cameo by Spike Milligan. The real Jesus (played straight) appears at the Sermon on the Mount, with the people at the back complaining that they can't hear. Terry Jones is magnificent as Brian's mum: "He's not the Messiah, he's a very naughty boy!"

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (1956)

Dir: Cecil B DeMille.

Charlton Heston, Yul Brynner, Anne Baxter, Edward G Robinson, Yvonne De Carlo, Debra Paget, John Derek, Cedric Hardwicke, H.B. Warner, Henry Wilcoxon, Nina Foch, Martha Scott, Judith Anderson, Vincent Price, John Carradine. Epic in every sense, 220 minutes of magnificence. The special effects deservedly won an Oscar (highlights: the parting of the Red Sea and the writing of the tablets) - look at that year again! A remake of DeMille's silent version of 1923.

ANGEL ON MY SHOULDER (1946)

Dir: Archie Mayo.

Paul Muni, Anne Baxter, Claude Rains, George Cleveland, Onslow Stevens. Murdered convict Muni is sent to earth by the Devil as a respected judge, and tries to outwit Satan while in mortal form. An entertaining fantasy, remade for TV in 1980 with Peter Strauss reprising Muni's role.

HEAVEN (1987)

Dir: Diane Keaton.

Bizarre, pointless effort interspersing interviews with movie clips on the subject of Heaven. Clips range from *Metropolis* to...

THE HORN BLOWS AT MIDNIGHT (1945)

Dir: Raoul Walsh.

Jack Benny, Alexis Smith, Dolores Moran, Allyn Joslyn, Reginald Gardner, Guy Kibbee, John Alexander, Margaret Dumont, Franklin Pangborn. An angel (Benny) is sent to earth to destroy it with a blast from Gabriel's horn. Funny, no classic, but not the turkey Benny always joked it was either.

ANGELS IN THE OUTFIELD (1951)

Dir: Clarence Brown.

Paul Douglas, Janet Leigh, Keenan Wynn, Donna Corcoran. Heavenly forces help the useless Pittsburgh Pirates hit a winning streak. Disney's 1994 remake with Christopher Lloyd looks awful by comparison.

JUDAISM

Founded: About 1300 BCE; Abraham is regarded as the founding patriarch, but the *Torah* of Moses is the basic source of the teachings.

Sacred texts: The five books of Moses constitute the written *Torah*. Special sanctity is also assigned other writings of the Hebrew Bible - the teachings of oral Torah are recorded in the *Talmud*, the *Midrash*, and various commentaries.

Organization: Originally theocratic, Judaism has evolved a congregational polity. The basic institution is the local synagogue, operated by the congregation and led by a rabbi of their choice. Chief Rabbis in France and Great Britain have authority only over those who accept it; in Israel, the 2 Chief Rabbis have civil authority in family law.

Practice: Among traditional practitioners, almost all areas of life are governed by strict religious discipline. Sabbath and holidays are marked by special observances, and attendance at public worship is regarded as especially important then. The chief annual observances are *Passover*, celebrating the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt and marked by the ritual *Seder* meal in the home, and the 10 days from *Rosh Hashana* (New Year) to *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), a period of fasting and penitence.

Divisions: Judaism is an unbroken spectrum from ultra-conservative to ultra-liberal, largely reflecting different points of view regarding the binding character of the prohibitions and duties - particularly the dietary and Sabbath observations - prescribed in the daily life of the Jew.

Location: Almost worldwide, with concentrations in Israel and the U.S.

Beliefs: Strictly monotheistic. God is the creator and absolute ruler of the universe. Men are free to choose to rebel against God's rule. God established a particular relationship with the Hebrew people: by obeying a divine law God gave them they would be a special witness to God's mercy and justice. The emphasis in Judaism is on ethical behaviour (and, among the traditional, careful ritual obedience) as the true worship of God.

[Source: *World Almanac*]

To you I'm an atheist; to God, I'm the Loyal Opposition.
(Woody Allen)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

According to the Judeo-Christian tradition, as related in the Bible, the Ten Commandments were revealed by God to Moses, and form the basic moral component of God's covenant with Israel. The Ten Commandments appear in two different places in the Old Testament: *Exodus 20: 1-17* and *Deuteronomy 5: 6-21* - the phrasing similar but not identical.

Most Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox Christians enumerate the Commandments differently from Roman Catholics and Lutherans. Jewish tradition considers the introduction, "I am the Lord..." to be the first commandment and makes the prohibition against "other gods" and idolatry the second.

Abridged text of the Ten Commandments in *Exodus 20: 1-17*:

- I. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me.
- II. You shall not make for yourself a graven image. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.
- III. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- IV. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- V. Honour your father and mother.
- VI. You shall not kill.
- VII. You shall not commit adultery.
- VIII. You shall not steal.
- IX. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
- X. You shall not covet.

"Ready for him?"

The other black-clad man's face experimented with several configurations before settling upon something wry. "We are ready. The perennial question arises: is he ready for us?"

"You mean, for this."

"Of course, this."

Brother Paul surveyed the surroundings for the nth time. He considered the appropriateness, or otherwise, of requiring those students about to take this final test to walk the length of that steam-industrial basement, pipe-pocked and redolent of the machine-oil aura of nameless contraptions, a touch away from the greasy fur of adaptable rats; to have them emerge into a waiting room which never failed to give the impression of a back-street abortionist; then when the waiting was just on the too-much side of enough, to call them into this mirrored monstrosity of state-of-the-art.

"Ludovico".

"What?" The other's curious look returned Brother Paul to the here and now. He relaxed into something businesslike with an edge of humour and a cultivated leaf of world-weariness.

"Ah, yes. A motion picture work I saw many years ago. A rarity even then, I believe. It is...", the face of years said something other than the mouth, "...not important. Shall we begin the checks?"

The other paused, a fold of uncertainty misting his motions, eyes unfocused and flickering.

Something more than mere amusement came and went from eyes which quickly turned to understanding - compassion, even.

"Your first time here. I am sorry; I knew this. Now look..."

Brother Paul points out the connectors on the cruciform device, which monitors should be registering from which areas, and how to read the medical displays for heartbeat, respiration, perspiration, adrenal activity and so on. The EEG peaks a test pattern from normal to excess to flatline death; he shows the kick-in switches and clear alarms for shock heartstart if required, stressing the unlikelihood of their need. He still feels the other's unease like a straitjacket on him. The checks are completed. The student is about to be summoned, but Brother Paul interrupts:

"Wait one moment". He reaches for the intercom switch to give him a voice in the waiting room. "We will be ready for you in a few moments. You may wish to use this time in prayer". Turning, the eyes assume new purpose. "Talk to me, brother."

"What?" Jackrabbit.

"Talk to me. This bothers you somehow, and I need to know why. We need your full attention here, and anything less will not help you, me or the student. You know how things are here, or at least if you don't you shouldn't be here. Speak freely."

"Brother Paul, I...". There is a moment of waiting for the required composure to assert. "I know this order has never shown the distrust of science that others have, and indeed we pride ourselves on this learning. We include in our self-reliance the use of whatever means are available to us, always to further the word of God and, by example, our discipline, but..."

"But?"

"...this is too much! I thought so when I took the test myself. Now, I feel like..." (impassioned, suddenly) "...like a damned - Grand Inquisitor! I mean, look at all this! What the hell are we supposed to be achieving here?"

Raised eyebrows were enough to engender silence. The smile which parenthesised them, however, was enough to defuse the sin of the words.

"Your profanity will be excused - this time. Let us dialogue - a catechism of the test, if you will. How did you feel when you were asked to go upon the Cross? Honestly, now."

"Afraid. That's all I can remember."

"Of course you were. But *why*?"

"I don't know. The pain. I thought I wouldn't be able to deal with that. And..."

"Yes?"

"And..." (realisation) "I thought I would fail. How could I possibly be worthy enough to stand that test - even the Christ cried out to be delivered, so how could I..."

"And how did you feel afterward?"

The silence seems to suck in all the sounds of the universe, as if all Creation is between breaths. "Transfigured".

Creation exhales. "So, shall we call him?". The brief nod suffices.

As the student enters, sidewise crablike apprehension and unsteady gaze, Brother Paul takes him firmly by the arm, as a kind uncle would, and leads him toward the machine; up the three steps and turning to face them, he rests back into the 'T'.

"Now you understand why you are here?", Brother Paul asks, kindly, expecting no answer. "You are here to better your understanding of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus for all of mankind; by experiencing the suffering of the Cross as he experienced it, as an affirmation of your faith in our order, as your personal covenant with God the Father by bearing the pain of his Son. We help you toward your enlightenment, we cleanse your soul. Let us pray."

After a moment of silent reflection, the door closes and the student is held within. Brother Paul's head is still bowed, then he turns slowly, deliberately. "Begin the program".

SANCTI · ELOHYM · SOTHER

NOMINE · PATRIS · ET · FILII · ET · SPIRITUS

EMANUEL · SABAOTI · AGIA · TETT



PACRAMATON · AGYOS · 0

Call me misguided, call me naive - oh go on, feel free; everyone else in fandom does - but I've always been of the opinion that fandom contains a far larger proportion of people willing to talk sensibly about religion than in the World Outside. Even those fans who are Christians are by and large less prone to react in knee-jerk fashion to any "unconventional" discussion in this area.

Although I moan a lot about my parents, one thing for which I am able to thank them is that they did not raise me as a Christian. Despite the fact that some law dictates that schoolchildren must be taught at least so much religion per week, my first school observed this statute not at all; and so by the time I found myself at a school that did, my knowledge of Jesus lagged far behind that of my classmates. In fact, the first time I discovered that Christianity was rather important was when a girl of nine or so waltzed up to me and asked the blindingly loaded question: "Do you love anybody?".

"No", I replied, scenting a trap.

"Then you don't love Jesus", she riposted, and waltzed on away as one who has scored a tremendous victory. I, of course, was thoroughly abashed at my supposed moral failings, so both she and I were perfectly happy with the situation, a state of affairs all too rare in this vale of tears.

At this school, hymns were sung (with more gusto than tunefulness) at morning assembly, and Headmaster Madgwick, he of hearty mien and traditional beliefs, would suffix these with a rousing lecture drawn from the New Testament, generally dealing with either the birth or death of Jesus. This led to my erroneous belief that Jesus was born at Christmas and killed at Easter having mysteriously grown up in between. It's easy to scoff now, but at the time it all seemed quite logical; for not only did I have no idea of quite how people "grew up" (other than that the older you got, the more chance you had of it happening to you), but since Jesus was, as Mr Madgwick kept reiterating, the Son of God and frequently performed miracles, why shouldn't he be able to grow up magically in two months flat? It all held water perfectly.

On to another school, which not only had proper religious services but also taught religion on the curriculum. The scales fell from my eyes as I was issued with a Bible and started reading it in the logical way (i.e. from the beginning). For the benefit of anyone who hasn't tried this, the Old Testament is (a) dull and (b) home to a great deal of war history and codes of ethics calculated to make a callow eleven-year-old blanch.

Evelyn Waugh's headmaster in *Decline and Fall* would open the Bible at random and "read a chapter of blood-curdling military history" to the morning assembly at his school. We got a teacher with the modern version of the Bible, which led to the story of the construction of the Temple being read out featuring all the measurements translated to modern terms, meticulously to three decimal places. Several of the masters were seen to grin broadly during this, my first clue that not all grown-ups actually believed what was already becoming to me a ludicrous set of events.

I did eventually finish reading the Bible, discovering along the way that the Old Testament also contains (c) a book devoted to nothing save several

that hobby paralleled that fervour a new convert to a religion is inspired to proselytize.

I wouldn't argue with anyone who said that. Fandom's gods, to my view, are superior to the real thing in that they don't call for wars, torture or undue intolerance in their worship. Indeed, at the end of the day, all the ghods of fandom are only human.

HAZ SEZ IT (29/4/91)

¹ What Harry may have in mind is the novel "The Book of Ptath" by A E Van Vogt. Recommended for religiously confused thirteen-year-olds everywhere. [S V O'Jay]

If God were a marble
Would Churches be spherical?
Would glass-makers be priests?
Would sand be sacred?

Would we not, instead of aspiring, transcending, reaching, wanting,
Roll into forgotten corners
And call it holy?

Would we not treasure the clarity with which we could see
Each others'
Inner colours?

If God were a marble...
Perhaps He is a marble!

Cecil Nurse

[S V O'Jay: Portions of letters which appeared in AOD 5^{1/2} have been excised. Correspondence dates from December 1990 to August 1991 or thereabouts. Comments, including those attributed to {Nic Farey} were all written at the time.]

Ian Creasey, 73 Richmond Avenue, Leeds LS6 1DB

Thought most of AOD5 was pretty good, but *UK Deaths by Cause* 1976 was pretty pointless, besides being out of date. I mean, what precisely is the difference between "Natural Causes" and "Other Natural Causes"; and isn't "Traffic Accidents" a subset of "Accidents"? (Well, there was no exclusion clause, unlike under "Cancer"). A *True Faith* by "Patrick McKay" (i.e. Kev McVeigh) was tedious and seemingly nothing to do with death. I first saw this piece in *The Organisation* apa back in March [1990] and didn't like it then. I enjoyed the rest of the issue, though - particularly the last page: spot on as usual.

[I think you may be being slightly unfair to Pat McKay, though probably less unfair than McVeigh is to Des Lewis, for example. As to the cause of death headings being confusing, although I quoted my source (The Book of British Lists), I don't know what their source was. Probably the Home Office.]

David Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks RG1 5AU

[Firstly, David refers to my remark last issue (5) that he "gleefully" proclaimed himself "Fandom's Number One Hate Figure" after this accolade had been granted in AOD4; secondly, to Joe McNally's doubting that Langford minor is a member of "The Three Johns".]

Gleeful? The correct word would have been "bemused".

Yes, little brother is one of *The Three Johns* (now, I think, in suspended animation) and also one of the *Mekons* (who always seem to be doing world tours and sending postcards from Germany, Holland, the Midwest, Japan etc.).

[The Mekons, at least, have a name deriving from a literary reference, as do Cheslin Jr's outfit "Ned's Atomic Dustbin", such great historical groups as "Steppenwolf" or indeed "The Comsat Angels".]

Ken Cheslin, 10 Coney Green, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 1LA

Many thanks for the zine, which I thought excellent. Oh, one or two bits were, shall we say, "ordinary" and/or rather heavy on pathos, which is excusable, but most of the items were well-written and interesting reading.

Father, Forgive Me I would call ordinary, and to a lesser degree I thought *Death Comes Calling* was too, though in other company they might have stood out. On the other hand, I thought *Songs for the Dying* most interesting, rivetting even (though I've little interest in most of the entertainers per se).

Famous Last Words I enjoyed, though I suspect this is not the best of what must be a large crop. My favourite, and has been since I heard it some years

ago, is "They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist...". You could have done epitaphs too.

[Perhaps some epitaphs would have been interesting. I came across a listing of one in High Wycombe which would have been rather appropriate. It reads: "Death is a fisherman; the world we see a fish pond is, and we the fishes be; He sometimes angles, like doth with us play, and sliily takes us one by one away".]

Songs to Commit Suicide To. I think I have heard of one, and heard of five of the bands/artists - can't say it excited me much.

Death: ordinary. More or Less Than Just Love: bored me. Early Morning, Almost Anywhere: ordinary. UK Deaths by Cause 1976: interesting, pity it's not more up to date. Deathshead Revisited: also uninteresting, and so much of it. One Man's Heaven: ordinary. A Hell of a Job: a grand article, would have liked more. Suicide Playlist #2: uninterested. After the First Death: ordinary.

On The Improbability of my Existence: I liked this, though I think his *[Barry Bayley's]* argument is invalid when he mentions the number of parallel worlds being impossibly great, 'cos it's not, if you accept that the series is infinite (or pretty much so).

Death's Diary: ordinary. Untitled: uninteresting. Death, some TV movies: I don't find much TV interesting. This was, mildly. Bright Winged, with Pale Hands: ordinary. Page 35 [Playlists]: uninteresting; and 36 and 37 [A True Faith; I Drink Beer, Me...].

Hm. I don't seem to be very enthusiastic about the majority of the contents, looking back over the list, which puzzles me because I got an overall impression that this was a very good issue. I am at a loss how to account for this. Maybe I'm wrong and my "ordinarys" were pretty good and my favourites really fantastic. Ah, well!

Letters: Er... the back and front covers *[of AOD4]* were one illo? Honestly, never noticed. I put this down to starting at the front of the zine, going through by page order and getting to the end, by which time I may well have forgotten what the front cover was like, and if I never bothered to open the zine out, well that's my fault and not yours (hastily checks AOD5 front and back covers).

I see that the next theme will be religion. I am dumbstruck at the immensity of the possibilities this opens. One can be reasonable and tolerant of religious issues, while admitting all the ills religion has played a part in causing. One can also point to a lot of good religion has done, its help in times of distress. This, however, is totally unsatisfactory and makes for boring reading. What we want is a bit of the old hellfire and damnation, like, you watch out all you bloody heretics, God will get you in the end, iffen we don't catch you fust and give Him a helping hand. Or, religion is the opium of the people, used to keep the masses in line, and just look at all the wars and persecutions done in the name of religion.

Unfortunately, I'm a bit wishy-washy myself (though inclined to the "opium of the people" line). I wish all religions were as wishy-washy as most of the C of Es seem to be, then maybe we wouldn't get things like hounding Rushdie, or those damn Mormon missionaries, or the Holy Inquisition, or Hitler... (I say

"unfortunately" up there meaning I couldn't rave convincingly on either extreme side.

That's only the tip of the iceberg, of course. There must be a lot of mileage in describing ancient religions: Sumer. Egypt, Greece etc., and the odd cults such as the Cargo cult... er, and Mammon, the Conservatives' own special unacknowledged God. And then there is Roscoe, Ghughu, Foo Foo, "The Yobber is mightier than the Poo", fannish religions. The Great Pumpkin of the *Peanuts* strips is some sort of God (or summat) which leads us on to Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy and so on.

I've not written much [*Some would disagree*], but I've been thinking a lot, and I conclude that there are bound to be erudite folk out there at this very moment bashing out literate and intelligent articles on all aspects of religion, just for you. No doubt, as well as factual items, many a sheet of paper is being beaten red hot whilst being impressed with many a reader's opinion on religion. Then there's a lot that could be said, but not by me, I'm too lazy to do the research. Religion in sf... Nehemniha (Nehemiha?) Scudder, the Sixth Column fake religion, gods in the *Conan* stories, religion in *The Lord of the Rings*, Terry Pratchett's deities, Narnia (and the other Lewis stories), the Blish stories, *Leibowitz* and so on...

In conclusion I offer the unoriginal thought that, as in political systems, broadly speaking no particular system of religious beliefs is any better or worse than any other in practice. It just depends how individual people interpret the particular beliefs.

Steve Jeffery, 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon OX5 2XA

The new typeface and layout is an improvement over *AOD4*, and makes for a neater looking zine. I like the Olafs too, particularly Olaf as Mort on p38.

Father, Forgive Me (S V O'Jay): This hit hard, coming a couple of weeks after I'd lost two grandparents within a week of each other. A rough time for the family. It made me horribly aware that my own parents are mortal, and wondering how I would cope in their position. That my own parents will die sometime is something I know intellectually, but never connected to on a gut level until times like this.

After the First Death (Helena Bowles): This connected too, taking me back to a time I was working at a geriatric hospital. You learn fast not to become too friendly with the older patients, when there's the possibility that they're not going to be there the next day when you come in. More distressing are the ones who are dead before their body gives up the struggle to hold on. It's not death I fear so much as the idea of constant pain, and the loss of dignity and independence in old age.

Songs to Commit Suicide to: My own faves for absolute doom and depression are The Cure's *Faith* (esp. *The Funeral Party*), Kevin Coyne and some of Richard Thompson's gloomier ditties (*Withered and Died*). Strange that you missed Country Joe's *Fixin to Die Rag* from these, or *The Supernatural Anaesthetist* from Genesis' *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*. "If he wants you to snuff it, all he has to do is puff it."

On the Improbability of Barry Bayley: Lovely line in there: "It's astonishing that I am here, especially as I have never won a lottery in my life."

A True Faith (Patrick McKay):

"Do you know how pale and wanton thrillful
comes death on a strange hour
unannounced, unplanned for
Like a scary overfriendly guest
You've invited to bed"

(Jim Morrison)

Four o'clock in the morning is the absolute worst time to be alone and depressed. The Samaritans try to put their more experienced staff on the end of the phone lines for this shift, with good reason.

Mike Glicksohn, 508 Windermere Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6S 3L6

Your special all-death issue of *Arrows of Desire* reached me slightly less than five days after I received a call from my brother telling me our father had died in a San Diego hospital after suffering massive heart failure while wintering in a camper in the California desert with my stepmother. In fact, your fanzine reached me before I had heard again from my brother so I didn't quite know what arrangements were being made when I read your own apology to your dead father. Now I know there will be no funeral, no memorial service, and my dad's body will have been cremated long before you get this letter, so I won't have to go through what you went through. And I'm not even sure if that's good or bad. I do know that as yet I have forded my grief down and kept it under control so I could continue to function and perform the duties of everyday life until I knew for sure what arrangements would or would not be made. So I haven't really cried yet either. But I expect I will before too long.

Obviously the issue reached me on an immediate emotional level. Some of the contents I found tasteless, others were in downright bad taste, but many tried to come to grips with the effects of death on the survivors in honest and sometimes even eloquent ways. And coming to terms with the effects of death is something we must all learn to do; and do by ourselves since there doesn't seem to be much anyone can say or do that can have any real effect on the suffering those who grieve must feel and live through and come out of.

If this issue had reached me at some other time I might have written at greater length but right now I have little heart for loccing fanzines and I'm not yet ready to write about my own feelings on the subject. I also have no interest in your next issue so you should save yourself the postage and send that copy to someone else.

Thanks for putting me on the mailing list, even if the timing was too bizarre to contemplate.

Mike Abbott, 102 William Smith Close, Cambridge CB1 3QF

At last, Michael Abbott gets his finger out and writes. Thanks for feeding me *Arrows of Desire* until now, anyway: it's good stuff, especially (last issue)

Stretcher Bearer. I won't try to go through the issue commenting on everything, but I will say that I'm disappointed in Kev McVeigh for not mentioning the perilous position of Drummer with Spinal Tap, surely worse than anything with the Grateful Dead.

Alan J Sullivan, 13 Weir Gardens, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 7TH

As per previous issues, you've managed to get a good, varied mix of material together - a good collection of contributions can go a long way toward making a zine a success...

Father, Forgive Me: Oddly enough, this struck a real chord. It's the unsaid things that haunt, more than any ghosts... that and the guilt that lives on. And on...

Death Comes Calling: Well, you'd hardly expect people to meekly report to Death to have their existence terminated. Lenny Henry made an interesting observation on the matter of Death coming to call: "Death ought to send you a little postcard, like the gasman: Death will be calling round this Thursday afternoon. Then you could be out."

Songs for the Dying: A very [illegible] listing of musical fatalities. Tell Kylie? She should be so... While on the subject of music to commit suicide to, why no mention of Country & Western? Some of these are just soooooo depressing!

[This "traditional" type of C&W has largely been surpassed by "New Country" and so-called "Southern Rock" (Hank Williams Jr is recognised as one of the first to incorporate Southern rock into his material), which deals with all the themes you'd expect from contemporary, intelligent music of any kind. Also, if you want to hear some good, fun music in the original idiom I can heartily recommend "Another Saturday Night" - classic recordings from the Louisiana Bayous, which includes some excellent r&b and Cajun music from this area. I listen to it even as I type these words. Ace Records, CHC 288.]

Death: Why? Sorry, no idea. I suspect Death needs no *raison d'etre*, being the only certainty apart from taxes. (Don't tell the Government, they'd only work out a way to tax the dead...) There is also the question of whether Heisenberg considered Anthropomorphic Personifications when assembling his theory/principles. It's a thought, anyway.

More or Less Than Just Love: A piece I actually found downright touching. I hate it when people remind me that I have a sensitive, caring nature. It's just so un-pro-survival in the cold and heartless world we live in.

Early Morning, Almost Anywhere: Like *Father, Forgive Me* this is another chord-striker. Like an awful lot of people, I've a mother living just like that, in slightly less "luxury" but equally alone.

UK Deaths by Cause: I ought to send you a printout of a data file our course is currently working on - it's a similarly death-fixated set of stats. What worries me most though is the way the lecturer grins so much whenever he talks about it.

Stretcher Bearer I'm sure I've seen before, but it's still a good one. [You may have seen this before, but only if you were in the right place and have a long memory. Along with other S V O'Jay pieces, some of which have subsequently

appeared in Arrows, it appeared in a zine called "Countenance Divine" which appeared in 1987 and shifted about 10 copies!]

Deathshead Revisited: Love it! Where can I get the album? A set of titles like that is far too good to miss. They just plain don't write 'em like that any more/ever since.

A Hell of A Job: Well, true, but someone has to do it, and it does beat working for a living... the fun and games that would ensue if that oh-so-vital function were not performed. Of the incarnations of Death, what about the one in Gaiman's *Sandman* comic, eh? An incarnation like that would probably encourage too many "volunteer" terminations, though.

Suicide Playlist #2: Oh well. One good turn (33 or 45) dseves another.

After the First Death: Succint. Very nice.

Necrocon: I shall await the conrep (ghost-written, no doubt) with interest. The guest list looks impressive enough - H P Lovecraft hanging around in some dark and eldritch corner no doubt. Errm... have you told Banksie yet?

On the Improbability...: Considering all things in all, and the possibilities engendered by infinite/multiple universes, each person is a miracle of probability in their own right, each one of us unique. What a thought. Good article, very philosophical.

Deat's Diary: Natch - how else to keep track of all those little jobs that need doing.

Untitled: "How long?" - nearly as good a question as "Why?", and as easy to answer. All time is relative. All observations are subjective to the observer. Time exists to prevent everything happening at once. And wherever you go, there you are. Your guess is as good as mine, or probably better from your viewpoint.

TV Movies: Some of which I've seen, a few of which I've regretted seeing - it's all good viewing.

Playlist: The Top Ten: More morbid music.

Music to Have An Abortion To: Now this is siiiiiiiiiiiiiiick!

A True Faith: Now look, am I being obtuse or does everyone have some sort of suicide/wrist-slashing story inside of them. Dare I ask if there is some sort of obsession here? *[Illegible]*

[Thanks, as always, for your comments, but I would like to add a personal plea that you either get a typewriter/wp (if you haven't already done so in the intervening years) or clean up your handwriting! I had to lie down after transcribing this one, and as you can see there are still a couple of words I missed.]

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

Many thanks for the fifth issue of *Arrows of Desire*. I'm closer than most fans to the theme of this issue, so it must seem more relevant to me than to younger readers.

It came at the right time, too, so soon after a series of departures of fans and former fans: Don Thompson, Rick Sneary and Don Wollheim in the United States, and Art Thomson in England.

I've been wondering about one aspect of death nobody considered in *Arrows of Desire*: why so many fans are dying before they reach the three score and ten which we're led to believe we'll probably enjoy. Wollheim was over that unofficial limit, but entirely too many fans have been dying in their 60s, 50s and even younger. Part of the answer to the problem may be overuse of drugs, alcohol and tobacco products, but not all of the prematurely dead fans can be placed in these categories. Maybe some day a researcher will discover an unexpected reason for the situation, like inhaling subatomic particles of paper during the stapling operations on fanzine publications.

I thought the items in the issue ranged from competent to excellent for the most part, with only one or two that didn't interest me at all. Most of the writers are unfamiliar to me, and I hope their presence in this issue signals their appearance as writers in many other fanzines in the immediate future.

[I hope so too, as I agree many of them can produce very interesting pieces. It seems to be the case that, in line with the AOD readership, which I would not consider "traditional" (whatever that is), people other than "traditional" fanzine writers seem willing to submit pieces for it. If this leads to a wider and more diverse readership for fanzines in general, then so much the better.]

Your own introductory item probably gripped me as much as anything in this issue. It's now more than thirty years since the death of my father, 33 years since I lost my mother, and I still dream of them occasionally. However, almost always they're still alive in my dreams and I'm not aware of their passing; it's as if I had been transported back into a past and my dreaming mind isn't aware of what has happened since the date in which the dream story is laid. This, of course, is the situation into which many aging people slip in their waking lives, when they become senile and retreat to the past. So such dreams bother me little, for fear they're the first symptoms of imminent senility for me, and they encourage me a little, because the senile people I know seem much happier in their fantasies of living in the past than those of us who remain aware of what the present is like.

Funerals and viewing the body come up several places in this issue. I dislike both customs intensely. I did the conventional things when my parents and several close relatives died, only because I knew it would cause grief and worry to the family and friends if I followed my instincts and behaved with apparent callousness. But I know I'll leave instructions for a closed casket and only a graveside service when I die, instead of the traditional viewing and funeral home ceremonies.

But I was luckier than some of the contributors to this issue. I didn't need to get upset about the death of someone close and dear to me until I'd passed my youth. Three of my grandparents were dead when I was born or died soon after and the fourth lived until just a few years ago. I had lots of uncles and aunts but the only one who died during my boyhood and youth lived in another state, I'd never seen him, and the funeral was held too far from Hagerstown for me to be expected to attend. A number of great uncles and great aunts died but I hadn't

known them well enough to get upset. I didn't have many cousins and all of them lived until I was in my 30s or thereabouts.

You overlooked one of my favourites in the last words category: Ben Hecht tells about it in his autobiography. As a Chicago newspaperman, he covered the executions of murderers. One of them was led to the scaffold, the noose was put about his neck, and just before the trap was sprung he was asked if there was anything he wanted to say. He replied: "Not at this time." And you didn't list what is probably the best movie ever made with death as part of its title: the 1934 production of *Death Takes A Holiday*, starring Frederic March.

[The list was actually confined to TV movies. Had I been inclined to be more general, and indeed to include movies with death as a central issue, rather than purely titular, top of the list would undoubtedly have been "It's A Wonderful Life".]

After the First Death is going to stick in my memory after I've forgotten most of the other contributors to this issue. I suspect most people who must deal with death in their employment never lose completely the emotions Helena Bowles describes, no matter how many times they confront death. I noticed this during several hospital stays. Nurses and orderlies who had seen hundreds or thousands of patients die during care in the institution were clearly rattled each time it happened during my stay. It was easy for a patient to know when someone else had died, even though the staff members were forbidden to relate this fact. One nurse was in the habit of saying soothingly, "Don't worry about it", if a patient felt worse or suffered bad pain. If a patient became a member of the critical condition list, you could hear her saying this in a raised tone of voice. But if everyone on the floor could hear her yelling at the top of her lungs, "Don't worry about it", we knew someone was dying at that moment.

Harry Andruschak, PO Box 5309, Torrance, CA 90510-5309

I note that many mention funerals in this fanzine. I had to attend a few in my life, but none in the past fifteen years. Or Memorial Services either. For myself, I paid \$700 to "The Neptune Society", a non-profit organisation that does quickie cremations followed by a burial at sea. "Bake and Shake", so to speak. All my next of kin have to do is make one phone call, and the Society takes care of all the processing and paperwork. And my family pays zilch.

This is part of my attitude towards death. It will happen, so make it as cheap and convenient as possible. As an atheist, I do not believe in any kind of life after death, nor souls, nor reincarnation, nor anything. After all, when all is said and done, there is not the slightest evidence that the Universe was "created", "caused" or "designed", nor does it seem that the Universe has "purpose", "design" or "meaning".

One other aspect of death amuses me, or rather, the reaction to it: organ donation. In my wallet is a card which makes it quite clear that if I die, or am about to die, I wish my organs to be salvaged from my body and used to heal other people. What could be easier? What could be more ethical?

Well, I don't know what the situation is in the UK, but here in the USA a lot of fans are reluctant to be organ donors for a variety of reasons. I have a hunch

most of it is tied to the Christian concept of the entire body rising on the Day of Judgement, even if they are not honest enough to actually admit to this sort of superstition. And not just fans, of course. Most of the USA population, thanks to Christianity, are reluctant to be organ donors.

[Christianity has in fact little to do with Christ and a lot to do with St. Paul's vision/version. I am also inevitably reminded by talk of organ donation of the old joke: Kev McVeigh intends to leave his body to Science. Science intends to contest the will.]

Paul Di Filippo, 2 Poplar St., Providence, RI 02906

Thanx for the latest AOD. As usual, a bang-up job. Been thinking a lot about death myself lately, mostly through Zen studies.

My sister's sister-in-law recently had her estranged husband show up on her doorstep and commit suicide in her presence by shooting himself through the heart. Guess that's one way of avoiding senility!

Kev P McVeigh, 37 Firs Road, Milnthorpe, Cumbria LA7 7QF

Herewith one loc on AOD #5:

Yeah, I looked at *Killing A Child* for you, thanks for the credit. All I did was read it, mate. You had to write it.

My grandmother died a couple of years ago, and afterwards I kept having flashes back to the moment I last saw her alive. In the hospital, frail and yellow. The rest of the family went straight in, I went to find chairs, so she didn't know I was there. They were chatting when I came in, and she was so thrilled to see me. That's what I remembered. And I remember leaving early to meet someone at the station, to bring her back to meet gran. The fucking train was late. That's what I remember.

Funny that, I ought to remember how she took my side when I was in trouble, the biscuits she used to save for me, picture cards on Space she collected that got me into all that and now all this. I just remember waiting for a train, bitter and cold. And how pleased she was to see me, how proud of me and my sister, even when I felt I'd let everyone down. (Excuse me, it's snowing outside; this can't be hay fever, can it?)

Songs to commit suicide to: *I Could Be Happy* (Altered Images) - dark and twisted; *The End* (Nico) - cold and empty; *Caroline Says II* (Lou Reed) - soundtrack to abuse?

Barry Bayley seems to be arguing that nothing would have changed if Cleopatra's nose had been different. How would we know?

[Indeed. See "Quantum Leap", first episode, second season, for an intelligent TV treatment of this.]

I suppose Pat McKay was saying the opposite in a way. Truth doesn't matter, belief is the overriding factor. The ending said something else, though - what we believe doesn't affect reality for anyone else, but it affects our perception of others, and our response to that perception. So the length of Cleopatra's nose only matters because people worry about it, and make extrapolations - alternate

histories - which lead to new perceptions of reality - now. And some of these perceptions lead to changes, and hence Barry Bayley was wrong?

[I assume at least one other person out there (probably Pat McKay) managed to follow that argument. Speaking of whom...]

Pat McKay, wherever

Might I point out to the supposedly knowledgeable Kev McVeigh that the "Hope I get old" remark he attributed to Ian McNab is actually a quote from a song title on the first lp by *They Might Be Giants*, and what about Tammi Terrell who died of a brain haemorrhage on stage in Marvin Gaye's arms. Otherwise OK.

Still on rawk 'n' rawl: John Langford (brother of the more famous Dave) may be in *The Three Johns* (and he should be careful about that too, now that Clause 25 is going through...) but he is really a *Mekon* in disguise! Now there's Sci-fi for ya! (And he's part of *Dim Subooteyo* too!)

[See also the famous Dave's loc above.]

I might be in touch about Religion, but if not, remember I said it first in my loc last time.

Keep watching the mailbox...

[At risk of disillusionment, the theme for this issue had already been decided before you came up with your apposite comment. I should also point out that the phrase "great minds think alike" presupposes more than one such mind in operation. The subject of AOD #7 is, as you may remember, "Bloody Foreigners!", but I would be interested to see if you can make apposite comment on the themes for issues #8 and #9 which, yes, have already been determined.]

Sididis, PO Box 17084, Doornfontein 2028 (RSA)

I liked the idea of the theme running thru all writings in yer mag. Some of these people are so fucked up, it's great to see honesty in writing and genuine emotion coming thru. *Black Flag* has not been so lucky, we have advertised in national newspapers, stuck posters on all campuses and bombarded likely people by post, but have got so little to show for it that we have had to move our deadline to Xmassacre in order to have a hope of getting something worth publishing. Meanwhile our information campaign goes bravely onward in the hope of finding some creative South Africans somewhere. So that is why you aren't clutching a *Black Flag* and going "Wow, these African chappies are not quite as Third World as we may have supposed". Pity, but apathy seems to be a popular pastime here, as people are content to sit on their butts and wait for the next interesting government scandal to break (which is about as definite as rain in a monsoon or Maggie Thatcher wearing blue).

[Interested contributors should write to Black Flag Publications at the above address. Bear in mind that (last we knew) any RSA-destined mail is still quite likely to be opened before reaching its intended recipient. We would be happy to be corrected if this is now inaccurate.]

Steve Jeffery (again), c/o Anzon Inc., PO Box 559, Laredo, TX 78042
Thanks for AOD #5¹/₂: *Does He Still Drink Beer?*

Mike Abbott is probably right. The aggressive, violent, bullying is not the "real" you, but one part of you, although one whose emotional content is so strong that it has a disproportionate effect in the way you and others may view yourself.

I'm not convinced you should dismiss Harry Warner's comment on professional help out of hand on the basis that it didn't work in some other context. Knowing what you're capable of, you owe it to Tara to do whatever it takes to protect her from such abuse. Why do you resent her and hate her so much when you lose control?

{Nic Farey writes: I don't agree that the earlier failure was in "some other context". In that case the violence was inwardly directed, so to speak. They do say that suicide is the sincerest form of self-abuse. The "resent and hate" question may be more complex. I theorise that, although I am generally attracted to "strong" women, I am ultimately unable to deal with that strength and the amount of control it can imply (suggesting, I know, that I have a basically weak character). Perhaps the resentment surfaces as a reaction to being unable to deal with that control while necessarily being submissive to it.}

I don't see why your social life need revolve around the consumption of alcohol, any more than Harry Andruschak's commitment to total abstinence. Vikki is an abstainer, by choice and a genuine dislike of the taste of alcohol, but I enjoy the taste of beer or cider, at least until about the third pint. Like you, I have parts of myself that I am afraid of revealing under the disinhibiting influence of alcohol on my sense of control, and it worries me when my mouth starts to operate in a higher gear than my ability to think about what I'm saying. (All right, who said "It always has"?)

Some people like the loss of control that drinking brings; I don't, and it frightens me, and I haven't gone over that edge again since my early twenties. Why do you drink? More importantly, why do you keep on drinking beyond your ability to control it?

{Nic Farey writes: I believe the problem lies largely in "solitary" drinking (which is a state of mind, not an indicator of the number of people present), and also the odd concept of "drinking to get drunk". I have discovered on the rare occasions when I have been sober in a room full of drinkers that there is nothing so obnoxious or unfunny as a bunch of people who are (even slightly) drunk when you're not (the reverse also applies). So, you either don't associate with these people at all (difficult - I don't know or socialise with many abstainers) or you join in the general lack of sobriety, at which point everything becomes witty and entertaining again. The problem lies at a point further on where things stop being funny. As you say, a moderate line between "dangerous" drinking and total abstinence should not pose any problem. Usually, if I'm in a crowded pub with friends on a Friday night, I know when I've had "enough" and just come home and go to sleep. On most such occasions, I don't "drink to get drunk" or drink just

for the sake of it. Although this will undoubtedly be hard for Harry to accept, I genuinely enjoy it.}

Haz Bond, (COA) 13 Merrivale Road, Stratford ST17 9EB

A few comments on *AOD* #5^{1/2}. Notable that most correspondents either ignored the central article (or so I presume, as you don't print or WAHF any more letter writers) or skimmed over it very lightly. And perhaps not surprising that the meatiest responses come from people with experience of alcoholism and/or mindless violence. I suppose I should say that I drink relatively little inside fandom, and scarcely at all outside it (since drinking alone strikes me as a totally futile pastime). Also, I have a very low tolerance for alcohol.

Harry Andruschak is a generally decent guy, but I found this letter (as I found his response to Martin Tudor's similar piece) extraordinarily patronising. As one who has drunk and stopped drinking rather than one who has never drunk at all, it's fair enough to grant him the position of Informed Commenter. I suppose he must have been attempting to lend you moral support (though an awful lot of what purports to be a loc to you addresses itself to the hapless M Tudor); instead it comes over as smug and patronising. I've also noticed a tendency to sniff out supposed alcoholism in letters to other fanzines whilst commenting on others' articles: I'm put in mind particularly of an article I reprinted from an apa by William McCabe, than whom I can think of nobody less likely to be in need of AA, but whom Andy said he'd love to drag to a meeting due to WAM describing an evening at the pub followed by an (almost certainly non-alcohol related) hospitalisation and concussion. Writing letters in that tone won't help anyone, Andy.

In contrast, I have a healthy loathing for that little creep Kev McVeg, but am forced to admit that his letter regarding violence, drunken and non-drunken, has a ring of painful truth and rises above most of his dreary self-flagellation in personalzines.

And combined with that there's Tara Dyson's extraordinary piece, which makes the back of my neck creep every time I read it. I've drunk with this macho shithead she's talking about, it's you Nic. As Kev comments, we never see what goes on the rest of the month. Violence terrified me, much more so than alcoholism, probably due to the fact that I've had experience of the former but not of the latter. I know the feeling Tara describes of being totally unable to defend yourself, not because you're physically too weak or overpowered, but because you just can't. I remember being punched and having a knife drawn on me, and though I was physically stronger than the guy in question, my sole resource was to instantly collapse on the floor and play dead (and it took a woman to disarm him. Hmmmm.). In other words, even when my life was in danger I couldn't defend myself.

Nasty thought, that, but I suppose on reflection that it's not too surprising, since I lack many of the common defence mechanisms that other people take for granted, like being able to laugh off violence and tragedies. I can't. Thinking about anything like that makes me physically ill, yet I can't just not think about

them. You probably remember that episode at Mexican III where Avedon was yelling at me. Any normal person would have walked off or silenced her by throwing their drink at her within two minutes. I couldn't. I could go on, but I can hardly criticise McVeg for feeble self-flagellation when I indulge myself in a similar way.

Well, enough of this. As someone says: "We are all equipped with microscopes for intimate self-examination, and too many of us are using them as dildo-substitutes for anal masturbation".

{Nic Farey writes: Interesting points about defencelessness. I also recall, in my student days, my usual reaction to a violent attack was to curl up in a ball on the floor and actually encourage the attacker ("Go on, have you done enough?"), the theory being that they would be shamed into stopping by this passive resistance. Didn't always work. Mind you, at the time I was so fucked up generally that I used to hide under tables without warning, and in all sorts of public places too. Conversely, I was once asked why I didn't retaliate when someone had just kneed me in the head as I bent to pick up a pack of cigarettes (this was at a bar). I was so drunk I hadn't even felt it.

Although, in common with much of the LSE lowlife, I tried lots of interesting and illicit substances at this time, I never had enough confidence in my sanity to try LSD. I have that in common with Janis Joplin. Someone once slipped her a hit of acid. On being told, she immediately went to make herself physically sick rather than risk the potential bad trip.

Returning to the violence question, it occurs to me that I have rarely hit another man. Only ever women. That reminds me of one of the most frightening (and violent) characters I ever saw on TV, in an episode of The Sweeney called Taste of Fear. The guy is an army deserter who has most recently served in Northern Ireland. His signature remark, delivered at the beginning of the episode is: "If there's two things I like, really like, it's thumpin' birds and kickin' Micks".

[Cultural note for the unfamiliar: "The Sweeney" (Cockney rhyming slang: "Sweeney Todd" = "Flying Squad") was a seminal British cop show of the seventies, starring John Thaw, Dennis Waterman and Garfield Morgan; "birds" is a slang term for women; "Micks" is a (derogatory) slang term for Irishmen.]

Ken Lake, 115 Markhouse Avenue, London E17 8AY

Drinking: I didn't want to, wasn't going to mix in: troubles enough you got, without I should pontificate. But now you virtually beg me. OK, I'll try to be brief.

Like all monomaniacs/addicts/fen, you are parblind: you do and say things without even noticing the contradictions or even the onvius pointers toward the truth.

Example: "most of my social life centres around the consumption of alcohol" - that is the root of the whole problem, that you can write this and not realise this is a confession that your whole attitude toward life is skewed.

All else follows. Imagine the person who would write "most of my social life centres around... Neurotics Anonymous/eating/prayer/winetasting (when you spit it out)/stamp collecting/beating up niggers/football... you name it". Reaction: ho,

a NUT. Why? Because making "most of your social life" centre around ANY one activity is unbalanced. Some such absorption in monomania is less harmful (to you, to others) than others ways: few people ever got more broke than through stamp collecting, fat and dead through eating, pretentious from winetasting, unpleasantly yobbish from football mania.

But until you can parctice with equanimity a social life that NEVER "centres around" drinking, you will always be an alcoholic. Which you are, no denying or arguing can change that.

I might enjoy winetasting - once. I tried Neurotics Anon decades ago and was bored to tears. I lack the physique or the self-confidence to go out beating up anyone. All sports bore me beyond description: men chasing balls around. Even womanising was never my bag, being brought up in too puritanical a society for me to view any kind of unfaithfulness with equanimity. I tried prayer: it's onanistic. I tried onanism: it's selfish. I tried selfishness: it loses you friends. I tried friends: some drank too much, ceased to be friends because they refused to accept that I didn't WANT to spend all my time and money drinking. Some are foodies: they remain friends, but no way would I want to eat to gourmet standards every night, and I can do a damn sight better than greasy spoon at home.

It's a matter of horses for courses. If you have boozy friends, meet them once a fortnight and tail off. Ditto stamp collectors, winetasters, hearty eaters, neurotics, any other monomaniacs. The world is full of pleasures, almost all of them BETTER if you have had nothing to drink for several hours before you try them. Why prejudice your chances of enjoying all that life offers you? All else is excuses, apologies, self-justification, whingeing and lies. Face the world: it's a helluva place.

{Nic Farey writes: Herewith some excuses, apologies, self-justification, whingeing and lies: you, in common with many others, either misunderstand or deliberately misinterpret the phrase "centres around the consumption of alcohol". On Monday nights at one of my locals we have a quiz night - general trivia, 50p a go, winning team takes all; Wednesday nights (before I acquired a prolapsed disc) was pool league; first Thursday of every month is the Wellington meet, third Thursday the BSFA. On Fridays or Saturdays we often go out for a meal, perhaps to our favourite local Indian or to that rather good new Thai restaurant just opened; or perhaps the cinema. Sunday is Bruch Club at the George - a great cooked breakfast, unlimited coffee and all the papers; good conversation too. The only thing in common with this (you'll admit) varied social round is that all take place on licensed premises. I used to play squash (I hope to again), and after the game we would naturally go to the bar for a refreshing shandy. Not to mention conventions, parties and so on. I have been known not to drink at any or all of the above. Monomaniac? I don't think so.}

"The Gods of Nasty are smiling on me tonight"

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Thought for the day: When God was younger, did he resemble Iain Banks?
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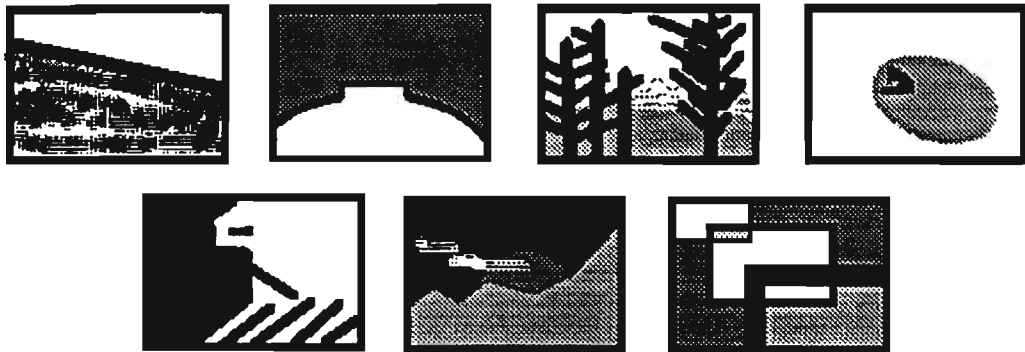
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(Yiddish proverb)

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