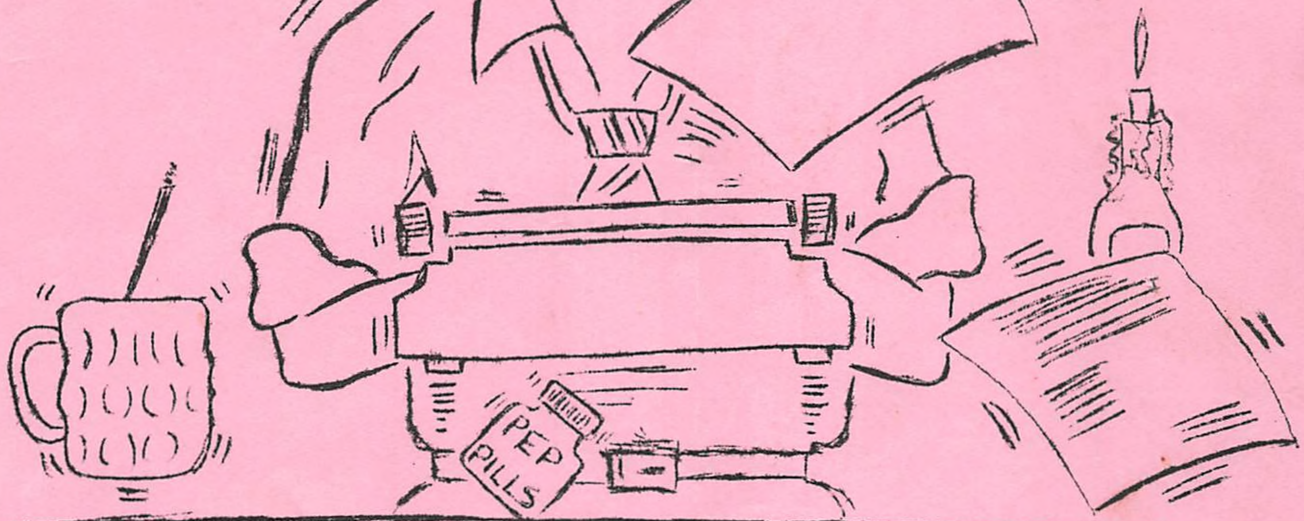


CHUCK

HE HE!!  
HE HE!!  
HE HE!!



FOUR



HE HE!!  
HE HE!!  
HE HE!!



7507

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April/May 77

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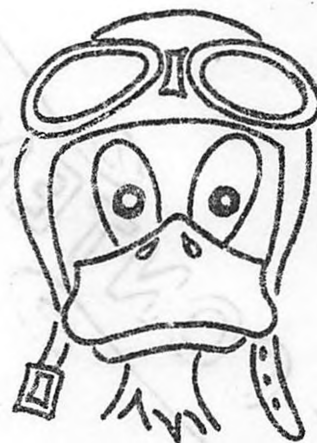
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Artwork: DP



WELL SPRING  
IS HERE



Well Spring is here at long last and who but the Aussies and New Zealanders would complain. Everyone keeps saying "it's been a long Winter" - personally I've very seldom lived through a short one! I always prefer to comment "there's the Ice Cream man" rather than "There's that idiot of an Ice Cream man again!". We have a regular who never misses a week; in fact he's been known to fit chains to his tyres. More power to his elbow - the man is obviously one of true grit! But the trees are budding; colour is creeping back into the gardens, and my tennis elbow is loosening up - a sure sign that Winter is ebbing. A good thing too perhaps, for my electricity bill these last two periods have almost reduced me to tears and now the term "crying all the way to the bank" conveys much more sinister suggestions. Undoubtedly there are others much worse off than I, so perhaps I shouldn't complain. So Spring is in the air and Summer is just around the corner; just the right time for a change in ideals, attitudes and trends. We need not change the world, but how about knocking some sense into the people living on it!

Nuff of this flippancy - now for much more serious matters!

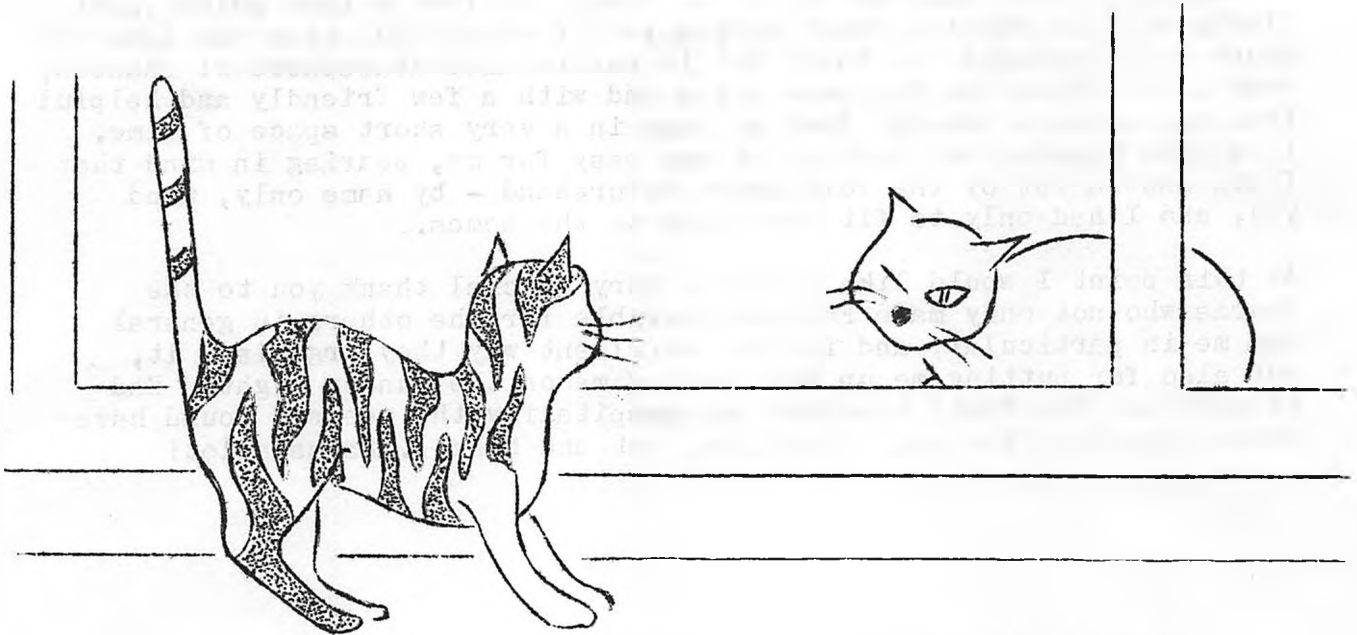
I spent most of yesterday chasing a Biafran-type Tom cat from the house in an effort to protect our cat's virginity. Persistent thing it was too, dammit - it even came slinking up to the windows while we were having dinner! Then when we were sitting watching The Big Match there it was again, at the front this time, wailing like a demented baby and pacing up and down like a hungry albino panther; its eyes seething with lust and lasciviousness. When I went to throw a glass of water over it my wife objected, that is until it piddled all over her rockery plants, whereupon she called it for all the names of the day and promptly threw the water over it herself. It scampered off but not to be deterred it was back again within minutes, gazing in at our pet lying on the hearth rug. We decided to ignore it but it was like trying to ignore a lighted cigarette which had just dropped into your lap and in a joint effort from mama, papa and the offspring it scampered off under a fusilade of paper balls and apple cores. As yet it has not reappeared but the occurrence has forced us to consider putting our furry lady through a 'woman's operation,'



Things have been looking up - last week I found the answer to S F Sleuth's problem (remember Cygnus 2..how could you forget it!) The story in question was THE NIGHT CALLERS by Frank Crisp and the book is now catalogued and safely tucked away in my



bookshelves. I found it on an expedition into the Big Smoke. Joseph Nicholas, that most amiable of writing machines, sent me THE COMING OF JONATHAN SMITH (Harry Ludlam) and I discovered that two other old favourites THE VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE (A E Van Vogt) and DARKER THAN YOU THINK (Jack Williamson) were back on the shelves with nice new reader-enticing covers. What with these, HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE (Shirley Jackson) (thanks to Joseph again!) and the few dozen others I managed to pick up, my library is beginning to look what it was years ago. I'm still searching for THE POSSESSORS (John Christopher) and everything by E F Russell that's in paperback and when I acquire these I will be able to sit back and purchase with satisfied ease.....



And so to Faancon.... It was all I expected it to be and I enjoyed it; the wisecracks, the witticisms, the seriousness of some discussions (if you could call anything that is discussed in hiccupping, slurred and sleepy overtones serious!!) and the entire gang-bang party as a whole. My thanks to Joseph Nicholas and Dave Langford for that first half an hour when they really made me feel at home in strange company. Thanks you two; that session at the bar really broke the ice for me... now I feel as if I have been floundering with the rest of you for ages. And having played electronic football with Gra Poole I can now say quite categorically that he isn't a Grumpy-gub. The term Grumpy-gub lends itself to a dwarfish, wizened, bearded creature who leers out of devilish eyes. Er..ahem..on second thoughts! Thanks to Dave 'The Master' Rowe for taking me along to a vegetarian restaurant - my ears have since elongated somewhat and my sight is improving astronomically which I suppose goes to prove that old saying "you'll never see a rabbit wearing glasses!"

I haven't made up my mind about Dungeons and Dragons at a con but I think I like the game; albeit in small doses. At Faancon I played in Fred Hemmings' dungeon which I feel was a mistake. Others will I'm sure share this opinion, none moreso than Howie Rosenblum who, through my Irish impetuosity to take up arms against an invulnerable monster(which I think Fred dreamed up on the spur of the moment) lost his beloved Osimov, a champion of many dungeons. D & D is good as war

or adventure games go but the problems are the preliminaries which take up too much time (it's worse than Monopoly!!) and at a weekend Con I think it a tragic waste of friendly chat time. However please forgive me all you D & D moguls - it's only an opinion.

Another opinion which might not be shared by others is that I think the Faancon type of con (if you will pardon the vernacular!) is the best in which a neo can really associate himself with the people known otherwise through LoCs or Fanzine editorials only. The hardest thing for any newcomer to a group is the mixing and one does feel ones way. An organised con might just prove to be too much for the newcomer who wants to meet and talk with the people in fandom (who quite justifiably will be running about trying to fit everything they can into the short time available to them) but in the relaxed atmosphere of Faancon; over a few pints the ice soon melts and with a few friendly and helpful fen, any newcomer should feel at home in a very short space of time. I enjoyed Faancon but perhaps it was easy for me, bearing in mind that I did know a lot of the folk there beforehand - by name only, mind you, and I had only to fit the faces to the names.

At this point I would like to say a very special thank you to the Mearas who not only made Faancon possible for the others in general and me in particular, and for the excellent way they organised it, but also for putting me up and feeding me on the Sunday night. Had it not been for their kindness and hospitality the weekend would have ended miserably for me. Thank you, Pat and Mike...thanks a lot!

THEY'LL ALLOW ANYTHING TO SIGN ON  
THESE DAYS....



And now to this ish which, although perhaps not immediately apparent, represents a change of ideas for me. This change has been prompted by a rather prolonged reading session at the Meara's house during which, after Pat plomked a pile of HYPHENS in my lap, I became introduced to Irish fandom for the first time. All thoughts of sleeping left me then and I spent several hours (all that were left before my departure for Liverpool) deeply engrossed in their pages. To me they were sheer magic and not only did I shudder with glee at the bonanza of Willis, White and Shaw wisdom, wit and wonder, I felt a pang of sadness as they brought back happy memories of the time one could travel from one side of Belfast to the other without the slightest fear or reproach. It also surprised me no end to find that James White and Bob Shaw, both of whom I know from my days at Short's aircraft factory, were involved so deeply in fandom, and that Walt Willis lived but around the corner from where I lived in East Belfast. It's a small world!

So how come the change of ideas? Well the truth is that up until now I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do with CYGNUS, and I suppose this sounds daft considering this is its fourth trip, but there was something about those HYPHENS which made me sit up and think. There was nothing flashy about them, no fancy lithoed reduction, no sign of paper that has come from a mint. A typer, stencils, duper and a lively but soft humour was enough to make them magic. So I start afresh and if Messrs Willis, White and Shaw will forgive me I want to use their brand of entertainment. If this means that I will be criticised for trying to resurrect the fandom of the fifties, then I am quite prepared to accept it. If it means that I will be criticised for trying to emulate HYPHEN, then that too I will accept. I offer no excuses and if CYGNUS is ever mentioned in the same breath or even remotely comapred with HYPHEN then I will feel nothing but satisfaction in the knowledge that Irish fandom is once again rising like the Pheonix.

Now to this ish which has a pretty mixed bag. No more electros I'm afraid, with the exception of our friendly cygnet and his arachnoid friend, for they do not come cheap in this quarter of the globe. If I were to pay out for all the electros required for this ish, it might be out in time for Christmas. At this stage I haven't a notion how the artwork will turn out. Both Art and English were my strong subjects in school but my drawing is rusty I'm afraid. I've employed a bradawl, a four-star screwdriver and a needle for shading so I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

For those who reckon I'm mad to live on this side of the pond there is a letter of sorts. For those who like to test their knowledge of SF there's a short quiz. For those who think short story writing in fandom is lousy, there's a lousy short story. There is a report on the recent Eastercon. Some letters of comment and for those who like fun in fandom.....there's a bit of fun!

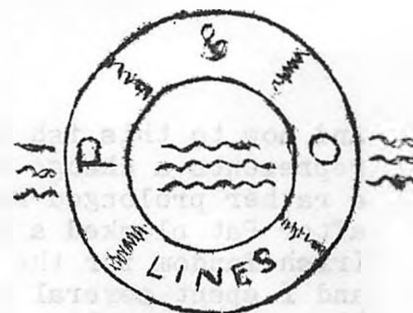
Good hunting!

Dave A

April 1977

Q. What's red and comes out of the ground at 140 mph?  
A. An E-type carrot!

# FASTEN SEAT(BELTS)



THURSDAY 3 FEBRUARY.....

In all honesty I can't say I looked forward to the trip - the destination yes, but not the trip. It's not that I object to travelling as such; only the method of transportation. I'm not a stranger to Derby, having been there more times than I care to remember, but on previous occasions my chauffeur was a Captain of a different breed, with a Viscount or a Ten-Eleven under his control...not a damn great metal hulk of a passenger steamer. And of course, in the executive mode of travel one could always be sure of a cheery smile from one of those beautiful dolly birds - those you hear speaking seductively over the aircraft PA system.

Anyway there I found myself getting off the bus at Oxford Street bus station (the scene of the Bloody Friday bombings) and walking down to the embarkation point of the Belfast to Liverpool ferry. That afternoon I had made enquiries about the weather (not being over enthusiastic about travelling by sea I was a bit concerned) and I shook and trembled all the way to the check in point. Force eight gales - westerly, the words rang in my ears like a message of impending doom. Then I joined the security check queue and what an assortment it contained! There was one bloke in front who looked as if he was either going on an expedition to the Matto Grosso or about to make an attempt on a Himalayan mountain - and taking all his gear with him. We Irish never do things in a small way you know! There was also this woman who started talking like it was her last few lugs of air on God's earth and I wish she hadn't...all she did was complain about the rough crossing two nights before. She cheered me up no end!

Well I got through the baggage check with no problems and joined this queue which appeared to end just around a corner. I moved slowly towards the corner and got one of those niggling doubts when I heard the words "Name rank and Unit". Then I turned the corner and found myself in front of a kiosk behind which a ruddy-faced sergeant with a red band on his arm glowered at me.

" Name rank and unit?"

" Eh!"

" You heard - name rank and unit?"

" I'm not in the army!" My exclamation was met with an icy stare.

" Next!" was his only comment.

I hurried away sheepishly to the Enquiry Desk. Yes - things had definitely got off to a good start!

So I found myself on board; travelling in style as you might imagine with by bed for the night the quarter-inch pile carpet in the First Class lounge. I suppose one could say that we did have a stewardess of sorts - no dolly-bird by any stretch of the imagination, but then she might have been thirty or so years ago. Her nurses cap put me off right away. Not that I dislike nurses - on the contrary I think they are marvellous.....I just hoped her prowling about was not a pre-supposition on her part that I and the three others sharing the same carpet would be needing her services.



Undaunted by the round-the-passehgers cursory glance made by the matronly figure I settled into the reclining aircraft-type seat with TRAPP'S WAR (Brian Callison) and a cigarette but discovered that although I do like Callison I couldn't concentrate amid the loud whisperings of the air-conditioning and the muffled noise of engines. Engines!! I pulled aside the curtain and looked out the window (oops sorry - porthole). We were moving dammit! Ghod I'd missed the take-off! Gloomily I returned to my book.

I must have dozed off for I awoke with a start only to find my stomach in circumstances one expects after a prolonged period of intoxication....cripes I'd only had one glass of beer since setting foot on the darned ship! Was this the hurricane I had feared? I tried to walk to the cafe - this was at eleven o'clock - and found with every other step I was either pawing the air or trying to kick holes in the bloomin' floor! Strewth, a roller coaster was nothing compared to this! I'd just started my coffee when a woman with a soggy cloth in her mitt snatched the ashtray away.

"We're just closing, luv."

"Oh! I'm sorry." then "Is it always like this - up and down?"

"Can't feel a thing, luv," she replied.

And there I was worrying.....I WAS worried!

I finished the coffee spurred on more by the glowering staff as they clattered shutters and flashed lights off and on and staggered back to the lounge, pausing momentarily at the one-arm-bandit to splash twenty pence in wild abandon. I went back to TRAPP'S WAR but discovered that I'd gone off reading for the rest of the night so I tried to make notes. I gave up after a while for my rabid scrawl came out more like Pitman's shorthand and I can't read shorthand! Then I made my first big mistake.....when I pulled back the curtain and looked out of the porthole again. At first the scene which met my eyes was breathtakingly beautiful with climbing mountainous waves and an iridescent wake sparkling in the reflected glare of the ship's lighting. Then the truth hit me like a ton of bricks! I was in the middle of a damn typhoon!! I think I must have turned several shades of green (forty perhaps!) then, putting even the most industrious of chameleons to shame! Ghod, I hate being sick at the best of times and that is pure Irish to say the least.



After that I tried to sleep....on the floor....on the seat, then back to the floor. Being a regular camper and fairly used to some measure of discomfort I thought that I might've been able to get some shut-eye - even with my case for a pillow and overcoat for a blanket. No way! My stomach refused to stay in the one place long enough to allow my imagination to believe that I was at home and tucked warmly against my other half. One - two - three o'clock, two - four - six cigarettes. I eventually dropped off - awoke at four and then at five. I woke up again at six and gave up, then feeling like death warmed up I staggered off to the washroom. I came back to the lounge feeling like death returned to its normal state and looked out of the porthole. Making sure of course, to take a deep breath before doing so! Cheers! Imagine my surprise....the storm had abated, or we had left it to churn itself into infinity in the Irish Sea, for there - were the lights of Liverpool....

FRIDAY 4 FEBRUARY.....

When the train to Crewe left Lime Street station the sky was blue and the wind had almost died to a whisper, so with the sun warming the carriage I settled gratefully into my seat. Now for some of that luxurious sleep. No such luck! I had just closed my eyes when the carriage door opened and I darned near froze to the seat. Ah well, I reflected watching the party of teenagers climbing on board, at least they would be friendly; having recognised the Northern Ireland accents. As it happens they were members of the Ulster ATC rugby team on their way to a match at Nottingham.

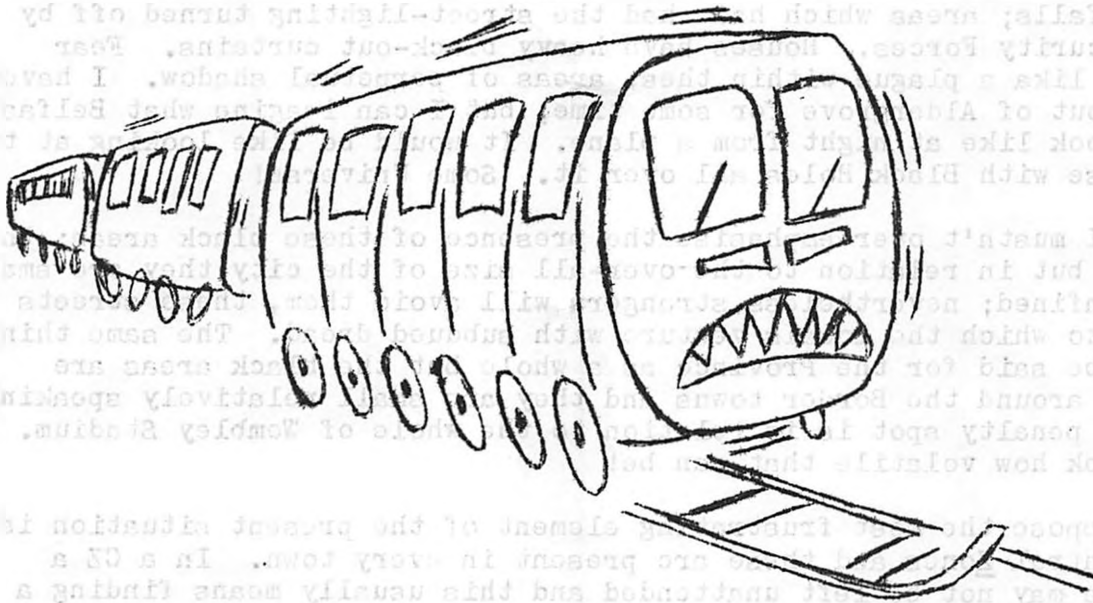
Then we were out in the country with the fields still waterlogged in parts, making the scene look like the Lake District. Travelling by train is a novelty for me and as the carriages swayed and rocked, it brought back memories of when, as kids, we would go down to Sydenham Station and put half-pennies on the lines only to see them flattened beyond recognition after the train had come and gone. We didn't do this often I should add, for in those days a 'make' as a half-penny was known, could purchase numerous goodies such as two Black-Jack chews and a gob-stopper of gynomous proportions, or a packet of bubble gum with a famous footballer card. Those were the days (the steps of SCHRAD) when I really enjoyed the long hot summers and in winter the very thought of snow was enough to send shivers of ecstasy up my spine.

Then somewhere between Liverpool and Crewe a rather strange thing happened....the train stopped in the middle of nowhere! Next thing we heard a door open and this man who we presumed to be the driver or guard, ran along the track to a nearby 'trackside' 'phone. After a prolonged conversation during which he waved his arms about like a marionette he came back to the train shaking his head sadly. We heard a door slam, then the engines revved up and all appeared to be well.. that is until the train started going backwards! When we reached the station we had left some miles back, word came through that the driver had spotted something wrong with the line. We switched tracks and soon were on our way again.

Needless to say this little incident cost me my Derby connection at Crewe and it wasn't until an hour later that I was finally on the last lap of the outward journey....destination Derby Midland!

I arrived at the Clarendon around eleven thirty and after checking in made my way into the centre of Derby; primarily to get something to eat, but in addition to have a scout around the hi-fi and book shops. It was whilst walking about that I found myself glancing suspiciously into cars parked along the sides of the roads and then, as if to make matters worse, I met with an embarrassing moment. I went into Woolworth's and without thinking went up to a Supervisor who was standing just inside the door. You should have seen the look on her face when I lifted my arms into the air. I'm sure that she and the dozen or so others standing nearby who gaped at my apparent futile attempt to fly thought they were being confronted by a lunatic - not an Ulsterman who offers himself for frisking inside the door of every shop he goes into. Red-faced I lowered my arms and hurried past her, conscious of staring eyes as I tried frantically to disappear among the other shoppers. I caught myself on after that little episode but I still couldn't help glancing towards all those empty cars in the streets.

It was two fifteen before I finished my browsing and headed back down the London Road to the hotel. Soon, I thought....soon I would have faces to fit all the names I had grown an affection for in these last few months. Strange faces - but not strange for much longer. My weekend was just about to begin.....



## Quiz

1. What SF story begins "put down that wrench.."?
  2. Who is the current editor of New Writings in SF?
  3. In which novel does Father Ruiz-Sanchez appear?
  4. Who wrote the Quatermass TV serials?
5. Which novel begins with the birthday party for Louis Wu?
6. The 1970 short story Hugo Award went to whom and for which story?
7. What was the British title of D G Compton's novel which had the U S title Chronocules?
8. Who was Captain Pike?
9. Identify the novel which ends "No one dared disturb him or interrupt his thoughts: and presently he turned his back upon the dwindling sun"?
10. Who wrote The Grasshopper Lies Heavy?

Answers on page 18



## A LETTER FROM ULSTER

I'VE NO WAY OF PRINTING ITALICS - HENCE THE USE OF CAPITALS IN THIS INTRO. THE FOLLOWING LETTER IS FROM ME TO YOU AND HAS BEEN PROMPTED BY LETTERS AND COMMENTS ON THE HOLE IN THE STREET SYNDROME WHICH APPEARED IN CYGNUS 2. IT IS WRITTEN, NOT TO INSPIRE FEEDBACK OR SYMPATHY BUT CALLS ONLY FOR AN OPEN MIND AND ASKS FOR UNDERSTANDING....

I have an Uncle - on in years and living in Vancouver. Quite wealthy, who would dearly love to come home to NI for a short stay to see his family. He won't come because of the trouble. I have an Aunt - living in Huddersfield. Not so old; not so well off who would also like to come over to see us all. She won't come because of the trouble. I have an old friend of a different persuasion who braves the streets of Chicago and who would love to reminisce over a pint at our local. He won't come because of the trouble. All very sad....

I suppose the most frightening malignancy which rears its ugly head is fear itself. This affects everyone, young and old alike, some moreso than others depending on the area in which one resides. There are parts of Belfast which remain in a constant state of darkness once night falls; areas which have had the street-lighting turned off by the Security Forces. Houses have heavy black-out curtains. Fear breeds like a plague within these areas of perpetual shadow. I haven't flown out of Aldergrove for some time, but I can imagine what Belfast must look like at night from a plane. It would be like looking at the Universe with Black Holes all over it. Some Universe!

Now I mustn't over-emphasise the presence of these black areas: they exist, but in relation to the over-all size of the city they are small and confined; nevertheless strangers will avoid them, these streets out onto which the locals venture with subdued dread. The same thing could be said for the Province as a whole but the black areas are mostly around the Border towns and they are small relatively speaking - as the penalty spot is in relation to the whole of Wembley Stadium. But look how volatile that can be!

I suppose the most frustrating element of the present situation is the Control Zones and these are present in every town. In a CZ a vehicle may not be left unattended and this usually means finding a spot outside the restricted areas or having someone with you to mind the car while you go about your business. That's only the start of the problem, the rest of it is trying to find a place to park, which seems contradictory to the hole in the street syndrome. Another thing, which really became apparent to me the other day, is the dangers in even leaving your car outside the restricted areas. I almost made the mistake of locking up my car and running away from it to get to a shop before it closed for lunch. I caught myself on just in time! Anyone seen running away from a parked car can cause all sorts of hysteria in NI and if one isn't careful, one can return to find the car being cautiously investigated by the Army. Worse, as has happened to many, the doors blown off or the car reduced to an expensive pyre. Needless to say this sort of thing only happens to people once - once is enough!

But one gets used to the Control Zones and to the constant frisking

Q. What's black, hides in trees and is dangerous?

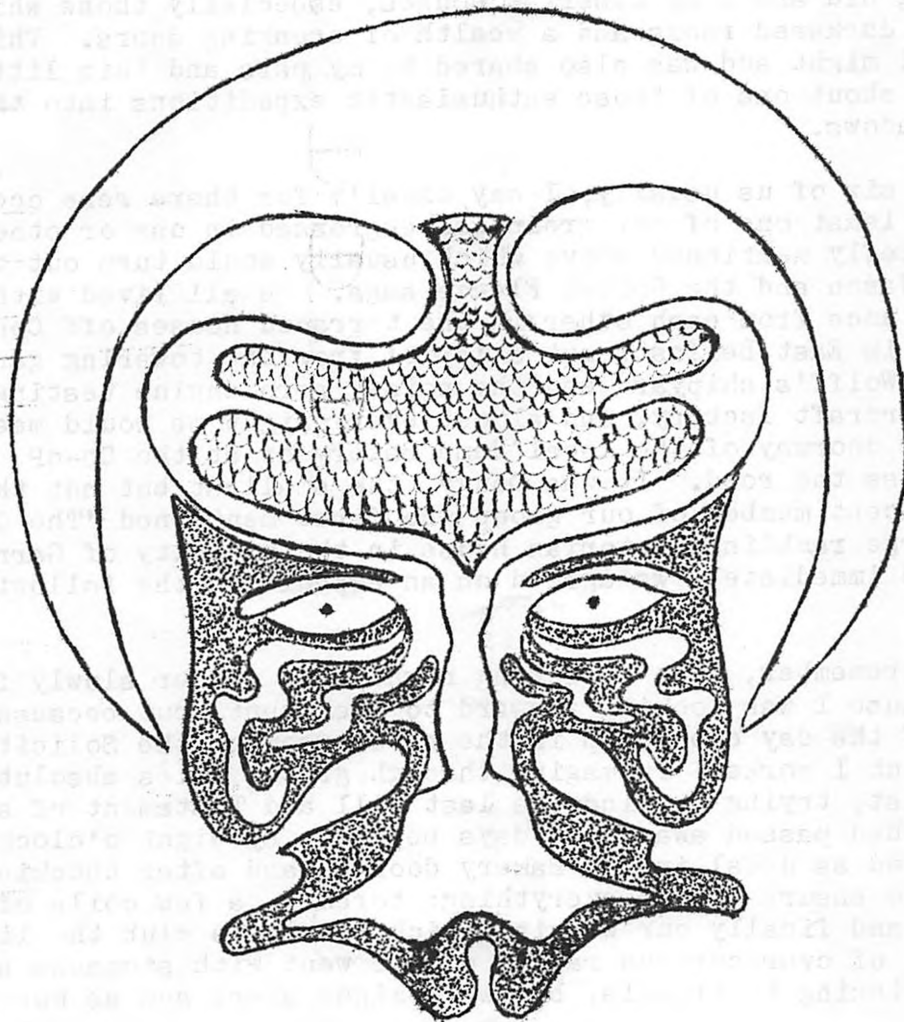
A. A crow with a machine gun!

at the entrance to Belfast's IRON CURTAIN; the tall ring of metal railings around the city, and the electronic metal detectors, and suspicious stares from the Security Guards in the stores, the Saracens, Armoured Personnel Carriers and the Jeeps which scuttle about like angry hornets; and usually most uncompromising should one get in their way. It all becomes an accepted way of life.

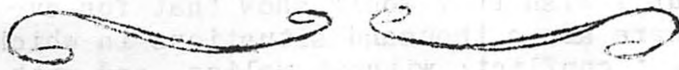
It is generally thought by others that in Northern Ireland, all Protestants and Catholics are constantly at each others throats and who can blame them when the News media; hell bent on sensationalism, have done little to show different. One cannot blame the Press I suppose, considering that sensationalism is what sells newspapers and glues people to their TV screens, but I wish they would show that for every wrongdoing (by either side) there are a thousand situations in which both sides come together without conflict; without malice, and with a will and desire to really live together.

Heaven knows it is hard enough to live and survive comfortably in these days when even the supposedly wealthy are having to budget their bank balances. And life - even for those who are gifted with three score years and ten - is short enough. I love my country as do many thousands of my countrymen and with the combined will of the majority of people who wish only to live in peace with one another, that peace we all crave will come about.

I only hope it happens soon.....



# THE STEPS OF SCHRAD



Playing Dungeons and Dragons at Faancon brought to mind one of the crazy interests I used to enjoy as a teenager - no we are not about to discuss the frenzied exploits of an adolescent rake and neither are we about to embark on an excursion into the realms of rock 'n roll. Not that my teens were not pre-occupied by either of these interests at one time or another mind you, it's just that neither happens to have anything to do with the subject I have in mind....a subject shared by others I dare say, at one time or another. I had a passion for exploring old and long deserted houses, especially those which had numerous darkened rooms and a wealth of creaking doors. This fascination I might add was also shared by my pals and this little evocation is about one of those enthusiastic expeditions into the houses of shadows.

There were six of us usually; I say usually for there were occasions when at least one of our group was engrossed in one or other interests briefly mentioned above which usually would turn out to be yet another Jason and the Golden Fleece saga. We all lived within shouting distance from each other in the terraced houses off Connsbrook Avenue in East Belfast; not a 'spit' from the towering gantries of Harland & Wolff's shipyard and the noisy aero-engine testing beds of Short's aircraft factory, and almost every night we would meet either in the doorway of the local Home Bakery or at the Co-op butchery across the road. It was Dougy, the smallest but not the least significant member of our group who first mentioned 'The Cloisters' - a large rambling Victorian house in the vicinity of Garnerville Nurseries and immediately we agreed on an expedition the following night.

Well, as I remember, that following night came rather slowly for me, not only because I was looking forward to the event, but because I spent most of the day cooped up in the strongroom of the Solicitor's office in which I worked; rummaging through grotty files absolutely swathed in dust, trying to find the last Will and Testament of some old dear who had passed away some days before. By eight o'clock we had congregated as usual in the Bakery doorway and after checking our duffle-bags to ensure we had everything: torches, a few coils of rope, screwdrivers and finally our walking sticks (used to club the living daylight out of over-curious rats!) off we went with stomachs queasy and knees beginning to tremble, but with minds alert and as keen as a razor's edge.

We turned off the main Holywood Road and into the large wooded area



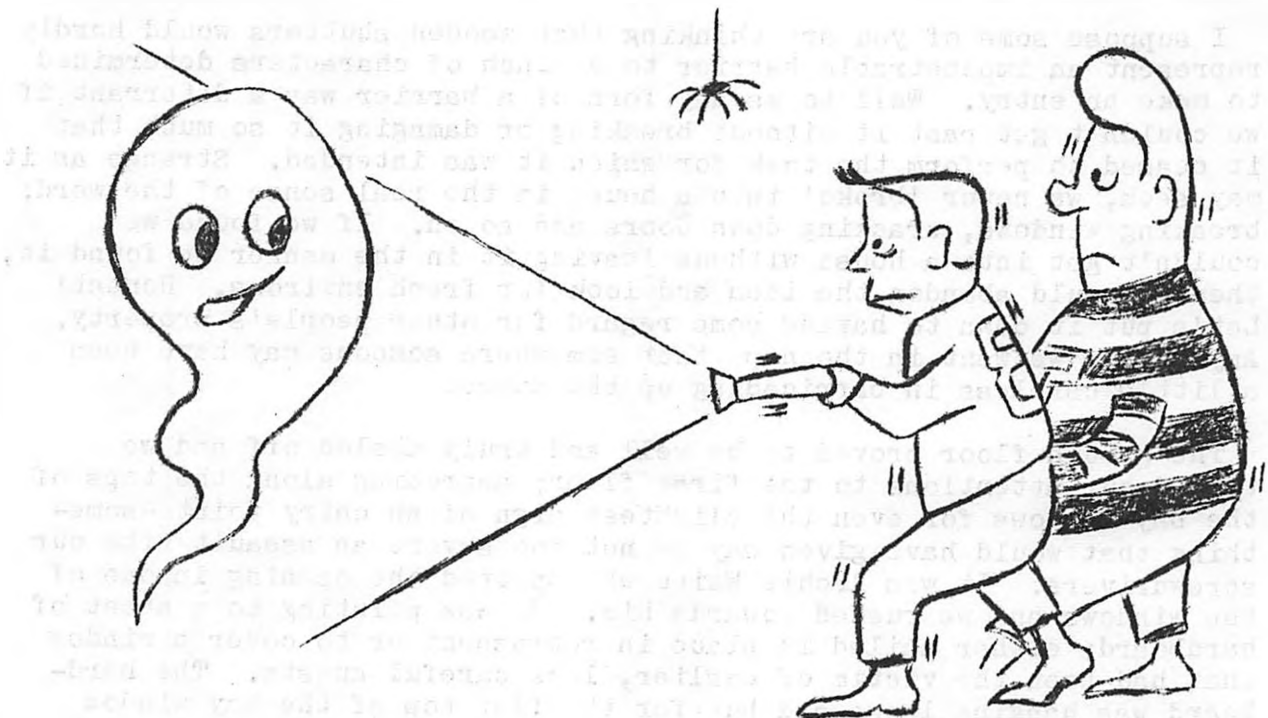
which rose in a gentle incline to the Hollywood Hills. At that time of the year the air was sweet with the smell of flowers not only from the nearby Rhododendron bushes but also from the Nursery from which came some of the best Chrysanths in Northern Ireland. We headed on through the copse in the gathering gloom and then came to an area of open ground. There in front of us looking rather bleak and sinister was 'The Cloisters' as Dougy had aptly named it; a huge two storied house with a cloistered annex going away from side of the building and ending in a tall square tower about the same height as the house itself. We stood for several minutes slightly over-awed by the eerie atmosphere and as was usual I felt a shiver run up my back. These sort of feelings I liked to think were due to the chilly night air but in retrospect I think I had an inbred fear of some of the places we visited. I know it was something I was never prepared to admit. Undaunted by whatever thoughts might have crossed each of our minds we moved towards the bleak outline and then to our disgust discovered that every single window we could see was boarded up from the inside. We turned on Dougy who could only shrug and make a face. However, having come so far, we were not about to give up so easily.

I suppose some of you are thinking that wooden shutters would hardly represent an impenetrable barrier to a bunch of characters determined to make an entry. Well to us any form of a barrier was a deterrent if we couldn't get past it without breaking or damaging it so much that it ceased to perform the task for which it was intended. Strange as it may seem, we never 'broke' into a house in the real sense of the word; breaking windows, cracking down doors and so on. If we found we couldn't get into a house without leaving it in the manner we found it, then we would abandon the idea and look for fresh environs. Honest! Let's put it down to having some regard for other people's property. Anyway, on we went in the hope that somewhere someone may have been a little careless in barricading up the house.

The ground floor proved to be well and truly sealed off and we turned our attentions to the first floor; searching along the tops of the bay windows for even the slightest sign of an entry point -something that would have given way to not too severe an assault with our screwdrivers. It was Archie White who spotted the opening in one of the windows and we rushed towards him. He was pointing to a sheet of hardboard; either nailed in place in retrospect or to cover a window that had been the victim of earlier, less careful guests. The hardboard was hanging loose and but for the flat top of the bay window would have fallen to the ground. We noticed with some satisfaction that there was no glass in the sash window the hardboard had been covering and immediately began searching for some means of clambouring up. As it so happens the house was of the type built of brick with a generous rendering of cement and painted after. This covering had broken away in places and for a person who was an expert at climbing lamposts, as was our Dougy, it was just like offering him a step-ladder. Up he went like a human fly until he reached the flat platform-type top of the window, on reaching which he promptly scrambled over and disappeared. Seconds later he confirmed our suspicions and called down for one of the ropes. It didn't take him long to afix one end in real Boy Scout fashion to a bracked of a down spout and soon we were all climbing up the wall to the opening.

Within minutes we found ourselves inside the old house in a largish

room with three doors. The floor was littered, as was the majority of the remaining rooms in the house, with leaflets and docketts and on examination these were found to be livestock return forms and handouts dating from the war years. There was nothing much else of interest in the room so we tried each of the doors in turn, two of which led into rooms on either side while the other led into a long corridor. We decided to make our way down to the ground floor and with rib cages as tight as drums we moved out into the wide passageway in pairs; heading we hoped, in the direction of the stairs. As luck would have it we came to a large landing and a wide staircase which wound down into the darkness. We hurried down; our feet thumping on the wooden boards. We arrived on the ground floor as one for there wasn't one of us there who wanted to be the first one down or the last one left on the stairs. That might give you some idea as to how nervous we were! I think we frightened ourselves more often than not by having this attitude of mind but I suppose it could be put down to each and every one of us having fairly active imaginations.



And so began the exploration.... The corridor on the ground floor overlooked the front of the house as did the passage on the first floor and to our surprise we discovered that, like the room on the upper floor, the rooms on the ground floor were linked to each other by communal doors. We decided to split into two groups - one keeping to the corridor while the other explored the rooms one at a time. The room party consisted of Dougy, Archie and Dennis 'Tub' Boyle and they disappeared into the first one leaving George Callaghan, Billy McManus and myself in the passage where we were to wait until the next door along was opened. This was we could maintain contact with each other. Yet another indication of our wariness.

The first three rooms appeared to be of no interest to our three intrepid explorers but at the fourth Archie stuck his head out into the corridor and waved his torch in our direction.

" We've found somethin'!" he exclaimed and promptly disappeared back into the room.

We hurried into the room to find Dougy doing a trampoline act on an old brass bed which under torch-light looked as if it had seen better days. Up and down he went with the old spring creaking painfully.

"You'll go on yer ear," said George, playing his torch around the walls.

"No way," replied Dougy, reaching to even greater heights. He was wrong as usual. Two jumps later he cracked his head on the ceiling, lost his balance and ended up on his backside on the floor. He groaned as the wind was knocked out of him.

"Serves you right for showin' off," remarked Billy, testing the tension of the spring. "Lucky you didn't break yer neck!" Then he climbed onto the bed.

Tub, whose outline was anything but sylph-like, clambered on after him and the spring's objectionable creaks were harmoniously joined by the groans of the bed as it sagged under his added weight. Their hope of matching Dougy's altitude was shortlived for Tub's third trip down mortally wounded the bed and it collapsed with a crunch. It was a good job it was an old bed! When the bed-ends folded inwards, Tub found himself firmly emeshed in the jagged ends of the broken spring and of course there was little or no room for Billy who was on his way down to a hard and uncompromising floor. Conclusion - he picked the softest thing within reach of his flailing legs on which to land, which happened to be the unfortunate Tub. Amid cries of...

"Oh Gawd I've ripped my trousers!" and....

"Argh! I'm bleedin'!"  
both landed in a heap on the floor.

When they had finally extricated themselves, Tub was nursing the gash on his shin and Billy a sore elbow; having only seconds before used it as a battering ram on poor ol' Tub's head. I picked up Billy's torch and rattled it until the light worked.....not before the lens rained onto the floor.

"Slap it into you - that's what you get for messin' about, I said handing the torch back to him.

George muttered some well known profanity and shaking his head opened the door into the next room. "C'mon," he said, "we haven't got all night!"

With Tub, Dougy and Billy nursing the various parts of their anatomies we followed George into the next room.

The corridor ended at a narrow flight of steps and up we went accompanied by the agonised groans of Tub who was still hobbling.

"Vampires and ghouls will smell my blood," he grimaced.

"Then they'll be put off right away," I laughed. "Unless of course they're alcoholics."

Someone tittered....

Archie lit a cigarette....

"S'not funny, buggerlugs," croaked Tub, "I fell like I've been mortally wounded...and anyway I don't drink."

"I'm sure someone will think of a word to describe your way of gettin' it down, Tub," said George. He reached for Archie's glowing weed. "G'is a draw."

"Soddoff!"

"Alright - be like that! I'll just have one of my own then!"

When we got to the top of the stairs we arrived at another passage which ended at a door. The door was lying ajar and a noise behind it made us freeze.

There was a clatter as Archie dropped his torch.

"Erk! Whatwussat!" Billy McManus went rigid.





"Crikey I'm goin' home," wailed Tub.

"Jeez don't stand on my torch," cried Archie as Tub's foot descended on it. "It's only plastic for Gawdsake!"

"Argh! That hurt!" swore Tub, as Archie kicked him on the ankle.

"Whaddya do that for?"

"You were gonna stand on my torch!"

I hit Archie a thump on the chest. "Shaddup for Gawdsake!"

"Whaddawe gonna do?" Dougy whispered.

"Sssshh!"

"I'm gettin' outahere!" said Tub.

I hit Archie again.

"Whaddya hit me for - it was him!"

"For cryin' out loud," groaned George. "Howdya expect us to hear anything with all the racket goin' on!"

We waited for what seemed like an age behind the slightly opened door and then at a given signal from George we charged through it as one (for aforementioned reasons!) There was nothing behind the door but the empty corridor.

"Rats!" whispered George.

"Bullocks!" replied Billy.

"No, rats," confirmed George dragging hard on his cigarette.

We agreed to stop and have a smoke and as we sat in the dank corridor the whispers came at intervals.

"I wonder what sort of place this was?"

"Dunno - an office building by the look of it."

"This house stinks!"

"It was warm today - the creaks must be the house coolin' down."

"Those buildings in the grounds...air raid shelters?"

"Yeah, and they stink like the house!"

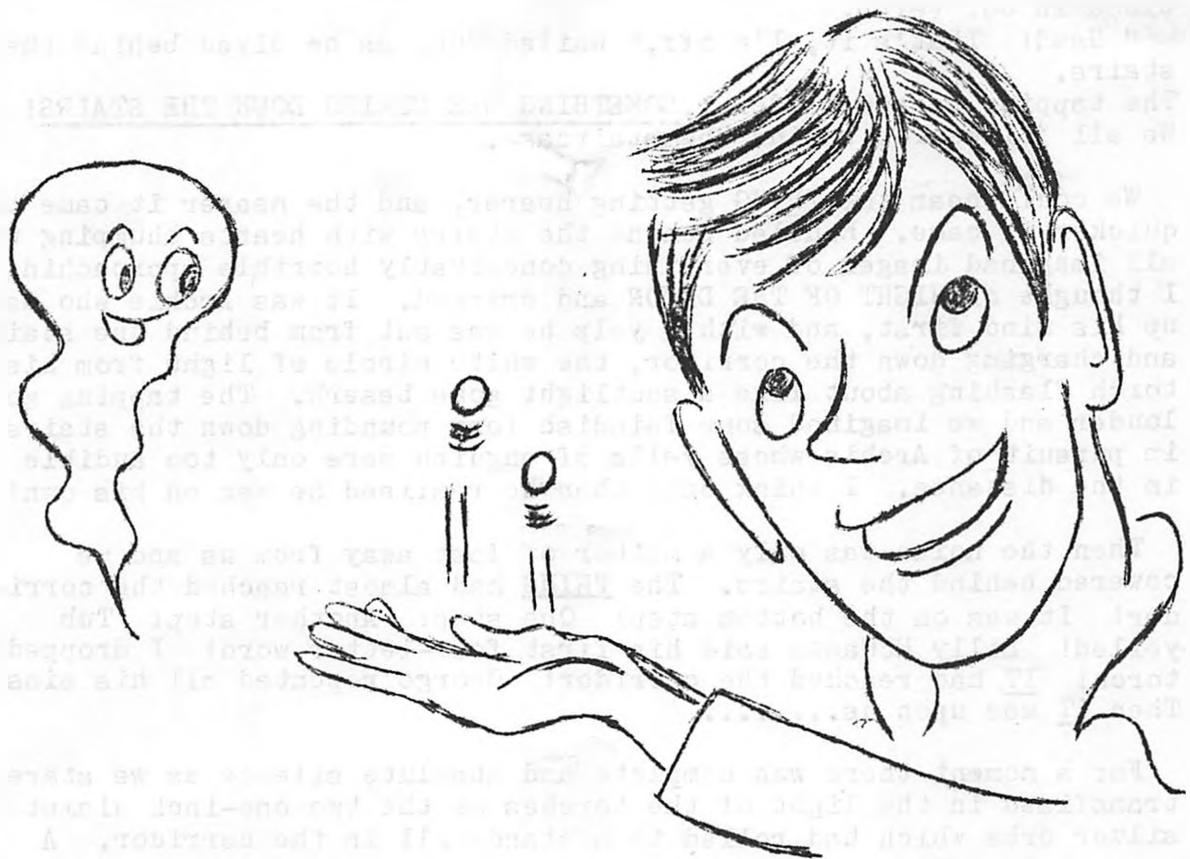
"Good place to bring a bird this."

"Why?"

"It's too morbid....wrong atmosphere."

"Gawd, I'm starvin'!"

into friendly banter but needless to say that little incident was enough to destroy completely our waning enthusiasm for any further exploration of that old house and disgruntled we made our way back to the opening through which we had made our entry. The only thoughts which entered my mind as we made our way home that night was if there had been any ethereal embodiment in the house I'm sure it would never forget our noisy and rather brief visit. I know we certainly didn't.



#### ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. BLOW-UPS HAPPEN by Robert Heinlein
2. Kenneth Bulmer
3. A CASE OF CONSCIENCE by James Blish
4. Nigel Kneale
5. RINGWORLD by Larry Niven
6. Samuel Delaney, for TIME CONSIDERED AS A HELIX OF SEMI-  
PRECIOUS STONES.
7. HOT WIRELESS SETS, ASPERIN TABLETS, THE SANDPAPER SIDES OF MATCH-  
BOXES AND SOMETHING THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN CASTOR OIL
8. The original Captain of the USS Enterprise in the pilot program  
for STAR TREK. Played by Jeffrey Hunter.
9. CHILDHOODS END by Arthur C Clarke
10. Hawthorne Abendsen in THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE by Philip K Dick.

Q. What's green, hairy and goes up and down?

A. A gooseberry in an elevator!

We found nothing much of interest on that floor, just the dust of years of unuse and a few empty buckets and boxes. Then we arrived at the stairs and feeling a trifle disappointed we turned and made our way back to the steps at the other end of the corridor with the object of finding access to the flat roof of the cloisters and the tower beyond. When we arrived at the bottom of the steps we hunted around but luck avoided us....there was just no way out without us deliberately breaking the shutters down. Then from the top of the steps we had just come down, we heard that same creaking groan only this time it was followed by a tapping sound which chilled the blood in our veins.

"Gawd! That's it, I'm off," wailed Tub, as he dived behind the stairs.

The tapping became louder...SOMETHING WAS COMING DOWN THE STAIRS!  
We all joined Tub behind the staircase.

We could hear the THING getting nearer, and the nearer it came the quicker it came. Huddled behind the stairs with hearts thumping we all imagined images of everything conceivably horrible approaching. I thought of NIGHT OF THE DEMON and cringed. It was Archie who made up his mind first, and with a yelp he was out from behind the stairs and charging down the corridor, the white circle of light from his torch flashing about like a spotlight gone beserk. The tapping got louder and we imagined some fiendish form pounding down the stairs in pursuit of Archie whose yells of anguish were only too audible in the distance. I think only then he realised he was on his own!

Then the noise was only a matter of feet away from us and we cowered behind the stairs. The THING had almost reached the corridor! It was on the bottom step! One step! Another step! Tub yelled! Billy McManus said his first four-letter word! I dropped my torch! IT had reached the corridor! George repented all his sins! Then IT was upon us.....

For a moment there was complete and absolute silence as we stared transfixed in the light of the torches at the two one-inch diameter silver orbs which had rolled to a standstill in the corridor. A mixture of relief and disbelief flooded into us as we rose slowly and came out from behind the stairs.

"Bloodyhellfire!" I breathed.

"I think I've wet myself!" groaned Tub.

"DOUGEEEEEE!!!!!" yelled George.

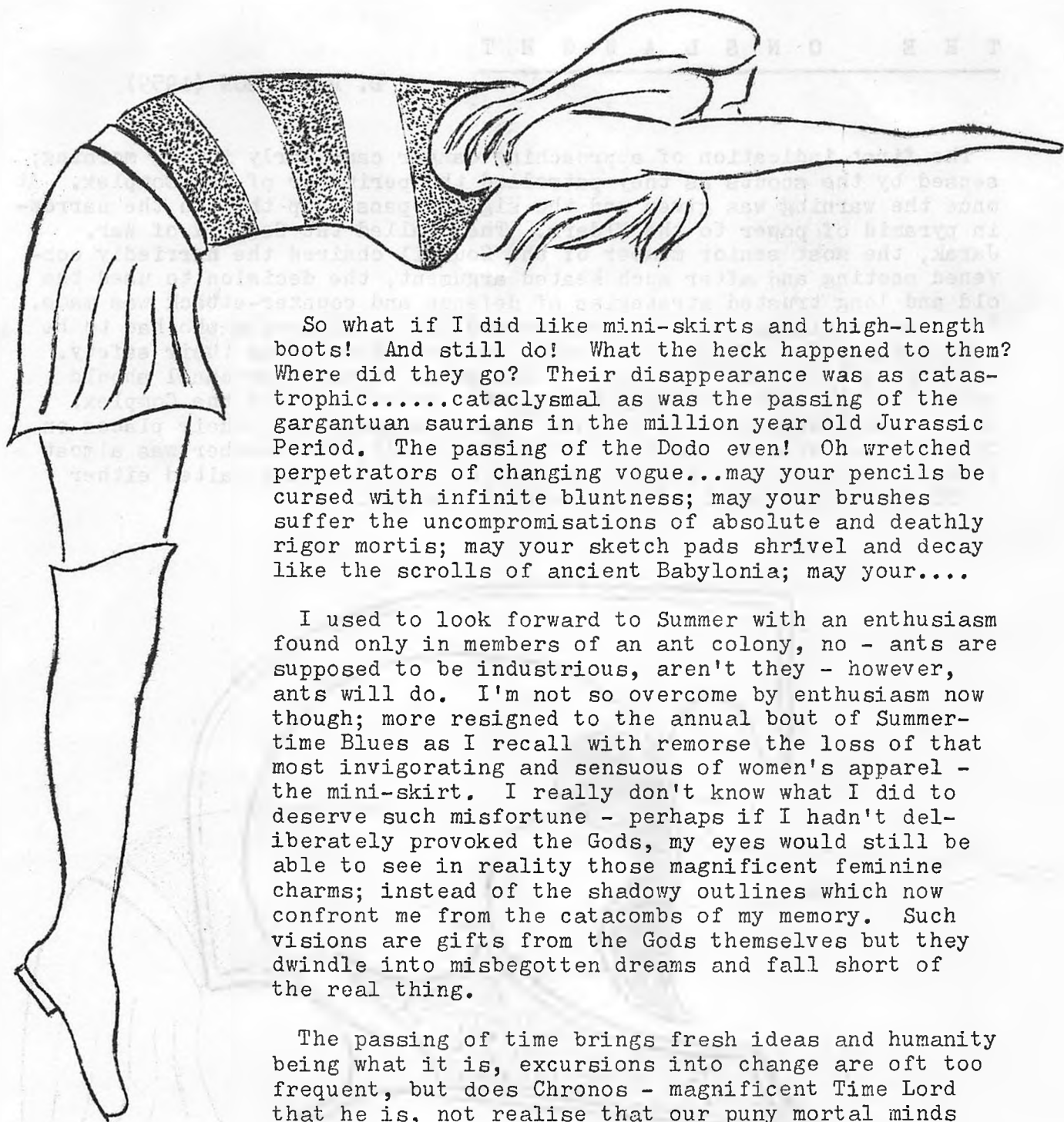
There was a clatter of footsteps as Dougy came charging down the stairs.

"Scaredyez didn't I!" He yelled, jumping the last few steps.

Archie came back, having heard the voices and he joined us as we watched Dougy retrieve the two steel balls and carefully wrap them in his handkerchief. Then Tub, still trembling after his most harrowing experience, and with rage, went beserk and threatened to paste Dougy all over the walls, ceilings and floors of the house. It took three of us to hold him back and eventually we managed to calm him down, but not before he promised to dispose of the two offending metal objects upon Dougy's person in a most undignified and painful manner. Needless to say Archie wasn't too pleased at Dougy's prank either. He had returned nursing a rather painful looking gash on his lower lip having run slap-bang into the one and only door in the house which opened outwards.

For all the shouting however, thankfully it eventually turned





So what if I did like mini-skirts and thigh-length boots! And still do! What the heck happened to them? Where did they go? Their disappearance was as catastrophic.....cataclysmal as was the passing of the gargantuan saurians in the million year old Jurassic Period. The passing of the Dodo even! Oh wretched perpetrators of changing vogue...may your pencils be cursed with infinite bluntness; may your brushes suffer the uncompromisations of absolute and deathly rigor mortis; may your sketch pads shrivel and decay like the scrolls of ancient Babylonia; may your....

I used to look forward to Summer with an enthusiasm found only in members of an ant colony, no - ants are supposed to be industrious, aren't they - however, ants will do. I'm not so overcome by enthusiasm now though; more resigned to the annual bout of Summer-time Blues as I recall with remorse the loss of that most invigorating and sensuous of women's apparel - the mini-skirt. I really don't know what I did to deserve such misfortune - perhaps if I hadn't deliberately provoked the Gods, my eyes would still be able to see in reality those magnificent feminine charms; instead of the shadowy outlines which now confront me from the catacombs of my memory. Such visions are gifts from the Gods themselves but they dwindle into misbegotten dreams and fall short of the real thing.

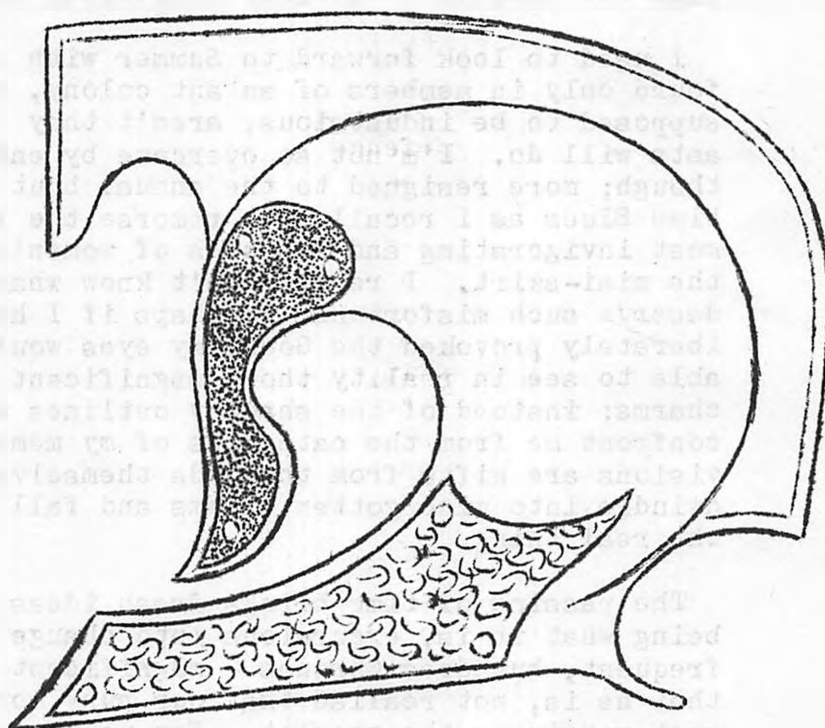
The passing of time brings fresh ideas and humanity being what it is, excursions into change are oft too frequent, but does Chronos - magnificent Time Lord that he is, not realise that our puny mortal minds must remain in the present. For us the past is a memory; the future mere speculation.

Yes, for me the Mary Quants and Hardy Amies' of this world are burdened with what must be a most unpardonable sin. They have deprived me of my long-legged shapely beauties and replaced them with ill-garbed Persophones which do nothing for me.

So what if I liked them - and still do!

*ad gustum*

The first indication of approaching danger came early in the morning; sensed by the scouts as they patrolled the perimeter of the Complex. At once the warning was given and the signals passed up through the narrow-in pyramid of power to the Elders. They called the Council of War. Jarak, the most senior member of the Council chaired the hurriedly convened meeting and after much heated argument, the decision to use the old and long trusted strategies of defence and counter-attack was made. Now their decision would be put forward to the Community who had to be made fully aware of the peril which was now threatening their safety. Quickly he broadcast that all but the outer defence personnel should gather in the main assembly area - the central zone in the Complex. By the time Jarak and his brother Council members took their places on the elevated dias at the head of the huge hall, the chamber was almost full to capacity and strangely hushed as the Community waited either confirmation or denial of the dreadful rumours.



Slowly Jarak raised himself and looked around the tightly packed chamber.

" Brothers and sisters," he started, "often we have had to contend with dangers from the alien forces living beyond our world - and as often we have succeeded in repelling those who have threatened our existence; not without loss of numbers and terrible hardship." He paused and looked out over the sea of faces. " This morning, word was received of yet another attempt to destroy us.. This new threat with which we will soon be confronted is not totally unexpected - for we have always been aware that one day we would come face to face with a terrible adversary from whom we could expect no quarter. An adversary of tremendous ferocity and strength. Beyond our world, in the timeless eddies of the Great Reaches we are known as a race of strength and reasoning but only foolhardiness

on our part would permit us to believe that no others would dare match their strength against us. I tell you now, my brothers and sisters, that foe is now approaching." His voice died to a whisper. "I cannot tell you in all sincerity that we will survive this latest onslaught, but what I will say to you is this.....our strength is in our numbers and the will and combined might with which we have confronted others will make this latest enemy pay heavily for his folly." Slowly he raised his arms above his head. "Come tomorrow we all might be in the land of our fathers.....in the Valley of Sleep, but let not your hearts be troubled, we will fight as only we know how and perhaps the great God will be with us. Go now, my brothers and sisters - go in strength."

At once there arose a great shout from the crowd; military and civilian citizens joining in voice to cheer their leader. Then with voices ringing in a joyful victory chant the multitude dispersed; each one in the throng making for his or her appointed position. Soon the great hall was empty and Jarak turned to his colleagues.

"It is time, my friends. Today we stand together." With that he hurried in the wake of the crowd while the remaining Elders looked at each other grimly.

"Jarak is strong," one said, staring after the disappearing figure.

"And Jarak has wisdom," said another. Then they quickly followed after him.

When Jarak walked out into the sunlight he stared down into the valley below where his people were massing together in their respective positions; forming into lines of defence. To the North the military; besplendant as the morning sun reflected off their armour in a dancing glittering haze. They took up position to form the first of a two-pronged line of defence and counter-attack. To the South, the civilian workers grouped to form the second prong. Below him; forming the main line of defence and counter-attack waited the Elite Guard. It would be their task to repel the initial attack, while the pincers of the Northern and Southern units closed in on the enemy's flanks. This strategy had worked many times in the past and indeed he hoped it would work again. Yes, it would work. He felt a tremendous surge of pride well up inside him. For several moments the clamour of moving bodies ceased and a deathly silence settled over the valley. Everyone waited news from the scouts.

The came from the East; rushing to their Commanders with the news of their findings and then immediately taking up their positions in the ranks. The Commanders of the flank positions waved their units back until they were swallowed up in the undergrowth, then the Commander of the Elite Guard gave the order for his first battalion to advance. The large square formation moved forward - away from the Complex entrance, and their place was taken by the second battalion of the illustrious warriors. Jarak turned towards the sun and searched along the wall of tall savannas. From there the enemy would emerge, from there would come the merciless charge. He could hear the sound of the enemy now and in his heart he realised that the fatal hour was almost upon them.

The morning sun crept slowly upward towards its Zenith; hovering over the valley which would soon become an arena. All other forms of life had ceased their chatter; momentarily halted in their daily lives as they waited the outcome of the approaching carnage - a carnage they were



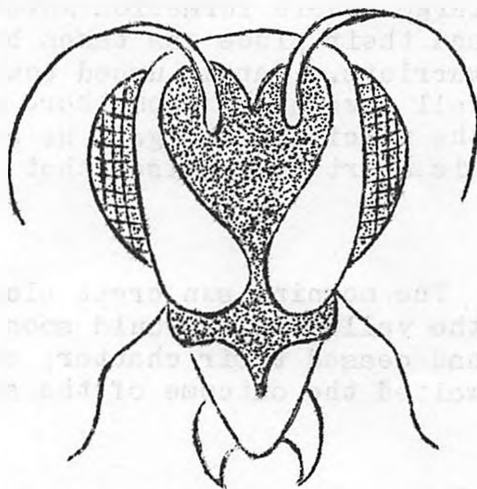
powerless to stop. The birds, safe in their hideaways, watched almost casually as the two battalions of Guards waited in tight formation, while other creatures both great and small moved off to watch the onslaught from afar - the wished no part of the halocaust. The noise of the approaching enemy sounded close now and after several crisp, final words of command, the Guards raised their weapons as one. Suddenly the savanna parted and the two mighty forces faced each other. At once there was a roar and the enemy rushed forward - its target the Elite Guard; the final defensive group of Elders; the entrance to the great Complex. Its objective; the absolute destruction of the great city and its inhabitants.

Force met force - strength met strength as the two opposing adversaries struggled in the arena of survival. The Elite Guard pressed forward, forcing their way into the heat of the enemy, but its strength was immense and they were forced to withdraw. Again they lunged forward, spurred on by their Commander's voice which called to them above the turmoil of battle and time and time again they were crushed underfoot or swept up and swallowed by the great maw of the enemy. The Commander urged his units forward again, forcing the enemy back towards the waiting Northern and Southern forces. Then ever so slowly they gained ground; fighting against tremendous odds until the enemy was driven back. At the given signal the pincers closed - attacking at the weakening flanks. Again the Guards pressed home their advance, forcing their foe into the waiting weapons of the Northern and Southern units. They had but one thought. To prevent the enemy reaching the Complex.

Then in one final effort the enemy made an almost suicidal charge and broke the ranks of the weakened Guards. Jarak, watching with his colleagues, braced himself for the final stand; waiting for that death dealing blow. A rallying shout came from the scattered battalions and in a death defying charge they flung themselves into another attack. It was all or nothing now, and the dead or dying were crushed into the dust of the valley floor as the defending army surged forward to protect their leaders and the future of their species. Strength returned to weakened limbs, resolve was re-born as they fought back grimly; fighting with unmatched gallantry until the enemy was beaten back...retreating into the safety of the savanna with hate and retribution biting at its heels.

Later that night, when the wounded had been tended and the dead mourned and laid to rest, Jarak faced his people in the great domed assembly area. That day, he told them, they had stared defeat and death in the face and survived. Now it was time to rebuild their defences and to make them stronger than ever before. Once more they had faced extinction and once more they would live to fight again,

Not far away from the great mound of earth and stones that was the Complex, the Giant Ant-Eater licked his wounds. Now it would think twice before attacking the home of the White Sauba-ants.



# drunkard's diary

Eastercon 77.....

as viewed by Joseph  
Nicholas

This soon after the con my brain should be unsullied, my memories unfaded, my thoughts as clear as the purest crystal; but this, of course, just isn't the case. I can remember only isolated incidents, and even those not in the order in which they happened. But am I daunted? Of course not! Conreps are little more than a collection of invented trivia in any case....



Being broke, I didn't spend the Thursday night in Coventry. Instead, I went to the Tun, it being the first Thursday of the month in any case, and found it to be surprisingly crowded for what now seems to be regarded as the first day of the con. Dave Langford thrust a fanzine into my hands; it bore the title of Bulging Lobes, but closer examination proved it to be actually Twll-Ddu 6, back from the grave with a directory of fandom so contrived that a silence, broken only by the furtive rustling of paper, descended throughout the pub as those present fell to looking up their names to see what scandal had been surreptitiously attached to them.... Dave later talked to Hartley Patterson about D & D for five minutes before realising who he was and hastily handed him a fanzine to make up for it. I found it pertitent to remark that this was the first time I had ever seen Dave demonstrate cringing servility to which he retorted that I was pinching all his best lines before he himself could use them. I suppose I might have been, but I certainly can't remember any of them now.

When I eventually arrived in Coventry about Friday lunchtime, almost the first thing I did was to make for the bar, only to discover that what had been the main bar two years ago had now become the book room. While no one could deny that an enlarged book room wasn't needed - the sudden proliferation in the actual number of dealers over the past couple of years has made it a virtual necessity - the net result was to shift the main bar downstairs into the "public" area of the hotel - a bar that was smaller, more claustrophobic in its decor and often choked with mundanes between the evening hours of six and eleven.

Win a little, lose a little...up in the book room, then, as I managed to avoid spending vast amounts of money on second-hand paperbacks, another fanzine was thrust into my hands. Assiduous study of the cover convinced me that I was looking at it upside down; it turned out to be John and Eve

Harvey's Ghas 3. Mumbling my thanks, I began leafing through in search of my own loc, imbibing Cinzano-and-lemonade-with-lots-of-ice the while.

The afternoon trundled along without much help from me. I talked, I drank, I went to the Fandom Room and had Dave Bridges thrust a tinsel-wrapped concoction into my willing hands. It wasn't One-Off 4, it was... but the title defied immediate comprehension. When I finally steelled myself to read it, I found it wasn't as bad as bad as One-Off 3...

The SF Mastermind Quiz later that afternoon was fun, won in fairly convincing style by the Gollancz Boy Wonder, Malcolm Edwards ( who remembered to turn up this time), just pipping Dave Langford at the post for the title, with Kevin Williams and last-minute substitute Gerry Webb trailing distantly in third and fourth places. But this was not all; so incensed was the questionmaster Pete Weston by audience front-man Roy Kettle's bland assurance that he knew all the answers without having to stop and think about them that Pete put Roy in the chair just for the hell of it. Roy answered most of the questions correctly too, demonstrating that membership of the Astral Leauge in an obviously indispensable step along the road to Inner Cosmic knowledge.

Yes, the Leauge! What fandom would do withou the awesome spectre of D. West, the Boak only knows. He and his willing sidekick, Brian Parker, have now achieved such perfection in the art of extracting 50p from unwilling volunteers, over whom D. looms which such God-like omnipotence, that they must surely keep themselves permanently pissed on the results. Yes, yes, - I bought a badge, I bought a yearbook - although I must say that 20p seems an extraordinarily low price to pay for the secret of the Bermuda Triangle. No wonder they have to have such continuous-donation facilities as the Best Award.

It was later this day that Kev Smith approached me and, fixing me with a beard-immersed eye, informed me that I wasn't irritating him any more. I was so surprised by this unexpected revelation that I almost bought him a drink, but refrained in the nick of time; saving such monumental extravagance until the Sunday. Exactly why I irritate Kev Smith is largely unknown to both of us. He claims, in fact, to have some explanation for this phenomenon but at the same time finds it impossible to put this explanation into words. The Faancon conversation has already been chronicled by Dave Langford (in Paul Skelton's TZTHNN 2), so I'm not going to repeat it here as an example of the "irritation" he means; but I suppose I ought to add that he doesn't irritate me at all. Well - not yet, anyway....

The hall was predictably crowded the next morning for Bob Shaw's talk on "The Gret Bermondsey Triangle Mystery", a subject even more preposterous than the beer-powered spaceship outlined last year. Full of laughs, and what must surely be one of the most contrived jokes ever told, it was also the first time I've ever seen Bob laugh at one of his own jokes. The prime feature of any of Bob's talks, of course, is his unvarying deadpan delivery, which on this occasion cracked up completely, to be exacerbated by the materialisation of Brian Burgess at his side, pies and milk at the ready, which resulted in the ending of the whole thing falling suddenly flat.

So to the Fandom Room... Overwhelmed by the talent that surrounded me then, I feel secure enough now to speak my piece. Yes, we do need the Fandom Room, and not just as a place for neos to come and find out something about fandom. It's needed for established fans to find each other in the general press of a convention, a place to meet and talk away the chaos that habitually infests the bar areas. Okay, so the convention is run by fans for fans, but I don't think the traditional idea of a fannishly orientated con quite holds up these days, mainly due to the sheer numbers of neos flooding in faster than we can accomodate them. Let's face it, most neos come to their first con for the SF diet offered them in the programme; fandom, for them, comes a poor second. Science Fiction has a mass audience; fandom does not (and nor, I suspect, does it want one!), and the



program has to take account of this, offering fannish items as a sideline to tempt the neos into eventually setting themselves afloat on a sea of fanzines - fanzines that they can inspect in the calmness of the Fandom Room.

The Fandom Room also appeared to be the weekend headquarters of the Astral Leauge, with Leauge Yearbooks and cassette tapes of the Leauge's Golden Greats on sale to those who sought spiritual comfort via the One True Way. The tape had been recorded by fandom's answer to Mike Oldfield, Graham Charnock, overdubbing mightily to set new standards in punk rock, blues, country, trucking songs...why, you could even hear the words. But despite the pernicious influences of the Leauge, the Fandom Room was really where it was at. I said as much to Greg Pickersgill and received a look of total perplexity for my pains. Suitably miffed, I went in search of another drink...

The curtain descends, lifting to reveal me seated in the downstairs bar with John and Eve Harvey, Mike and Pat Meara and Boris Lawrence. Discussing the forthcoming fancy dress parade, I wondered aloud how little the despised Helen McCarthy would be wearing this time, and expressed a semi-coherent desire to race down the aisle at her moment of triumph, rip her costume from her and make-off leaving her covered in nothing but embarrassment.

"What would it take to get you to do it?" asked Boris, who loathed her even more than I did. "A drink!" I responded, only dimly aware that I was prostituting my talents for an extraordinarily low fee. He bought me a drink and I found myself suddenly committed. I gulped for air, and Mike promised me a bottle of Cinzano should I carry out my mission. My reserve began to strengthen; glory would be mine! Also, no doubt, a hangover.... I had three hours in which to psyche myself up. Three hours! I began drinking even faster...

When the time for the parade arrived, and I went to take up my self-appointed position, it seemed like half the hall knew of my impending stunt. Gannets, Rats, Kittens - even the forbidding enigmatic figure of D. West - looked at me with expressions of expectancy and anticipation. Bloody hell! How many people knew of my plan? And had the news filtered through to her....? "It's alright," said Boris, "It's a one-piece, too tight. You'll never get it off." But hatred now suffused my very being. Nothing could stop me. I would be as an avenging angel of retribution; my grasping fingers would be as the flaming sword that drove Adam and Eve forth from the Garden of Eden. My teeth clenched together, my brow furrowed, my eyes blazed, I took a last swig of my drink..and chickened out. Later, Ian Maule told me that the expression on my face as she came up the aisle was terrible to behold.

The parade itself was of people dressed as characters from Marvel and DC comics. Comics...at an SF convention? Like Graham Charnock (in Stop Breaking Down 4), I tend to have a rather parochial view of conventions; they're for science fiction and science fiction fans, not Trekkies or Dr. Who freaks. Okay, so call me narrow-minded, but you've got to draw the line somewhere. The playlet the parade entrants presented while the judges were trying to reach a decision was unintentionally hilarious - a cock-up from start to finish that got more laughs than it really deserved. The script (written by someone whom I've probably maligned already), behind its cliches and its hopeless acting, seemed to have something to do with female domination of the universe. Truly there is more to comix fandom than meets the eye.

Sunday morning was the convention business meeting. A good title that, although a little pretentious for what is really no more than a simple bidding session. Or almost simple; with only the one bid for next year (Skycon), to quibble over the details of air conditioning in the bedrooms,

nearby eating facilities and why the room prices don't include breakfast seemed ludicrous. From the back of the hall, Ken Slater kept shouting about the need for a cheap breakfast, a meal that half the con members don't get up in time to eat and couldn't care less about anyway ( I only eat it because I'm paying for it at the room price), until Liese Hoare, her patience finally exhausted, shouted back that the hotel couldn't possibly guarantee food prices a year in advance. Silence fell as this gem was digested, a silence broken by Greg Pickersgill pointing out that, since we did only have the one bid, our only choice was in whether to have a con next year or not. We voted to have a con...

Later, I found myself at the back of the Fairfax Suite with Greg, Simone, John and Eve and Ian Williams. We are ostensibly there to listen to the after dinner speeches, but in actuality.... Guest-of-Honour John Bush cracks a feeble joke; there is polite applause. Brian Aldiss gets an award for SF criticism and gives a speech about Oslo. Other minor baubles are distributed; but we're waiting for the big one, the Doc Weir Award, which this year goes to...Keith Freeman.

Malcolm Edwards got it in 1974 for the simple reason that Greg and Simone stationed themselves next to the ballot box and distributed ready-filled forms to be signed and deposited. Stuffing the ballot box, yes, but at least it ensured that the award went to someone who deserved it. In 1975 it went to Pete Weston; in 1976, to Ina Shorrock; did either of them deserve it? Weston, maybe, but Shorrock? Hell, no! And now, to award it to Keith Freeman, a fan who might have done wonders for the BSFA but has done absolutely nothing as far as fandom goes for the last thousand years (unless you count duplicating the first few issues of Dave Langford's Twll-Ddu as a service worthy of such an award), is practically the height of absurdity - a sure sign, if ever one was needed, that the Award has now lost all its value and has become no more than an instrument of the old-boy network. We'd all participated in stuffing the ballot box for our chosen candidate this year, sure, but the secret processes of the award administration's vote-counting don't do anything to dispel the feeling that the intended resipient was probably selected well in advance in any case.

We filed out looking despondent, thinking hateful thoughts, and I snatched a half- empty bottle of wine from one of the tables on my way towards the door.

Into the hall for the dance, then, to the music of the Burlingtons. Magnificent stuff; Graham Charnock was surely cast from the same mould as all the great rock guitarists, contriving a look of total boredom as he thumped his way through rock 'n roll classic after rock 'n roll classic. In between admiring his style, Greg and I shouted out "Saints!" in the request spots, Roy Kettle shouted "Rockaboogie!" and Peter Roberts shouted "Reggae, mon!" later changing his mind and shouting "Surf music!" instead. They ignored that and gave him his reggae, Roy eventually got his rockaboogie, but Greg and I never got our Saints, despite the fact that Charnock was wearing his punk rocker's plimsoles. Rog Peyton jived almost continuously, putting the rest of us to shame. Close observation of his style revealed a strange paralysis that afflicted his left arm whenever the music started, to depart whenever the music stopped. When this little-known fact was pointed out to him, he denied it vehemently, waving the arm before us as though to demonstrate the wondrous healing powers of Charnock's guitar strings. Then the music started again...and I have this photograph...

The dance finished at two in the morning (with everyone still yelling for more and being ignored in true professional fashion by the band) and the room parties began. There really were room parties this time; but then, on the last night of a con, who the hell wants to go to bed? I

cruised from one to another, stopping off at the bar for the occasional re-fill; so broke was everybody that there wasn't alcohol in peoples private stocks to go around, and there was certainly none of my favourite tippie anyway. In one room, John Harvey produced his polaroid and took a photograph of me looking strangely belligerent...on my right in the picture is Helen Eling with a puzzled expression on her face, as though trying to fathom my innermost thoughts.... When the clouds that obscure my memory pass away once more, I am sitting on the floor of a room crowded with Rats and Gannets, with Ritchie Smith's feet not an inch from my glass of rum and coke (yes, really!), trying to stay awake and not succeeding. Could it really been Ritchie's feet - or the sight of Rob Hansen stretched out across the bed, oblivious to the world.

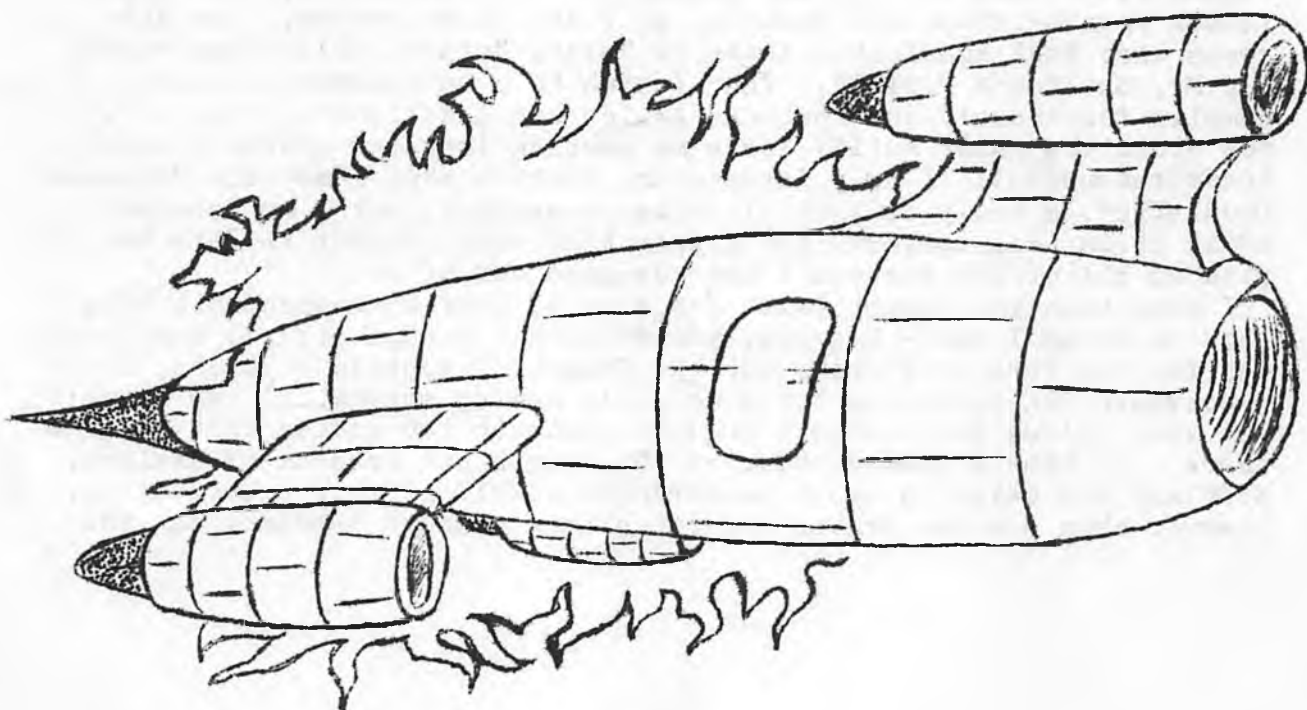
Whatever, I departed for bed sometime around five, but found time to take a photo of Ian Maule in a compromising position with Janice's handbag before getting there. In retrospect, I should also have taken one of Greg, fast asleep on the senenth floor landing, snoring mightily. Quite a sight...

In the morning, I sat in the hall and watched Zero Population Growth, which seemed to go in through my eyes and straight out the back of my head mere seconds later; I remember thinking at the time that it was a movie with a basically viable theme but a totally bungled execution, but now I can't remember a thing about it. I also saw the trailer for the forthcoming Star Wars, which looks as though it'll be really worth waiting for despite its obviously Planet Stories overtones.

With a few more drinks inside me - and my dehydration playing havoc with the inside of my mouth - I left, heading south for home and a decent night's sleep, spending Tuesday recovering and wondering where all my money had gone.

It was an enjoyable con - certainly far better than the miserable abortion that had been last year's Mancon - although I felt the whole weekend to be a fairly low-key presentation. I'm sure the reason for that, however, is the fact that my very first Eastercon, in 1975, had been in the De Vere, in Coventry, and my memories were probably colouring my expectations. But then that's really neither here or there; all that matters now is that it's a long wait until Silicon in August.....

Joseph Nicholas.....18 April 1977



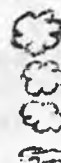




TOM-TOMS



MOKE AND



SEMAPHORE



Jim Henry  
74 Onslow Parade  
Belfast BT6 OAS  
13 Jan 77

I was happy to learn that you enjoyed my Letter of Comment, but a little disappointed that you thought so little about the MESSAGE in it. I gave one moral to my little tale, and said there was another (bet you've forgotten - go on, look back at it!). And

since the TV channels haven't been buzzing with news stories about an epidemic of a mystery ailment which seems to affect Science Fiction Fan Magazine editors, and leaves them glassy-eyed and comatose, or even catatonic, I believe that all your fellow sufferers treated my offering with the same measure of disregard.

So maybe I had better go back and spell out the second moral. It is, as you will realise when I spill the beans, only right and proper that I should do so. The second moral is in fact, the same as the first, but looked at from a different direction: it goes "A fan-editor who wishes to appeal (in his work! his work! Put that lip-stick away, David!) to more than a small group of initiates should be careful to minimize the occurrence of those cabalistic neologisms with which some magazines are all too heavily sprinkled. To illustrate, from Cygnus 2 rather than belabour one example, as I did in my letter, I am able to guess what Paul Huddleston means by "mag", "zine", "illo" and "ish"; but Mr. Skelton's "TWIMC", "fnz" (which to a mathematician smacks of complex functions!) and "pubber" (which has a delightful ring to it - how about the other half?) leave me gawping (meaning stupidly gaping incomprehension). I only forgave Mr. Skelton when I met his "Doomsday Doodlebic", a truly delightful verbal construct, but I am ashamed to admit it in this context, for I fear that many younger readers may not pick up all of the nuances I have dragged out of it!

I know that you cannot twist the arms of your correspondents to get them to do as I ask - heavens, you're such a cheapskate you won't even pay for the fare to Florida for the Suncon (I guessed that one; the electronic engineers use the same silly naming scheme...), so I can't see you, unless you suddenly acquire sadistic tendencies that weren't there last time I looked, touring the length and breadth of England, Scotland and Wales to apply hammerlocks to all of your contributors. So please, when someone writes a particularly obscure passage, can you

please clarify it - NOT by modifying what he or she wrote; it will be much more educational if you add explanations in your comments.

Issue 2 confirmed the recurrent nature of your affliction (the previous described DDTPP), and I offer you my heartfelt sympathy as an impending third convulsion manifests itself. Just keep up the good work.

(( As you have gathered, Jim, I'm now on my fourth trip. Not so many convulsions, but lottsa spots before the eyes. Now, to these cannibalistic hooliganisms...yes...well...TWIMC; I imagine this is Skel's shorthand for TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN, fnz; short for fanzine, pubber; fanzine publisher, and some you might have come across this ish...BNF; Big Name Fan, fen; collective for fans. For the benefit of new readers your DDTPP: DREAD DESIRE TO PRINT AND PUBLISH. If I've missed any forgive me, but I'm sure you'll remind me next time around. ATB (All the best) ))

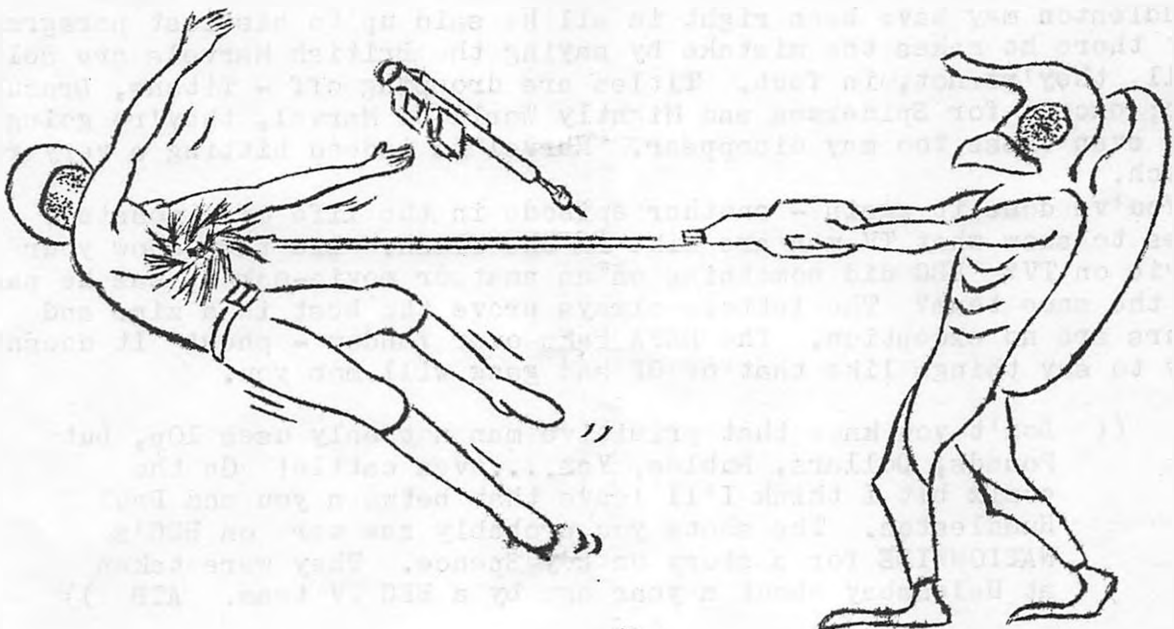
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Harry Warner Jr  
423 Summit Avenue  
Hagerstown  
Maryland 21740  
USA  
14 Jan 77

Project Death is a different way of telling an old story. I suppose you're implying that many will share the guilt, if nuclear war does occur. The account of your dramatic career was the highlight of this issue for me. Even if you may have exaggerated a smidgin here and there, I know such things can happen. There was a news story in this

nation not too long ago about a group of amateur film-makers who got into all kinds of trouble, when the authorities thought they weren really angry with the girl they had tied to the railroad tracks. In that case, the situation was complicated by the fact that a fast freight train was approaching, unbeknown to the movie group, when police arrived.

I felt better when I read in the loc section about the reaction created by your pen enclosures with your first issue. This proved you see, that I'm not the only person who gets nervous about unusual mail. About a year ago, I received a very small package from a fan I'd had very little contact with. The fan's name wasn't on the wrapper, just the return address, which I didn't recognise. People get angry with me



for mundane reasons, because I work for the local newspapers, and there are very few people in fandom who seem capable of doing something violent through the mails. I felt foolish when it occurred to me that it might be a bomb, knowing that the odds were very strongly in my favour. But I couldn't bring myself to open it casually in the normal manner. Feeling like a character in a 19th century melodrama I actually wrote a note explaining the situation, left it in plain view on my desk, then took the package around to the side of my house and opened it after much fumbling while I held it behind my back. That way, I reasoned, if it was a big bomb, neighbours would immediately know something had happened, and if it was a little bomb, inflicting only non-fatal damage, I probably wouldn't lose my eyes and the interior of the house wouldn't be disarranged. The contents turned out to be something peaceful, so I went back into the house, hoping my neighbours hadn't paid too much attention to what I was doing out there, and I tore up the note into very small pieces.

The Perry Rhodan stories are stupendously successful in German-speaking areas. Some of them have been translated and published as paperbacks in the United States under Forry Ackerman's editorship. Nobody, least of all Forry, would claim them as great examples of literature, but the people who complain most bitterly about them tend to forget their purpose: they're boy's stories, meant for very young audiences. I think they fulfill a purpose because there are no longer any prozines in the United States that cater to juveniles and there should be an alternative for youngsters who like science fiction and can find it on their level only in comic books.

(( Nice to hear from you, Harry. I fully understand your trepidation and although your experience with that mysterious package can be remembered with a smile, I'm sure it wasn't funny at the time. Hope the weather in the US is a bit more palatable now...ATB ))

%/%/%

Derek A Harkness                      I have noticed so there's no escaping, 10 pages  
11 Westland Crescent            less, tut-tut, and no explanation. I'll bet I'm  
Cookstown                            not the only one who noticed. I liked the cover  
Co. Tyrone                           but this Sedric chappy changes faces awful quick.  
22 Jan 77                            'Penny Dreadful' - that was good, beats me how the  
   10p got into the limestone. Probably a good  
reason but nice to think that early man used 10p's marked 1971. Paul  
Huddleston may have been right in all he said up to his last paragraph,  
but there he makes the mistake by saying the British Marvels are selling  
well, they're not, in fact. Titles are dropping off - Titans, Dracula,  
etc; except for Spiderman and Mightly World of Marvel, they're going  
and even these too may disappear. Marvel is indeed hitting a very rough  
patch.

You've done it again - another episode in the life of a monster. Just goes to show what TV men are like in the flesh. Did they show your movie on TV? BBC did something on an amateur movie-maker, was he part of the same team? The letters always prove the best in a zine and yours are no exception. The BSFA take over fandom - phew! It doesn't pay to say things like that or GP and gang will mob you.

(( Don't you know that primitive man not only uses 10p, but Pounds, Dollars, Rubles, Yen....even cattle! On the comix bit I think I'll leave that between you and Paul Huddleston. The shots you probably saw were on BBC's NATIONWIDE for a story on Roy Spence. They were taken at Helensbay about a year ago by a BBC TV team. ATB ))



Dave Bridges  
51 Crawshaw Grove  
Sheffield S8 7EA  
24 Jan 77

Many thanks for Cygnus 3...and, er 2 and, uh 1.  
Well if you insist on sending out the next ish before  
I've replied to the previous one, you'll not get  
many replies. Actually I did write a reply to number  
1 - complaining about Sci-Fi on the ballpoint and

how it'd have been cheaper and more effective to have used a teaspoon  
(more effective as advertising, not for writing with). Right what can I  
complain about in Cygnus 3. Showthrough was a problem and having examin-  
ed the paper it looks like Roneo Vickers have palmed you off with trans-  
lucent paper, which may be expensive, but isn't what you want.

Why did Paul Huddleston's article finish in the middle? Don't tell me  
you lost the rest of his Mss, tut-tut!

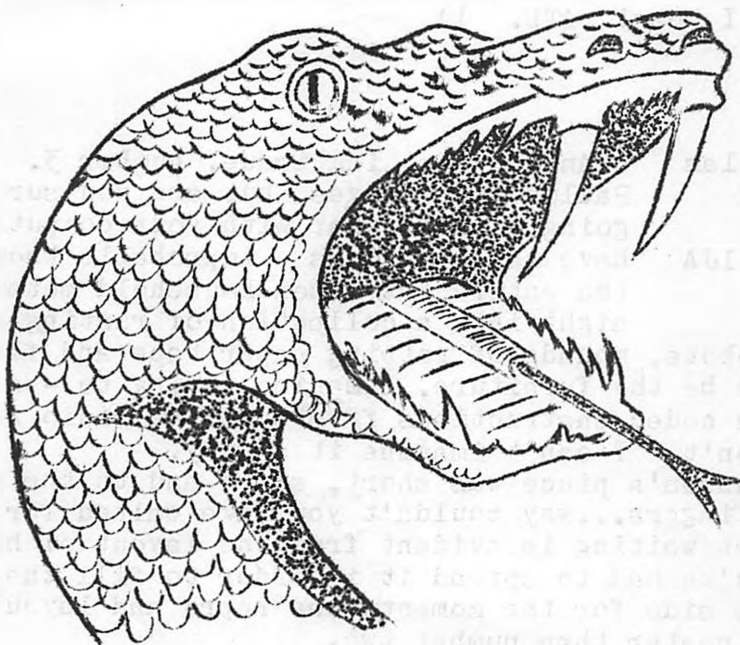
Very few people mind if you spell 'lousy' with an 'e', or 'penny' with  
an 'e' (actually That's how I thought it was spelled), so it's not that  
important to go through afterwards. Altering a mistake only draws att-  
ention to it. It's also time consuming (as I've found out myself.)

I agree with Kev Easthope's comments re Joseph Nicholas' comments re  
LOGAN'S RUN. I thoroughly enjoyed the film, but found the book decidedly  
average (admittedly I saw the film first, which may have affected my  
judgement of the book).

I'm sure these TREKKIES are mad, but trying to emulate the flashboard  
of the Enterprise is the limit. What do they do? Stand in a row and  
blink in binary sequence, or have they worked out a circuit to replace  
the technician who hid behind the central panel with a pocket flashlamp  
and a couple of mirrors. If they have, the actors union will come down  
on them like a ton of bricks.

Sorry this is just a short note, but I had to rush in case Cygnus 4  
came bursting in through the letterbox before I'd finished.

(( Nice to hear from you, Dave. As regards using a teaspoon -  
don't you think I stirred things up enough! ATB ))



Brian R Tawn  
29 Cordon Street  
Wisbech, Cambs  
PE13 2LW  
22 Jan 77

The 'Penny Dreadful' bit reminded me of when I had  
a craze on collecting 'H' and 'KN' pennies. I didn't  
go out of my way to collect them, but settled for  
looking at all the pennies I got in my change.

The first rot set in when I came by my prize one,

a 'H' penny dated around 1876 (I think), a year during which I hadn't known that any extra coins had been struck. Somehow I managed to lose it on the way home, which didn't do much to boost my spirits for collecting. The crunch came shortly after when I decided to bank some of my savings and while I was in the bank I decided to buy two bags of pennies and sort through them. Both turned out to contain nothing but 'H' pennies and suddenly finding them in such quantity (presumably because someone had cashed them in) took the fun out of collecting them.

I didn't care for having my life compared to a computer. Ugh! I work in a small depot and it can actually take longer to use the IBM than to do the work manually (which we no longer have the paperwork to do it with!) The thing literally feeds on paper and what niggles me is that it keeps breaking down and needs a few hours to get going again. Worse still, the thing usually has these bursts of temperament late in the afternoon and I end up getting home late at nights. I must admit to being against computers at the best of times. I agree they are wonderful machines but they lack flexibility.

I enjoyed 'We meet the BeeB'. I expected it to be amusing and it was. The Bernie Falk bit just goes to show how 'famous' people turn out to be very ordinary folk when you come to meet them. I'm sure that folks are only able to idolise people that they don't know and would (they think) like to know, more so if the idol in question lives a long way away. You mentioned Barry Sheene and Henry Cooper, two people who command a lot of respect and press coverage. Yet Sheene lives on the outskirts of Wisbech and no one around here gives a damn. Smith's have been trying to push Barry Sheene posters and his biography, but they can't. It's strange that he sometimes gets a huge spread in the National papers, yet never gets more than a tiny paragraph in the Wisbech papers.

As for Pink Floyd's ECHOES. Well I can sit and listen to it over and over.

(( My commiserations on your Firm's ailing whizz-box...sounds like it needs a long convalescence. See you in SCRIBE... soon I hope! ATB. ))

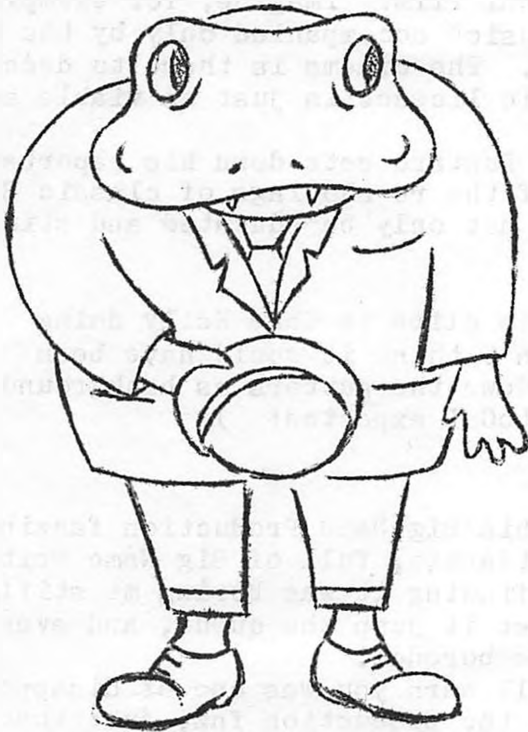
Joseph Nicholas      An interesting issue, number 3. I've heard of  
2 Wilmot Way      Pavlovian reflexes, but are you sure you aren't  
Camberely      going a little far with your computer analogy? I  
Surrey GU15 1JA      have these visions - improbable though they be - of  
16 Feb 77      the entire Patterson household metamorphosing overnight into a collection of rusting and gently  
corroding robots, mounds of rotting paper tape and floppy discs replacing what used to be the furniture. Imagine trying to - ah - make love to your wife on coded instructions from a remote radio relay...on second thoughts, don't. I can't imagine it anyway.

Gordon Johnson's piece was short, sweet and to the point. But damn your itchy fingers...why couldn't you have waited for those illos? The result of not waiting is evident from the layout of his piece - look how much you've had to spread it in order to fill the page. But leaving illos to the side for the moment, the repro and layout was fine, much cleaner and neater than number two.

Paul Huddleston's piece (by contrast with Gordon Johnson's) was far too short and compressed. It reads more like an introduction to an article than the article itself. And I thought that's what it was until I reached the last line and found myself with a feeling of "Where is the rest of it?" But I wonder what kind of flak - if any - that you'll get for running an article on comics in a fanzine. Traditionally,

comics have always been the poorer relation of written SF, looked down upon and sneered at (as SF itself was once looked down upon and sneered at). I'm afraid that I myself have little love for comics, equating them mainly with Primary School and other juvenile activities, and would not be seen dead with one within ten feet of my corpse. But a thought has occurred to me; with the demise of the swarms of pulp magazines that dominated the fifties, could it be that comics have taken over the role of illustration that used to be an essential ingredient of the pulps? I think it's possible, and I think that such a case would be worth investigating. Granted that there are no Finlays, Wessos, Pauls, Boks, Sternbachs, et al working in comics these days; but what about Jim Cawthorn, whose illos remind me more of Marvel heroes than anything else.

I can't agree with you that the 'Three Hundred Spartans' is really a disaster film. It's a "Historical epic", with all the history and plott-



ing that such requires - minimal historical accuracy (on which I am hot, being into history myself), cardboard characters and flashy, implausible settings. I interpret the phrase "disaster movie" in the strictly modern sense: meaning something of the calibre of The Towering Inferno, Earthquake, Airport 75, The Poseidon Adventure and so on. These too, as I mentioned in my last loc (the bit you didn't print dammit!) are afflicted with cardboard characters, flashy settings, minimal accuracy (dynamite the water reservoirs on the top floors of a skyscraper and it would either pour straight down the elevator shaft or take all the floors with it on the way down - the Engineering students at my sister's University worked it out, using the computer to justify their findings) and a pretty far-fetched plot. Real disasters are intensely personal affairs, involving no more than, at most, a family group, and run the gamut of human emotion. Even 747 crashes come into this, as relatives of the deceased become involved as separate units.

Hollywood ignores this, involving relatives of the deceased as some vast homogeneous mass, and aims its story in the direction of induced fear and vicarious thrills. Movies such as Two Minute Warning and Airport 77 depict nothing that even resembles grief or bereavement in any form.

(( I am usually at a loss for words at the end of your locs, Joseph, probably due to the fact that I'm usually out of breath by that time. However, I can say that it's great hearing from you. See you in November! ATB ))

Roy Spence  
29 Ballynichol Road  
Comber, Co. Down  
BT23 5NW

I was amazed at some of the statements made by your correspondent, Fred Bustard, regarding Science Fiction films. My immediate reaction was to ask Mr Bustard how wide his experience of such films is? The only example he quotes, namely "2001 - A Space Odyssey" is, in reality, one of the weakest of the genre! Nowhere has it ever been described as an "entertaining" film - such labels as "remarkable", "mind-blowing", "lavish" and

"spectacular" have been attached to it, but no critic has, to my knowledge actually said he enjoyed it.

May I direct Mr. Bustard's attention to the classic Science Fiction films of the fifties? Can he deny the brilliance of The Thing from Another World, The Day the Earth Stood Still, The Incredible Shrinking Man, or The Cage of Doom? Is he aware of the absolute eruption of quality Science Fiction films between 1956 and 1959, when men with vision; men such as Jack Arnold and Tom Graeff, startled cinema audiences with filmic masterpieces? Does Mr. Bustard realise that slumps in SF literature sales have repeatedly been checked, then reversed by an upsurge in SF films.

As to his point about total silence in deep space...this holds no more water than the argument that singers in a remote rural region should have no orchestral accompaniment in a musical film! Imagine, for example, Julie Andrews singing "The Sound of Music" accompanied only by the bleatings of a few mountain goats or sheep. The cinema is there to deceive, to entertain, to cheat even! Cinematic licence is just as viable as poetic licence.

In closing I would suggest that Mr. Bustard sets down his paperbacks for a short spell, tracks down some of the re-showings of classic SF films and thereby allowing himself to not only be educated and stimulated, but entertained as well.

(( One of my favourite musical film clips is Gene Kelly doing "Singing in the Rain" but I don't think it would have been if he'd had only rain running down the gutters as background but need I say more than this LoC I expected! ))

Dave Rowe            Well, I was reading this Big Name Production fanzine from  
8 Park Drive        the other side of the Atlantic, full of Big Name Writers,  
Wickford            and beautiful art, and finding it was boring me stiff, so  
Essex                when Cygnus arrived I let it jump the queue, and even left  
SS12 9DH            off reading the big name boredom.

My main reaction I will warn you was one of disappointment. Not that I was comparing it to the production fnz, just that I think it fell short of your own talents. The trouble was it was too disjointed - the editorial was bitty, little paragraphs and exclamations about this and that and nothing in particular. This is not a good way to start a fnz. (If you have a few not-over-related things then it might be an idea to use them as space filler, at end of articles when you've got space left.)

Gordon Johnson was too slight. Is it fact? - in which case it would have gained from some illo - or if fiction it's far too slight! Core Blimey may have been funny to someone familiar with computer terminology but as this was my intro to it, it hardly raised a titter. The picce by Paul Huddleston was pretty much the standard fillo for UK zines, just listing a few things and not really saying that much, okay, the kid's young but you've got to think of your reader too! After that little lot you'll be pleased to hear that there was something I did like about C3 and that was We Meet the Beeb. A good solid plot and a goodly pace. As a matter of interest...what is a brodingnagian spectre?

(( I suppose a lot of your LoC, Dave, was 'For Your Eyes Only' but the points you have made will undoubtedly be helpful to others. Okay - okay, I'm a lousy editor but at least something in C3 gave you a bit of a giggle. CB was directed to computer-types and I'm sure they got a giggle...WMTB was directed to anybody who cared to read it and like you I hope they enjoyed it. Now don't tell me off about the SS in this ish, it's for folks over here who asked for another one. You close your eyes when you come to it. A brodingnagian spectre is an over-powering, over-towering shadow. ATB ))



Jim Meadows  
31 Apple Court  
Park Forest  
Carbondale  
IL 60466  
USA

Noting your late comments in the 2nd issue...I don't think you quite understand the economics of television production, and why Space 1999 is ending in mid-air (yes production has been stopped). I think producers for programs in the UK have a stronger sense of series unity, and would prefer to end a dramatic series on a note of finality. But Space 1999 depended heavily on success in the USA. It already had the disadvantage of not getting a network time slot, and in its first year, did surprisingly well as a syndicated series. But ratings were down generally in the second year and ITC decided not to try for a third. They didn't think about ending the series; the show might have run for twenty years without an "end". That's a difference in the USA, where commercial TV dominates, and non-commercial TV (not wholly government supported, but done so to a great deal) is relatively small. Commercial broadcasters go for money, and a weekly TV series is a big money making machine. If a series is successful and is bringing in a large regular audience, the show will go on for years with no severe change in format or content, unless the Producers and the networks feel forced to make that change. Hence, week to week continuity is not great; there is the same cast of characters doing the same sort of thing against the same types of dangers. But the characters won't change much unless poor audiences scare them into it.

This is changing in recent years, as commercial broadcasters experiment with "mini-series" (short series with definite endings and usually a serial format) and other things, but it's still a basic rule. In the case of The Fugitive, an American series from the '60s; well that show might have been on for five years instead of two had not the audiences been too low for the network's liking. Normally it just would have stopped production but since the series was crying for a conclusion more so than some others, and since it hadn't been done successfully before, and since the money seemed good, there were two final episodes shown at the end of the Summer re-runs in which the good guy was vindicated. Very high audience and happy network! Supposedly however, the definite conclusion of the series hurt the show in syndication, which didn't make the distributors happy. So it hasn't been done often. Most recently, a comedy The Mary Tyler Moore Show filmed a final ending, and many daytime serials are finished neatly when they stop production. But the idea of a series with an ending still isn't strong here, as it is in Britain.

Paul Huddleston's piece on SF in comics wasn't as deep as I would like it (c'mon, only one page?) and it seemed to be unnoticing of the basic problem with SF comics. For a while the comic book as a whole has increased its quality of artwork and storytelling ability and while they are certainly more sophisticated than they were 20 years ago, they're still tied to the old bugaboo of the Lowest Common Denominator. That's what most comic publishers aim for, since it's financially rewarding, and that's why SF in comics has plenty of scary monsters, bems, black/white moralising, simplistic solutions to overblown save-the-world problems, shallow characterization, and pitiful little science. The B/W magazines that Paul mentions, with stories by Moorcock and Bob Shaw is the most promising thing I've seen (it's called Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction) but even it is obviously trying for the 15 year old Golden Mean, with the original works being somewhat more sophmoric than the adaptations. Besides which, it hasn't published regularly for a year.

(( Second State-side LoC this ish and just at close of play.  
Many thanks for writing, Jim - I'm sure your comments will  
provoke something in return from my well known pen pushers.  
You wouldn't by any chance be related to Joseph Nicholas  
would you. Looking forward to hearing from you again. ATB ))

I also heard from:

Bob Shaw (Glasgow)  
Colin Bateman  
Michael Dunlop

George Geddes  
Noel Armstrong  
Brian Tawn

Paul Huddleston  
Geoff Amberson

Paul Skelton (SMALL FRIENDLY DOG)  
Dave Langford (TWLL-DDU)  
Rob Jackson (MAYA)  
Pete Roberts (CHECKPOINT)  
Ned Brookes (IT COMES IN THE MAIL)  
Pat & Graham Charnock (WRINKLED SHREW SEVEN)  
Dave Cockfield (ATROPOS III)  
Jean Frost (JABBERWOCKY)  
Graham Poole (GRAPO)  
Don Markstein (TANDSTIKKERZEITUNG)  
Ragnar Fyri (ZEALOT)

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# O V E R      A N D      O U T

Well that's all for now, folks. Closing date is 4 May so if we arrive in your hall later than a fortnight from now you either live overseas and the cattle boat's engine threw a leg out of bed, or the big strike here has had effects more far reaching than I would have imagined.

And the next time? I don't know - I'm lousy at projecting publication dates (as it happens this ish has come out two months earlier than expected and dammit, I've already written a longhand draft of The Steps of Schrad for ish 5).

So until the next time....whenever that will be!

Good Luck.

*Dave*

