

San Diego Ancient Mariners Sailing Society: A Living Museum from the Golden

By Deb Dominici, Dave Easter (Commodore) and Jerry Newton – AMSS Board Members



of Vessels Age of Yachting



The Ancient Mariners Sailing Society (AMSS¹) is a fraternity of people interested in the preservation of vessels of classic design. As owners of historically relevant vessels, AMSS members understand that they serve as the temporary line stewards of true maritime treasures. As such the Ancient Mariners fleet comprises a “Living Museum” of boats in service which are well loved and cared for, and which are shown and raced together on a regular basis. Ancient Mariners flag vessels run the gamut from small classic knockabout dinghies to large, magnificent yachts originally constructed during the “Golden Age” of sail, before the Second World War.

The Ancient Mariners Sailing Society has been at the forefront of the classic yacht movement, which has obtained rapid growth and a worldwide presence and cultural following in recent decades. The AMSS was founded in 1975 as a not-for-profit 501(c)(4) corporation. Along with the Master Mariners Benevolent Association in Northern California, and many other regional organizations and clubs, the Ancient Mariners Sailing Society supports a fleet of classic vessels which are readily viewed by the public in their natural element – the Pacific Ocean and inshore waters of our West Coast. Maintained to sail rather than stand as exhibits shoreside, these museum-worthy maritime artifacts are living treasures, yet fulfilling their original purpose, often well beyond their years of expected service.

Left: During the Eighth Maritime Heritage Conference,⁴ the Ancient Mariners fleet put the vessels *Alsumar* (1934 Sparkman and Stephens yawl), *Freedom* (1938 Herreshoff Bermuda Cutter) and *Pacifica* (1947 Sparkman and Stephens yawl) on display at the museum. Visitors to the Maritime Heritage Conference were able to board these vessels, and study them at close quarters, above and below decks, as prime examples of classic Golden Age ocean-racing yachts.

Photo by Neva Sullaway, MMSD

At the 18th Annual San Diego Wooden Boat festival held at Koehler Kraft in June 2008, families built and launched their own wooden Bevins skiffs. Guided by shipwright Doug Jones (right, of Traditonal Boatworks) and his crew of boatbuilders, the event offers an opportunity to experience the satisfaction of building a seaworthy vessel in one weekend.

Photo by Neva Sullaway, MMSD



Photo by Deb Dominici, AMSS



The Maritime Museum of San Diego and the Ancient Mariners Sailing Society have been partners in the preservation of our maritime heritage in Southern California since their formation. The two organizations share a common commitment to keeping active and well-maintained sail fleets at sea on a regular basis. The Ancient Mariners join in the annual sailings of the *Star of India*, the oldest sailing ship currently able to make way on all points of sail, with her consorts: the *Californian*, HMS *Surprise* and other tall ships, providing escort vessels² offshore for these popular seasonal events.

AMSS Flag vessels are yachts of between forty to one hundred years old, often privately owned sailing vessels and not generally sought for the collections of public maritime museums. Currently, boats qualifying as flag vessels of the AMSS are sail or power vessels of ancient vintage or classic design, not including vessels constructed of fiberglass, aluminum or concrete. Vessels of this period were designed for international or universal rule yacht racing and the larger vessels were built to compete in ocean races such as the Trans-Pacific, Fastnet and Newport-to-Bermuda series. The full scale replica of the schooner *America*, the winner of the original America's Cup in 1851, is berthed in San Diego, and is an AMSS flag vessel.

Sometimes a beautiful boat is simply worthy of devotion, reverence and awe, and no one doubts it. A beautiful boat is as obviously invaluable as a Leonardo sketch or Monet's water lilies. The boat can be a magnificent structure. And the boat most likely to be deemed so is surely the wooden boat.³

– Michael Ruhlman

The association of the Ancient Mariners Sailing Society and the Maritime Museum of San Diego, as leading proponents of our national maritime heritage, commit to a Fund⁵ sponsoring educational activities such as the Family Boat Building Event, in which individual and corporate donors support the construction of wooden Bevins skiffs (or other water craft), by enterprising and deserving young persons (and their families), with the assistance of local boatwrights and Ancient Mariner members. In 2008, this annual event took place at Koehler Kraft Boat Yard, in conjunction with the San Diego Wooden Boat Festival.

The membership of the Ancient Mariners, although a relatively small organization, includes a surprising variety of accomplished individuals. A spare and accurate description of the club's makeup was published in the monthly newsletter, the "Albatross".



Olin Stephens (right), foremost yacht designer and builder of the twentieth century, was greeted by Ray Ashley onboard the Maritime Museum's *Medea*, during one of his many trips to San Diego hosted by the Ancient Mariner Sailing Society. Mr Stephens recently celebrated his 100th birthday.

Photo by Maggie Piatt-Walton, MMSD

Wood construction is desired, especially if the original was an example of fine workmanship and material...wood's characteristic of bending smoothly and fairly between support points appeals to the eye and aids performance. Not a good conductor of heat or sound, a wooden boat is quiet and isolated from the environment, and it is fragrant, which cannot be said of the plastic resins. Wood needs maintenance, but reacts beautifully to good care. In itself this creates a bond to the wood. The renewed appreciation of wood as a material for boats is easy to understand.

—Olin J. Stephens II

The Ancient Mariners include a wide range of those who keep our nautical traditions and sailing heritage alive including:

- Several of the most eminent American yacht designers of the 20th century
- Senior officers and directors of some of the finest maritime museums in the U.S.
- Members of the America's Cup Hall of Fame, skippers and crew
- Philanthropists who contribute to the maintenance of our nation's maritime history
- Boatwrights, artisans and craftsmen actively engaged in preserving classic boats
- Yachtsmen and women who have made their mark in caring for fabulous classic yachts
- Owners and employees of businesses that are world class leaders in yacht restoration
- Chandlers, writers, sailmakers, circumnavigators and other generally famous characters
- Publishers of internationally renown periodicals dedicated to classic yachts.

The Ancient Mariners racing programs feature a series of annual regattas in Southern California, sailing practically every month of the year. The most popular annual race is the Yesteryear Regatta, the premiere classic yacht race in which boats from all over the West Coast compete for a variety of well-known perpetual trophies. This race sails in May, and uses a staggered start with a reverse handicap format resulting in often exciting finishes at the Embarcadero, in downtown San Diego Bay (next to the Maritime Museum).

The 20 Guinea Cup Series has recently expanded to a seven-race series, with many races limited to working sails

Three thoroughbreds
vvy for line honors during a
Yesteryear Regatta: *Branta*,
Orion and *Sally*.
Photo by Frank Taliaferro, Elon.



(no spinnakers, mizzen staysails or gollywobblers). This series is open to all Ancient Mariner flag vessels and their invited guests, and continues to grow in popularity. The annual Kettenburg Regatta honors the local Kettenburg builders and the late Paul Kettenburg. Kettenburg PCs (the local PC fleet has been restored to nearly thirty boats), Pacific Class Cruisers (PCCs), K-38s, K-40s, K-41s, K-43s and K-50s, round out the fleet for their June Race, the Kettenburg Regatta.

Every month the Ancient Mariners hold General Meetings which are open to the public, and feature special programs and speakers of interest to classic boat admirers. At these meetings, new and experienced boat owners and local tradesman knowledgeable in the conservation, restoration and maintenance of traditional sailing craft share valuable information. At times, celebrated yacht designers, builders and racers address the group. The Maritime Museum typically hosts one

or more Ancient Mariners meetings yearly with speakers such as the *Star of India*'s Captain Richard Goben, or MMSD's President Ray Ashley. An annual awards ceremony and holiday party is held in December. The shore-side activities of the AMSS form the heart of our community, and bring together many who would not otherwise discover the wealth of experience, craftsmanship and practical expertise which is freely shared to enable our fleet to continue sailing in good repair and condition.

Reverence for wood is indeed an undercurrent of our Ancient Mariner culture, and Thomas Moser's words are evocative: ***The longing for natural materials with which we co-evolved is welded to our DNA, and as we alienate ourselves more and more from the cottage and the cave, our yearning for the natural world grows stronger.***⁸

Or, we may consider Jonathan Wilson's view: ***There is an irresistible aura about boats and yachts built of wood, an aura brimming over with the richness of creation. It flows from the strength and grace of trees themselves, through the hands of craftsmen who fashion them into proud new forms. It is the presence not only of substance but of soul, created in a collaboration between the earth, the sea, and the artisans who fit the wood with skill and care so that it will look lovely and last long.***⁹

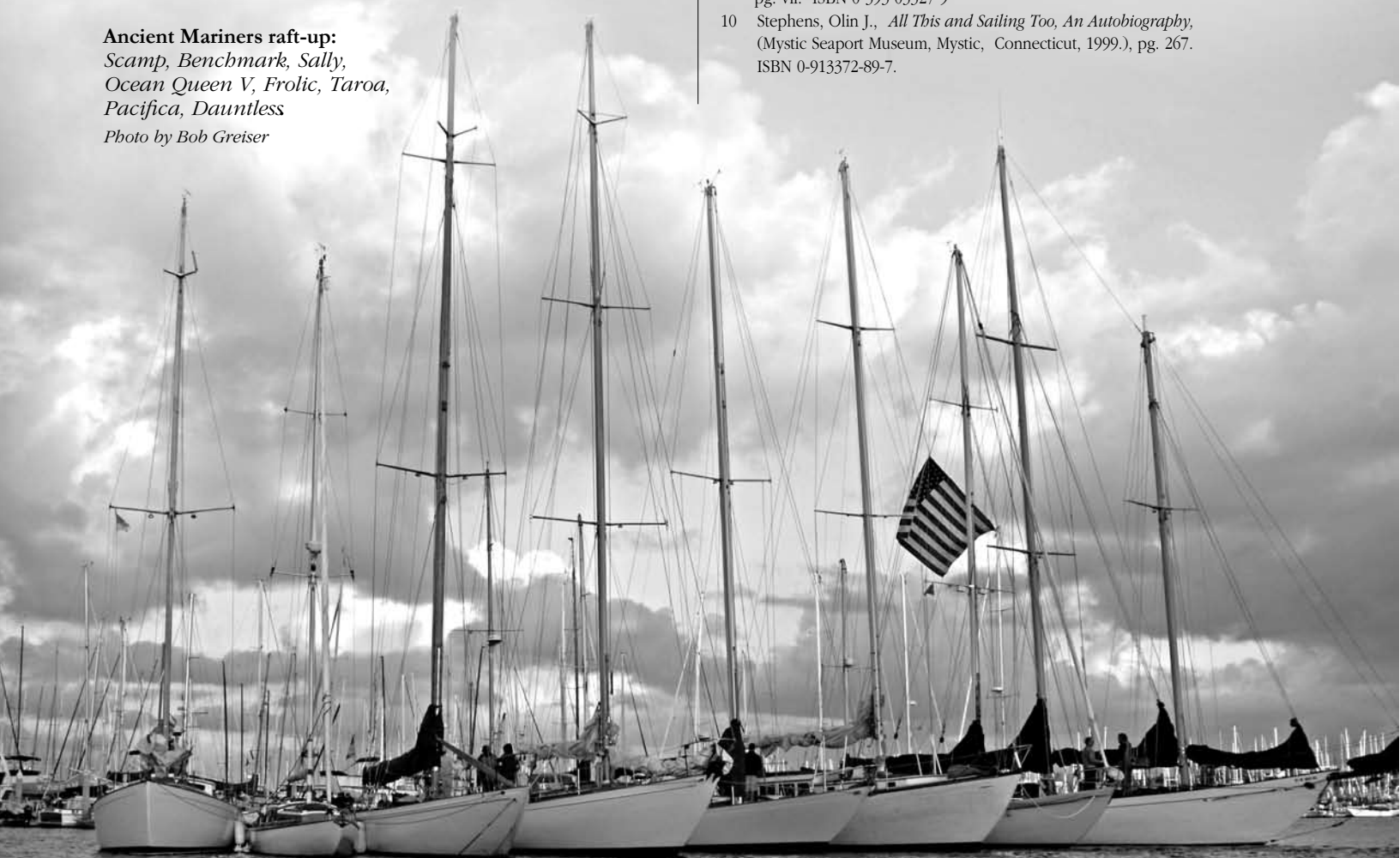
The Ancient Mariners are looking forward to the dedication of an exhibit on the Maritime Museum's *Berkeley*, which celebrates the partnership these two fine organizations have established in the preservation of our maritime heritage, and our conservation ethic dedicated to the maintenance of classic wooden sailing ships and yachts from the "Golden Age."

Ancient Mariners raft-up:
Scamp, Benchmark, Sally,
Ocean Queen V, Frolic, Taroa,
Pacifica, Dauntless

Photo by Bob Greiser

Notes

- 1 Ancient Mariners Sailing Society, est. 1975, California 501 (c)(4), Not-For-Profit Corporation By-Laws. P.O. Box 6484, San Diego, CA, 92166. www.amss.us.
- 2 Ashley, Ray, Ph.D., President/CEO of MMSD; Durdaller, Peter, Maritime Museum of San Diego, MMSD Ships Operations Officer, "Star of India Sailing 2007, Program Information, Plans for the Day, Escort and Press Boats," November 10 & 11, 2007.
- 3 Ruhlman, Michael, *Wooden Boats*, (Penguin Group, New York, NY, 2001), pg. 11. ISBN 0-670-88812-5
- 4 "Eighth Maritime Heritage Conference Program." *The Journal of San Diego History*, Vol. 52, Summer/Fall 2006, The San Diego Foundation, 2508 Historic Decatur Road, San Diego, CA 92106, pg. 7. info@sdfoundation.org.
- 5 Letter of Intent, Maritime Education Agreement between the Ancient Mariners Sailing Society and the San Diego Maritime Museum of San Diego, by the "Ancient Mariners/Maritime Museum Education Fund."
- 6 "Albatross," the Monthly Newsletter of the Ancient Mariners Sailing Society, "From the Helm," January, 2007, pg. 2.
- 7 Koehler Kraft, 2302 Shelter Island Drive, San Diego, CA 92106. www.koehlerkraft.com.
- 8 *Thos. Moser, Artistry in Wood*, Thos. Moser with Brad Lemley, (Chronicle Books, San Francisco, CA, 2002), pg. 127. ISBN 0-8118-3611-8
- 9 White, Joel. *Wood, Water and Light, Classic Wooden Boats*, (W.W. Norton and Co., New York, London, 1998), from the Foreward, by Jonathan Wilson, Editor, "WoodenBoat Magazine," pg. vii. ISBN 0-393-03327-9
- 10 Stephens, Olin J., *All This and Sailing Too, An Autobiography*, (Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, Connecticut, 1999.), pg. 267. ISBN 0-913372-89-7.



An Ancient Mariner Restores his Classic Yacht *Scamp*



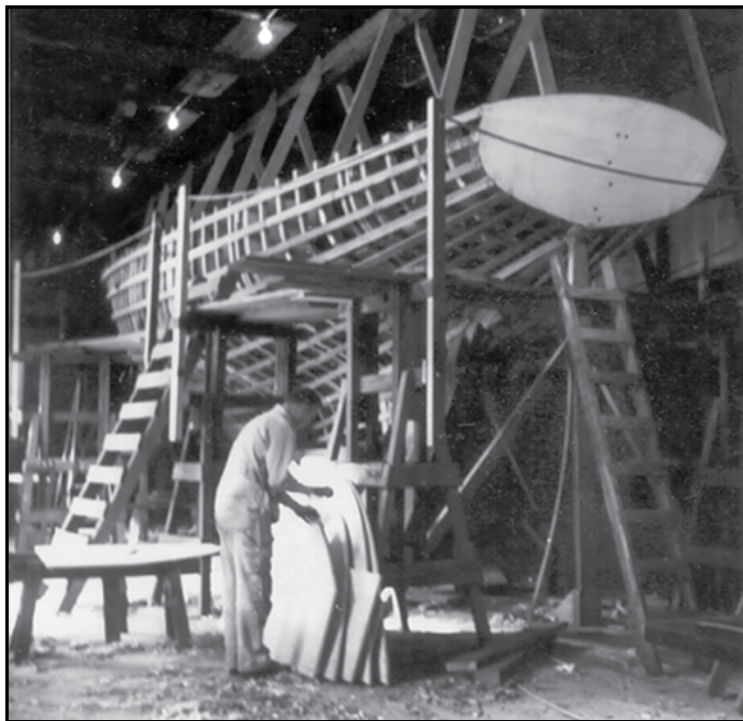
By Tom Jackson

Maritime Museum of San Diego and
Ancient Mariners Sailing Society member

The story of *Scamp* begins in 1958 at Stone & Sons Shipyard in Alameda, California, as Jack Ehrhorn, loftsmen and shipwright, began conjuring a handy 33-foot sloop for his boss Lester Stone. Built during the after-hours and slow periods of the yard, *Scamp* was "well seasoned" by the time she was launched into San Francisco Bay in 1967.

Constructed with renowned skill by Jack, all the materials were top grade, except for Lester's insistence on using galvanized iron fasteners. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the iron embedded in her structural oak and ironwood had reacted with the seawater saturated into the wood fibers resulting in "iron sickness" throughout most of structural timbers below the waterline. This was in spite of the fact that all the fasteners and drifts had been well coated with coal tar or white lead during installation. *Scamp* had been well-cared for, first by Lester Stone, then by Jack Ehrhorn and finally by me with regular replacement of frames and planks, and experienced attention to electro-galvanic interactions, but the chemistry between the oak's tannins, the iron and seawater, were inevitable.

There is a turning point that a caretaker of a vessel faces



Jack Ehrhorn (in 1958) built *Scamp* during his spare time at Stone & Sons Shipyard in Alameda, CA.

Photo courtesy the author

once the assessment has been made that her range of utility is diminishing due to her structural health. Do you keep sailing her within the shrinking confines of her limitations, or reconstruct the vessel so that the crew is the limitation rather than the vessel? *Scamp* fits into our family and future plans perfectly, so by 2003 my wife, Wyndham, and I decided to invest the effort and dollars to reconstruct her hull with new wood and non-ferrous metals, while otherwise strictly adhering to her original plans which we had on hand. After the decision to reconstruct the vessel

was made, I went through the process of carefully setting a scope of work and a detailed plan. Since I was going to be personally performing a majority of the work and yet had to keep a family and business going simultaneously, a strict plan was helpful to avoid the perpetual projects and high costs so many of us have witnessed when owners approach this level of work romantically. My plan was to finish this keel-off hull reconstruction in five months, and go sailing in the spring.



C.F. Koehler backed *Scamp* (November, 2003) into his old shed on Shelter Island with only a few inches to spare. (As of 2008, the boatyard shed had been completely remodeled and now has a vaulted ceiling.)

Photo by Neva Sullaway

Summary Scope of work planned over 5 months

- 1 Remove/reinstall keel, deadwood. Coat iron ballast keel with Ceramcoat.
- 2 In general, remove all iron fasteners below waterline and replace with Monel 400.
- 3 Replace keel bolts (8) and add G10 tubes.
- 4 Install 20 new floors, and new floor bolts in all floors.
- 5 New frames in (25) stations.
- 6 New planks (17) strakes up from garboard port & starboard.
- 7 Install new shaft, packing and new engine mounts, trans seals, and mechanical work.
- 8 New water tanks.
- 9 All new plumbing and fresh water system.
- 10 Replace all electrical, including new wires and panels, etc.
- 11 Replace all through-hull fittings with new. All new hoses.
- 12 Replace all chain plate fasteners with Monel.
- 13 New mast step, Purple Heart & monel.
- 14 Replace all standing and running rigging, rebuild all winches (vintage hardware).
- 15 Replace all electrical wiring in mast, add new lights per regulation (use vintage hardware).
- 16 Repaint & varnish entire interior.
- 17 Repaint topsides with enamel prior to launch.

It was important to honestly assess my skill capabilities and limitations, and account for any schedule uncertainties where my plan indicated that I'd be pushing into new territory. Although I had most tools already on hand, I planned to buy specialized tools when I came across the need rather than purchase them ahead of time. As it turned out, even a large project relies mostly on the standard professional set of heavy mechanics and carpentry tools. A local boatyard with a shed (a rare commodity in Southern California), Koehler Kraft, welcomed my ambition and provided a great backdrop of support for the project. The shed allowed me to work well past midnight with decent lighting, and in the rain, in very reasonable conditions.

Before the haulout I discussed with Jack the various drifts and bolts that he had used in *Scamp*'s original construction to supplement what was shown on his original drawings. I then purchased the various diameters of monel rod in the next size up (3/8" for floor-to-frame and bulkheads, 3/4" for floor-to-keel, keel to stem, etc. and drifts, and 1" for ballast keel bolts). In order to avoid long delays during the project, I machined all seven hundred and sixty of these monel studs to length and threaded them well beforehand, and purchased the monel nuts and washers for each end. Additionally, I purchased large quantities of heavy dimension Purple Heart wood for the structural timbers, and five-quarter mahogany for the planking. I protected the interior with heavy coverings and cut out door-skin panels to fit the decks so that the heavy work and traffic wouldn't destroy any part of the vessel I didn't intend to be working on.

Having the materials on-site, and a written plan in place allowed me to know what needed to be done each day before I showed up and kept the job on track. This helped avoid the wasted time of wondering where to start each day, or feeling intimidated by not knowing what to do next.

The first day *Scamp* was hauled out in November 2003, I removed the propeller & shaft, the rudder and steering gear, drove out the keel bolts and cut away the drifts holding the deadwood to the keel and stern post aft of the ballast keel. Koehler then lifted the hull off the ballast keel and we rolled her into the shop. The 7,000-pound keel was sent out for sandblasting and ceramic coating.

Once secured in the shop, cutting out every other plank from both sides of the hull re-created a system of ribbands onto which I could form the new replacement frames. This allows the hull shape to be duplicated exactly by using the hull itself as the pattern. This simplicity is only achievable if this work is taken on before the hull "hogs" or loses its shape due to age. After the new Purple Heart laminated 1-3/4" x 1-3/4" frames were installed along with the new 3-1/2" x 12" Purple Heart floor timbers, I transferred the location of each of the old planks' (now ribbands) seams onto the new frames, then the rest of the planking/ribbands were cut away. This allowed me to rapidly duplicate the original planking pattern without needing to save the actual planks. With the planks still off, it was quick work to install the new tanks, electrical wiring and other mechanical systems in the boat, along with the new mast step and chain plates. The planks were tight-seamed with epoxy encapsulation, bonded to the frames and mechanically screwed with #16 silicon bronze wood screws. The fairing of the hull was rewarding work, and Wyndham and I painted the topsides with enamel before *Scamp* went back out into the yard.

The ballast keel had been sandblasted and coated with a ceramic coating followed by epoxy primer. Re-attaching the boat to the ballast keel required careful alignment with the crane while the hull hovered over the keel on the cradle in the yard. Finally, the last keel bolt was secured, the rudder was in place and the mast was stepped. Five months after she'd left the water, on a blustery day in April 2004, we re-launched *Scamp* back into the Pacific amidst the well wishes of family and friends.



Above: The planks were tight-seamed with epoxy encapsulation, bonded to the frames and mechanically screwed with #16 silicon bronze wood screws.

Photos courtesy of the author

Right: Re-attaching the boat to the ballast keel required careful alignment with the crane, while the hull hovered over the keel on the cradle in the yard.

Below: Tom and *Scamp* underway again



***A thing of beauty is joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases;
it will never Pass into nothingness...***

— John Keats, *Endymion*:
A Poetic Romance; from Book 1

